University of New England

Research Enterprise & Engagement Plan

December 2024

Acknowledgement of Country

The University of New England respects and acknowledges that its people, courses and facilities are built on land, and surrounded by a sense of belonging, both ancient and contemporary, of the world's oldest living culture. In doing so, UNE values and respects Indigenous knowledge systems as a vital part of the knowledge capital of Australia.

We recognise the strength, resilience and capacity of the Aboriginal community and pay our respects to the Elders past, present and future.

Welcome to Country by Anaiwan artist, Larissa Ahoy.

My painting is a representation of the University of New England and its relationship with different communities from all over. The circle in the middle with the Iwata represents the University itself, as it is situated on Anaiwan land, and the totem for Anaiwan Country is the Iwata. The circles on the top represent the many cultures and heritages from all over the world, and they are all connected with a pathway that leads to UNE. The bottom circles represent the UNE campuses which sit on other nations, connected as well with the UNE in Armidale. The smaller dots are the students, staff and workers who make UNE a success. The line of dots through the middle depicts the journey in which students take to make it to UNE.

Uniquely UNE

The University of New England was founded in 1954 on the belief that Australia's regions needed direct access to knowledge. The university should "remain close to the people," said Sir Earle Page, UNE's first Chancellor, and be capable of adapting itself to local needs and problems.

Since its establishment as a standalone university seventy years ago, UNE has remained faithful to this brief, but learned along the way that local solutions have national and international relevance.

The Research Enterprise & Engagement Plan (REEP) will address the four university priorities, and support the University to achieve the vision set out in Future Fit. In addition, the REEP will maximise place-based opportunities through initiatives such as the New England Renewable Energy Zone. It will also be key to exploring growth opportunities in response to technological and social change, such as the major leap forward of Artificial Intelligence and its wide-reaching impacts on societies around the world.

The REEP is a five-year plan that has been designed with a range of actions and governance functions to allow for a level of adaptive management to be applied to its delivery, and facilitating the University's self-assurance efforts. It includes a set of goals and actions that provide direction, support research systems, enable researchers, and foster research translation as well as growing our engagement externally to UNE.

This is a continuation of the path that UNE has walked since 1954. A regional university, established to address regional issues, might be expected to have little influence outside its region. As UNE has discovered, a region is a part of the world, and a region's challenges have many international counterparts. By looking for solutions to problems in our backyard, addressing them through interdisciplinary, collaborative, and rigorous research, UNE has made itself a good global citizen.

Research statement

The University of New England is home to a dedicated cohort of research students, professional & technical staff and academics who strive to generate new knowledge and deliver innovations to address challenges for society, the environment and the economy.

The University prides itself on its achievements in both basic and applied research, and we recognise that both are necessary for sustained and deep impact.

The University seeks to maximise the productive output from limited resources, and looks to opportunities to increase the quantity and quality of research outputs, with research that is entwined with pedagogical practice – we want to be known as a university that has great impact.

UNE seeks out opportunities for our research and teaching colleagues to interact with research end-users, policy makers, peak bodies, industry participants and community. Harnessing these opportunities means that our research and teaching is informed by what is useful and feasible, while also being ambitious and innovative.

We as a University seek outputs of our research investments and efforts to be as useful as possible to the current and future generations, and we look to how a discovery by our research champions can be translated into a useful innovation to benefit the broader community.

While we are a regional university, we have a diverse campus footprint and staff and student profile including in metropolitan areas. This positions UNE well to have broad perspective on how we can have global impact.

'Enabling our researchers' means embedding a research culture that is supportive and encourages research through their careers, and puts in place systems to ensure safe and secure practice – to ensure welfare, rigour, compliance, integrity and wellbeing.

Vision

The successful application of the Research Enterprise & Engagement Plan, with adaptive management and self-assurance steps along the way, delivers a UNE research system that is financially sustainable and healthy, with a research culture that encourages and enables excellence and a pattern of work where diverse teams come together to collaborate on tough problems. UNE is known as an innovation broker for community and industry, and we are a partner of choice for entities seeking collaborators with systems that are right-scaled.

Not only are higher degree by research (HDR) students attracted to study at UNE by the reputation of our research, but so to are undergraduate and postgraduate course work students, with the vibrant research-immersive teaching practices we are developing here where research is fused with pedagogy.

Mission

This Research Engagement & Enterprise Plan builds on UNE's strengths, while also looking over the horizon at new ways of doing things. In so doing, we position ourselves to deal with large external drivers, both in how we manage risk, and also to inform where we put our research effort to have the biggest impact.

The Plan is aimed in part at turning UNE into the innovation broker and partner of choice for industry and government and community.

Our Flagship themes will support an innovation ecosystem that is both outward looking informed by the expertise, but also with internal support structures that enables UNE staff from across disciplines to be enthusiastic participants in working together to solve real world problems.

A strategy to **RISE**

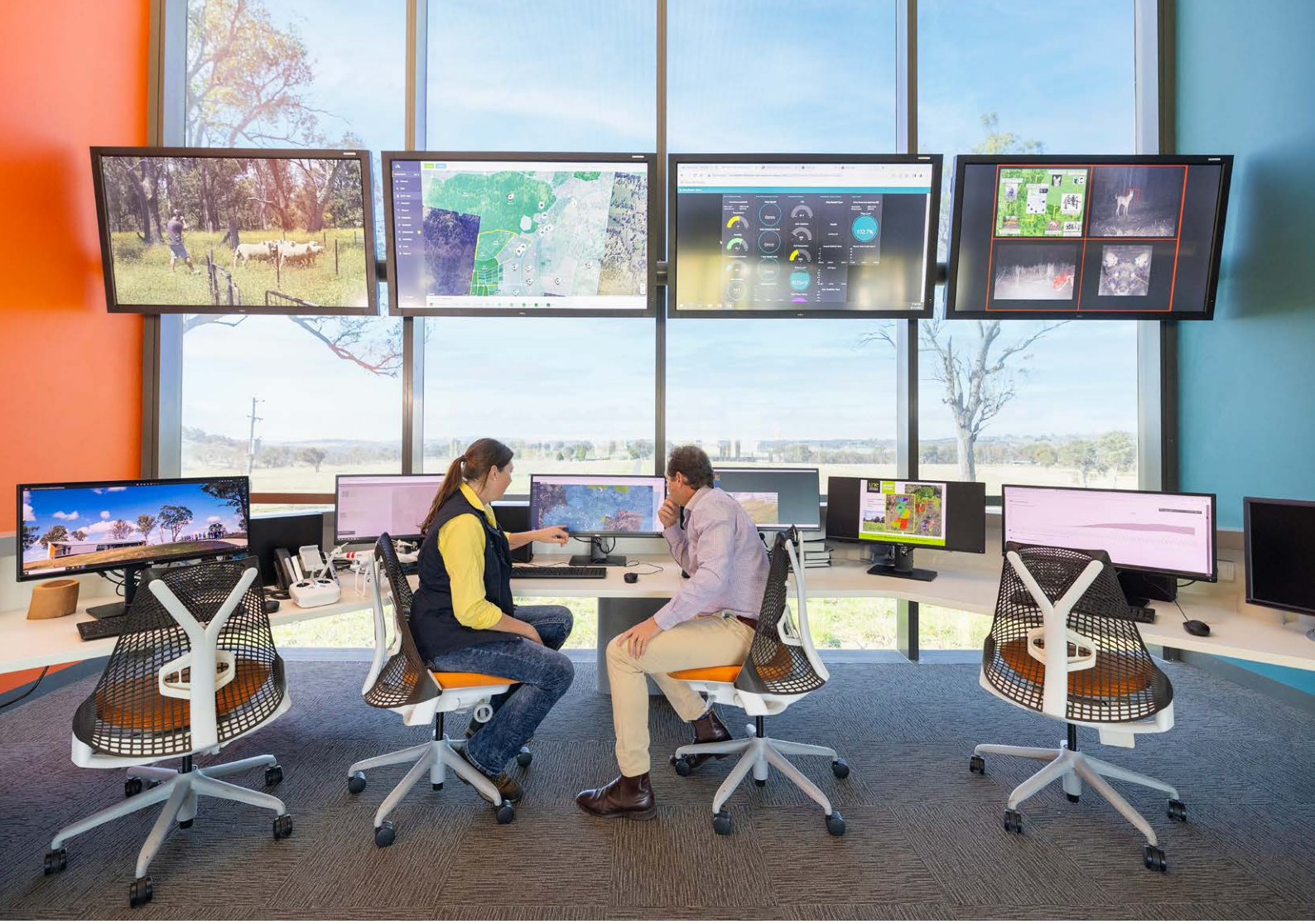
RISE encapsulates UNE's strategy for research excellence, growth and renewal. This Research Engagement and Enterprise Plan is a roadmap for UNE to rise as a leader in research by focusing on rigour, interdisciplinarity, sustainability, and excellence:

Rigour, relevance and responsiveness to a changing world

Interdisciplinarity, innovation, inclusion and impact that makes a difference

Sustainability, social responsibility, and supportive scholarly communities

Excellence, enterprise, equity, and effective engagement in our region



Challenges and opportunities for the future

The contribution of research and development to equipping humanity to deal with major threats has been on full display in recent years – with major advances in new RNA vaccines to help protect from COVID-19. Longer term, even bigger challenges are in front of us with climate change impacts and energy transition. New technologies, particularly Artificial Intelligence are emerging that will transform the way people work, including in professions that were previously thought to be somewhat immune from being replaced by computation.

Universities are pivotal to society being able develop technology to make change and to provide insights and skills to manage or respond to change. We have the opportunity to be participants in research domains that will be impactful for our community and environment. We have teams with the skills to enable UNE to contribute to new research in RNA and other gene technology fields. We have the chance to make a real difference to the New England Region and the energy transition in Australia due to our fortunate position at the geographical heart of the state's largest planned Renewable Energy Zone (REZ), and we are already looking at how to deploy Artificial Intelligence into new research questions and teaching paradigms while maximising academic integrity protections.

Our identity as the country's first regional university means we are attuned to rural and remote settings and the needs of regional Australia. The university is known not only for the research it does, but also how this research is integrated into our teaching and learning practice, and externally – we have a track record for our research outputs being deployed into use by government and industry to the benefit of society and the economy.

Goals

Foster Research Excellence

Maximising both the quantity and quality of research is important for many reasons: it increases university metrics including international rankings; it assists regular compliance and accreditation efforts such as for TEQSA; it increases grant success and income generation; it enhances reputation and is a magnet for research collaborators and funders; and it attracts students at both undergraduate and HDR level. UNE aims to increase research output quantity and quality, without trading them off against each other.

Increase the Impact and Profile of Research Endeavours: Become an Innovation Partner of Choice

Supporting the development of high-quality research, and then having the means to translate that research output into a product or service that will be used by government, community, consumers, industry or other researchers sets the conditions for high impact research and a great reputation for UNE. To maximise the likelihood that a research project will deliver outcomes that are relevant to end-users, engagement and planning that involves end-users from the outset is hugely beneficial – they help set the boundaries and constraints for how a new product would be used, who would use it, how much would they pay, what skills do they have to use the new technology, are there already competitors in the market etc. The Actions set out what UNE will do to engage end-users and industry in these conversations, how we will move a research output up Technology Readiness Level (TRL) and Commercial Readiness Level (CRL) ladders.

An important pathway for impact and widening the benefits of research is through its integration into teaching and pedagogy. New technologies and approaches to teaching will ensure that the latest research and knowledge will be brought into the learning space, whether virtual or online, immersive suite or farm.

UNE has a 70-year history of delivery of teaching and opportunities to rural and remote Australia. Many of the disciplines that we teach in are approached from the perspective of the experience of rural communities and rural issues. This provides the university and its experts with sometimes unique opportunities to discuss and lead on issues of importance to rural communities. Whether in health care delivery, educational attainment, water usage, rural industry and others, UNE has the expertise in the legal, economic and regulatory setting for these policy domains.

Boost Research Income and Expenditure

If a virtuous cycle of funding and investments could be triggered, through the initiatives in the REEP, where investments lead to an increase in income, which in turn lead to increased investments, that will be positive our research effort. UNE aims to attract increased research funding and use this to invest in activities that can go on to further increase funding.

Ensure Access to High Performing Research Infrastructure

Increasing the availability of on-campus contemporary and cutting-edge research infrastructure enables researchers to undertake experiments that are novel and insightful. Where we have unique infrastructure capabilities, that puts the university ahead in being able to lead in research and development fields, and can be a magnet to attract staff, students and partners to collaborate or locate at UNE – we should advance these opportunities. Key to maximising outcomes from infrastructure is having the right expertise to run and interpret results through our technical staff. Professional and academic staff working with infrastructure can be assisted with the development of access and maintenance platforms, while financial cost recovery and replacement is key for a system to operate in perpetuity. Increasing access to infrastructure external to UNE is also important for many research teams.

Attract and produce high performing higher degree by research (HDR) students

Enhancing the quality of research training and industry engagement assists in attracting and nurturing high performing HDR students - maintaining strong research activity and output. To increase our competitiveness in attracting HDR students at UNE, we need to raise the profile of UNE so more potential students hear about us, and we also need to make sure that UNE is a magnet option for potential students. Over time, the set of signals and opportunities we communicate to potential students will change, so the research portfolio will have a number of actions to monitor and to respond to the changing environment.

Strengthen Research Management, Governance, and Compliance

The Research Governance Framework will provide a comprehensive reference guide for staff to understand and navigate the layers of legislation and governance obligations; management requirements for projects, teams and individuals. A new approach of a research project number (Research Unique Project Identifier - RUPI) will be brought in to track compliance requirements such as safety, ethics, foreign arrangements, infrastructure needs, intellectual property, grant applications and procurement, also enabling the research team and university to track any changed conditions over the lifecycle of the project. The RUPI number will also enable UNE to develop real-world data on the actual indirect costs of research, to inform planning and budgeting and proposals for external funding and assist in conversations with government and funders about research value and pricing.

Enhance Wellbeing of Research Staff and Students

Staff and student well-being is a major priority for the university. The REEP will support these efforts by encouraging a work and study environment that is engaging and supportive, where students are trained for successful careers post-graduation, where HDRs are supported to complete their theses on time, and where Indigenous Australian staff and students are culturally safe and supported. A standalone Indigenous Research Strategy will be developed, while cultural and compliance activities within the REEP will also be configured to deal safely with Indigenous student and staff matters.

REEP approach

GOALS

Foster Research Excellence

Increase the Impact and Profile of UNE Research

Boost Research Income and Expenditure

Ensure Adequate Access to Research Infrastructure

Attract and produce high performing Higher Degree by Research Students

Strengthen Research Management, Governance, and Compliance

Enhance Wellbeing of Research Staff and Students

THEMES

Research Direction – Flagships, clear research priorities and an Indigenous Research Strategy.

Research Fundamentals – Platform technologies, benchmarking, capability, safety and compliance.

Research Culture – Celebrate excellence, performance framework, training, mentoring and excellence in supervision.

Research Enterprise – Research into practice, collaboration, networks and work integrated learning.

Research Engagement – Enhance website, highlight opportunities, communication, collaboration and networking.

OUTCOMES

Research Impact - Innovation, Collaboration, Engagement, Translation

Enhanced Food Security - Food Security, Technology and Future Foods

Better Health – Healthy Country, Healthy People, Healthy Planet

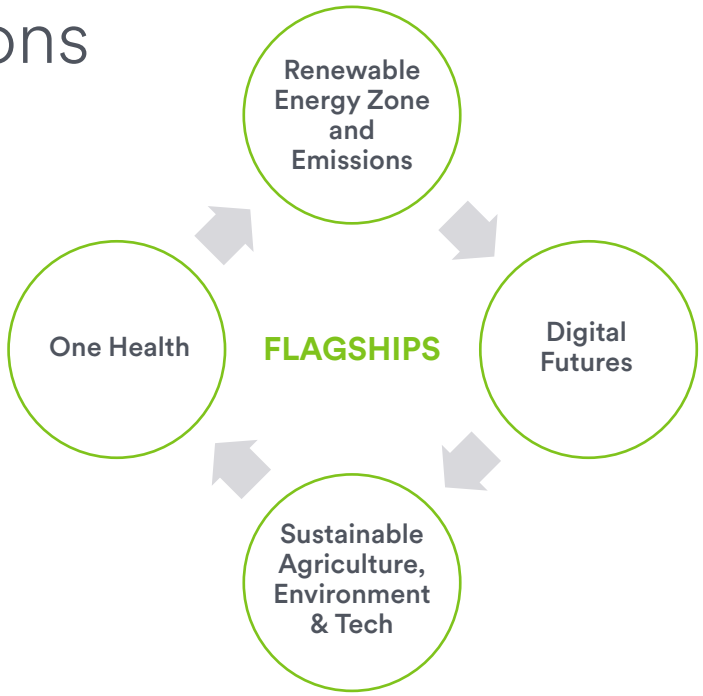
Resilient Communities – Resilient Systems, Communities and Regions

Respecting Humanity – Past, Present and Future

Themes & Actions

Research Directions

The University of New England will launch the Research Flagships Initiative to focus on multidisciplinary areas of opportunity, including OneHealth, Sustainable Agriculture, Digital Futures, and Renewable Energy, while setting annual research priorities and finalising an Indigenous Research Strategy in collaboration with Indigenous Australian staff, students, and the community.



Research Fundamentals

UNE's comprehensive research framework includes benchmarking UNE's research performance; regularly mapping our research capabilities; enhancing our approach to international rankings; undertaking a regular capacity analysis to understand where we have key person risks in research; establishment of institutes and centres; support and deploy platform capabilities (such as artificial intelligence, genetics, remote sensing, rural policy & regulatory science) across the university; management of infrastructure and collections; increasing support for grant bid development to increase competitiveness; enhancing systems and tools to support research governance ensuring research integrity and compliance through annual reporting and other improvements.

Research Culture

UNE's initiatives include enabling researchers by recognising researchers' achievements, fostering a positive research culture, and providing mentoring and research training for Higher Degree Researchers (HDRs) and Early Career Researchers (ECRs). Through structured programs and networking opportunities, we will enhance the HDR pipeline with competitive stipends and an effective supervisor development framework, provide comprehensive training modules for staff and students, and update the doctoral research agenda with industry guidance, research internships, and engagement strategies for students and funders.

Research Enterprise

UNE focuses on developing industry networks internally through its Incubators and Industry Impact hubs and networks and we will also look to joining network opportunities externally. We will also emphasise intellectual property management and commercialisation strategies, including new policies and programs, and aligning with industry through secondments, placements, and integrated learning opportunities to understand and meet industry needs effectively.

Research Engagement

UNE's Partner-of-Choice Framework aims to enhance industry engagement efficiently with guidance and showcasing of successes, including annual events like UNE Research Month, while also featuring inaugural professorial seminars, and facilitating secure and beneficial international research engagement through data registry and strategic planning.

Research plan implementation

The REEP is for five years, but a lot can change in that time – technology, policy, the economic environment, and funding opportunities. For that reason, an oversight structure and reporting framework will be in place so that we can track and respond to needs and opportunities taking an adaptive management approach.

Actions in Combination will Achieve the Goals

Combinations of Actions will be implemented to achieve the Plan Goals. For example, to address our ambitions of becoming an Innovation Partner of Choice, we will implement the REEP Actions that raise the university's profile; systematise and make available agreed costing and pricing structures; deploy new Intellectual Property management systems; regularly update our University capability map and align with stakeholder priorities and needs assessment; develop tools and protocols for external engagement; and update our research webpresence etc.

We need to track how well the Actions are working and decide whether we need to make iterative improvements over time. The plans includes Actions to monitor progress and adjust efforts to optimise success with an adaptive management approach.

Adaptive management approach of the Plan

Over time conditions change, as mentioned above, so in response some initiatives in the Research Enterprise & Engagement Plan may wax and wane in terms of effectiveness. For this reason, the measurement of outcomes and adjustment of inputs and settings of the REEP will be critical – identifying indicators that can be responded to in quick succession would enable a nimble and agile management approach. This management approach allows us to assess whether we have capacity risks; prioritise efforts to address these risks; and then report back on the effectiveness of the efforts. Actions in the Plan to enable such an adaptive management approach include:

- Research benchmarking and measurement tools
- Research Unique Project Identifier – to track research projects through compliance systems, grant management and infrastucture utilisation.
- Annual expertise pipeline & capacity analysis
- Setting of annual priority activities for research (informed by Capacity Analysis and KPIs)
- Postdoctoral research and managers support – responding to constraints identified in Capacity Analysis
- Annual UNE capability map to inform partner engagement
- Researcher Performance Framework, Team Research Plans and PPDRs
- Annual Research Overview Report.

Oversight of the plan and actions

The delivery of Actions within the Plan will be driven by a set of Delivery and Implementation Committees or Panels with responsibilities for:

- Actions related to Performance, KPIs and Self-Assurance
- Indigenous Research Actions
- Flagships
- Research Culture and Fundamentals
- Enterprise and Engagement

Sitting above these Delivery and Implementation Panels will be the Research Plan Oversight Committee tracking progress, reporting to University Governance bodies and working across the university to ensure appropriate engagement with teaching and learning, facilities and colleagues as well as external stakeholders.

Research Governance Framework

The Research Engagement & Enterprise Plan coalesces our approach to research governance and management, so that our activities and resources are managed in a way that is compliant with legislation and policies, using tools that make this efficient for staff. Our combination of training and systems will make risk management and compliance an important but routine activity, and where staff are encouraged to come forward if and when things go wrong.

Utilisation of the Research Plan Oversight Committee and university governance bodies, along with KPIs for the Research Enterprise & Engagement Plan and reporting efforts such as the Annual Research Overview Report that tracks the implementation, outomces and adaptations of the REEP will provide a self-assurance framework for research at UNE.

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