



UNE 2021 IRLSAF STRATEGY & FRAMEWORK

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Purpose

This UNE 2021 IRLSAF Strategy and Framework details the strategic landscape for IRLSAF at UNE with HEPPP evolving into IRLSAF (Indigenous, Regional and Low-SES Attainment Fund) as part of the Job-ready Graduates package and 2021 Reform of Equity Funding. The UNE 2021 IRLSAF strategy ensures the UNE priorities of retention and success are impacted through the Participation and Attainment/TransitionOUT stages of the UNE Student lifecycle, underpinned by five major principles. The framework to deliver the strategy involves an institution wide, teams-based approach to ensure impact.

With the transformation of the Higher Education Participation and Partnerships Program (HEPPP) to the Indigenous, Regional and Low-SES Attainment Fund (IRLSAF) from 2021, UNE has the prime opportunity to transform the way we consider and deliver projects to support some of our most important student cohorts.

Due to the high proportion of students at UNE from regional and indigenous backgrounds, DESE estimates see UNE's proportion of national IRLSAF pool growing. As part of the Job Ready Graduates package, DESE provided an estimate that IRLSAF funding for UNE would grow by just over \$280,00 per year over each of 2021, 2022, and 2023, as the new calculation was phased in.

As well as a moderate increase in funds over these years, there will be a significant increase in the proportion of the UNE population that falls under the remit of IRLSAF and so can be supported. Based on external DESE figures for the 2019 reporting year, UNE had more than 5,200 low-SES students¹, more than 900 indigenous students², and, subject to confirmation of the field DESE are using for calculation of regional and remote, an estimated 9,600 regional and remote students³⁴.

With this breadth of student base able to be supported by IRLSAF, UNE can now truly deliver a strategy for IRLSAF that is connected across campus, and focussed on major streams of work with measurable, institution-wide impact and outcomes. Through shifting to a strategic lens for consideration and prioritisation of our IRLSAF projects, we have the chance to deliberately grow programs with proven track records in areas aligned with the UNE IRLSAF strategy, support innovations where there is strategic alignment and a real chance of success, and reallocate funding on an annual basis on the basis of demonstrated outcomes that improve the opportunities of our students.

¹ Based on 2019 First Address Low SES by SA1 HE data measure

² Based on 2019 HE Indigenous student data

³ Estimated from 2019 First Address Remote & Regional HE data

⁴ Due to multiple categories of disadvantage it should be noted that the total number of IRLSAF students is not simply the addition of student numbers from each of the three categories. A conservative estimate of total IRLSAF students would be 10,000 students.

Background

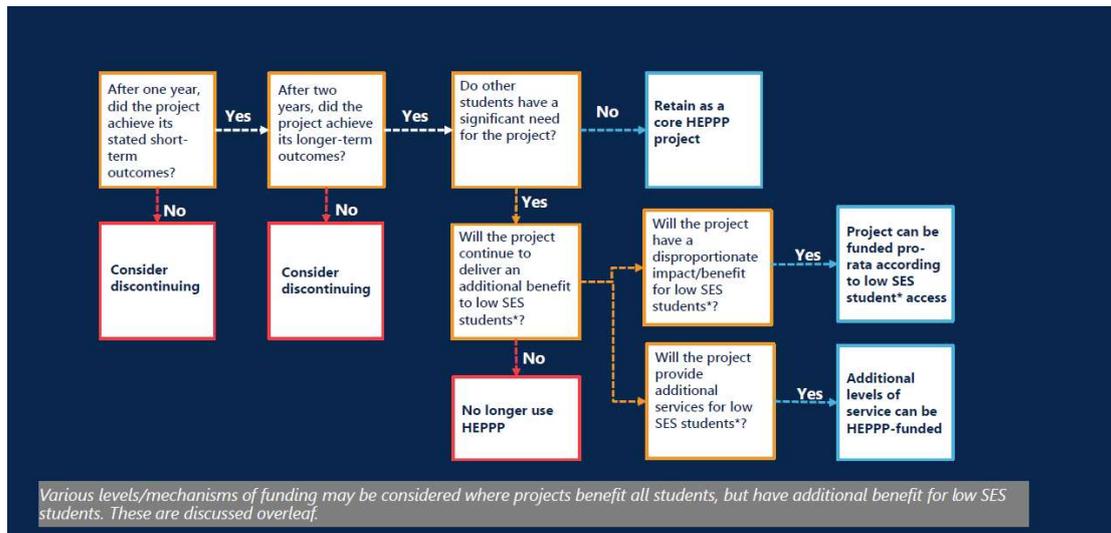
NOUS Review

This UNE 2021 IRLSAF Strategy and Framework is entirely consistent with the recommendations of the NOUS Group in its 2020 report, *HEPPP Strategic Alignment: University of New England*. That report revealed that UNE’s HEPPP expenditure is compliant with the guidelines, but could have greater effect if it were more strategic through a shift in focus towards participation and transition/attainment activities.

UNE engaged Nous Group (Nous) to conduct a strategic review of its’ HEPPP expenditure, delivered in two stages of Performance evaluation and Strategic alignment. The resulting four key recommendations for UNE to ensure HEPPP is supporting the university’s strategy include:

- Allocate HEPPP funding across the student lifecycle to address priority needs;
- Ensure HEPPP projects address the most significant barriers for low-SES students;
- Use decision making criteria to extend, mainstream or transition projects;
- Determine the balance between stability and innovation.

Another major recommendation was for UNE to decide whether to continue HEPPP projects as core offerings, or to transition projects to other sources of funding based on compliance and strategy. A ‘decision tree’ was provided for the purpose. This decision tree helps to decide if HEPPP projects should be retained, mainstreamed, or discontinued:



Finally, whilst UNE encourages diversity of projects and broader participation from across the university with its current HEPPP offering, it decreases the ability to strategically direct the portfolio and guarantee a consistent and positive experience for students across the university. Therefore UNE should consider developing a ‘core’ HEPPP offering, for ongoing assistance to UNE low-SES students facing enduring barriers and challenges. These barriers are systemic, and often unable to be removed completely (i.e. work and caring responsibilities, lower academic preparedness), which means the same projects will continue to be needed. UNE should aim to balance IRLSAF as an innovation fund with the stability of a ‘core’ offering.

NOUS Review: Student Lifecycle Stage Priorities

A realignment of IRLSAF expenditure is proposed to be undertaken to support funding across the student lifecycle ensuring IRLSAF addresses priority needs and the most significant barriers for UNE low-SES students.

The UNE Student lifecycle defined in the current HEPPP guidelines as Pre-Access, Access, Participation and Attainment and TransitionOUT has been evaluated to reveal:

- Pre-Access: focuses on prospective students who have not yet decided to go to university. It aims to increase access to university in the long term, through activities that raise aspiration in the short term. Recommended to shift from 61% of HEPPP expenditure in 2019 to 20% in 2021 and the to ensure strategic alignment commence use of a 'divergent choices' map:



- Access: The access stage of the student lifecycle focuses on low-SES students who are enrolling at UNE. This stage aims to increase the number of low-SES students commencing at university. This stage requires no change in HEPPP expenditure at 2% it is deemed appropriate spend;
- Participation (Retention): focuses on students who are currently studying at UNE. This stage aims to increase the success and retention of low-SES students. Recommended to shift from 26% of HEPPP expenditure in 2019 to 60% in 2021;
- Attainment and TransitionOUT (Success): focuses on improving graduate and job outcomes for low-SES students. Recommended to shift from 11% of HEPPP expenditure in 2019 to 18% expenditure in 2021.

Retention and Engagement Strategy revitalisation

A small group comprising the Director, Academic Quality, Acting PVC(AI), Director, Student Success, and ADTL HASSE, has agreed to drive a revitalisation of the UNE Retention and Engagement Strategy, as tabled to October 2020 Academic Board. The revitalised retention and engagement strategy will deliver a 2-year stream of activities across 2021 and 2022, prioritising those activities with potential for significant short term and long-term impact, and involving stakeholders from multiple roles on campus. Metrics will be a core part of the project. While scoping is ongoing, it is anticipated that the strategy will focus on four key streams, with limited, significant delivery in each of those streams including:

- Belonging – Peer Engagement and Wellbeing;
- Progression – Commencing transition pedagogy; Advising and learning analytics; Early warning and intervention; Exit pathways;
- Teaching and Learning Quality – Assessment; Learning Design; Academic

Skills;

- Sustainability – Engagement with and ownership of outcomes.

A number of those activities will draw on IRLSAF funding.

2021 IRLSAF Strategy

Based on the Nous Review and the UNE Retention and Engagement Strategy, the 2021 UNE IRLSAF Strategy will focus on the engagement, retention and success of the UNE IRLSAF student cohort, including Low-SES, Indigenous and Regional, Rural and Remote students, delivering IRLSAF activities predominantly in the Participation and TransitionOUT phases of the student lifecycle.

Principles

Principle 1: UNE will deliberately focus on participation and attainment to ensure student success

UNE achieves low-SES access rates well above the sector average. However, our retention and success rates are low compared to competitors. The latest report provided to December 2020 Academic Board highlights that:

- Our Domestic retention rate is 40th out of 41 universities in the sector
- Our Domestic success rate is 41st out of 41 universities in the sector

To ensure the best chance of student success, and that we do not build up student aspirations only to erode them once a student comes to UNE, we will deliberately move our focus to Participation and Attainment, as outlined in the below table:

Table 1: Funding Categories

Categories	2019 (%)	2021 (%)
Pre-Access	61	20
Access	2	2
Participation	26	60
Attainment	11	18

Such a significant shift will tax organisational capacity, and some IRLSAF activities may require the use of external parties to bolster the capabilities of UNE in the Participation space, particularly in 2021.

Principle 2: UNE will have a coordinated, institution wide approach, focussed on larger projects

IRLSAF will entail an embedded commitment from Deans, Academic Quality, Education Design, and Student Success. This will be realised at both individual project level, ensuring that delivery is shared based on team strengths and capabilities, and also at the governance level, ensuring that oversight and responsibility is embedded across UNE.

Coordination of approaches will necessarily require fewer, larger projects, focussed on areas where there is potential for significant impact.

This coordination will require the submission and consideration of proposals, addressing strategic aim, project scope and deliverables, outcomes against defined metrics, schedule, resource and budget requirements, and stakeholder and risk management strategies.

Principle 3: Projects shall be 'core' or 'innovative', with the number of core projects growing through to 2023 to comprise 80% of funding allocation

The funding model for HEPPP means that typically planning, bidding, and funding are undertaken only to a 31 December 'cliff' each year. With the revisions in Job Ready Graduates, the government has committed, in legislation, to IRLSAF through to at least 2024. While funding will still only be annual, UNE can take a considered risk to support projects for multiple years.

Notwithstanding changes in Commonwealth strategy, UNE will take advantage of this rare opportunity to embed programs where evidence of success is demonstrated. Programs which evidence success, each year, shall become part of the 'core' project suite, which will continue across years and enable greater certainty across years. This suite is expected to start relatively small, given the shift in funding categories towards Participation, but grow to comprise the majority of IRLSAF projects by 2023.

Core projects will:

1. Address the most significant and enduring issues faced by IRLSAF students at UNE
2. Have a clear evidence base for success
3. Clearly show additional benefit for IRLSAF students
4. Be evaluated for continuation every 6 months

Innovative projects will:

1. Address a known issue for IRLSAF students, or meet the needs of a specific sub cohort
2. Have theoretical merit, but require further testing to develop evidence of success
3. If successful, have potential for broader scale up, mainstreaming OR to seek alternative funds.
4. Be considered as part of an annual funding round, aligned with government IRLSAF funding announcements

As UNE will be growing its activities significantly in Participation in 2021, a large number of projects will be new, or expansions of current projects, and so will fall into the innovative category. Those which demonstrate high levels of success according to pre-defined metrics would roll across into core projects, eventually building core projects to 80% of UNE's IRLSAF funding.

Principle 4: Governance and Measures of Success are Embedded into IRLSAF activities at UNE

Metrics are an embedded part of ongoing delivery. At project initiation, projects will be funded where they provide clear and measurable metrics, including the baseline against which those metrics will be measured. Project principles will continue to be foregrounded, with regular status reporting, and 6 and 12 month consideration points by an oversight committee mandated. Regular monitoring will be undertaken by Academic Quality, who will also provide support and reporting to APEC, or its subsequent iterations, SET, and the VC, a minimum of every 6 months.

Repeat IRLSAF projects will be considered against the Nous decision tree plus considered for whole of campus impact. New IRLSAF projects will be assessed prioritising whole of campus impact, and utilising the Nous domains of appropriateness (IRLSAF compliance), effectiveness (short term and long term outcomes), efficiency (risk of duplication, too small a program, lack of time to demonstrate outcomes) and sustainability (innovation vs stability);

Principle 5: The 2021 IRLSAF Strategy will Align with the Revitalised UNE Retention and Engagement Strategy

A small group comprising the Director, Academic Quality, Acting PVC(AI), Director, Student Success, and ADTL HASSE, has agreed to revitalise the UNE Retention and Engagement Strategy, as tabled to October 2020 Academic Board. This group will pull in expertise from areas across campus, including IRLSAF, as required. Similarly to IRLSAF, it is envisaged that the revitalisation of the Retention and Engagement strategy will focus on a consolidation, into a similar number of key categories (four). Within these categories, a smaller number of larger scale projects will be

prioritised.

Through cross-membership and cross-referencing, the revitalised Retention and Engagement Strategy will be developed to have significant, and in a number of cases, direct alignment across key areas with the 2021 IRLSAF Strategy.

Framework

The following framework will deliver this strategy:

- 60% of IRLSAF funding is allocated to identified, planned, documented and approved Retention projects;
- 40% of IRLSAF funding is allocated to application submissions from across the university, targeting any of the Pre-Access, Access, Participation or TransitionOUT phases of the student lifecycle;
- The Retention projects include existing successful HEPPP retention projects;
- Repeat IRLSAF projects in the application submissions are considered against the Nous decision tree plus considered for whole of campus impact;
- New IRLSAF application submissions are assessed prioritising whole of campus impact, and utilising the Nous domains of appropriateness (IRLSAF compliance), effectiveness (short term and long term outcomes), efficiency (risk of duplication, too small a program, lack of time to demonstrate outcomes) and sustainability (innovation vs stability);
- Applications are submitted to the Faculty/Directorate who will review, collate and submit to the Director AQD as a prioritised cognate;
- Following assessment against the IRLSAF framework, AQD provide recommendations for 2021 funding for endorsement by Academic Portfolio Executive Committee (APEC) and Senior Executive Team (SET), and approval by the Vice-Chancellor (VC);
- All IRLSAF allocation decisions are conditional, based on the funding confirmation from DESE, expected in December/January of each year.