
Submission in response to *Women in Innovation Precincts Discussion Paper* published 15 August 2022 by the NSW Department of Enterprise, Investment and Trade

The University of Technology Sydney (UTS) supports the five priority areas identified in the *NSW Budget 2022-23 Women's Opportunity Statement* and welcomes the opportunity to contribute to the Department's investigation into Priority 2 – how economic opportunity can be improved for women in emerging industries across the State's innovation precincts, such as Tech Central.

UTS shares the view reached by the NSW Productivity Council (*NSW Innovation Precincts: Lessons from international experience*, 2019) that innovation precincts should be inherently inclusive places to work, play and live. Accordingly, UTS strongly supports this initiative given our clear commitment to social justice, inclusion and accessibility (*UTS Social Impact Framework*).

As noted in the discussion paper, many of the future industries of NSW are currently male dominated, including sectors where NSW has competitive advantages such as manufacturing, resources, defence, and agriculture (*NSW 20-year Roadmap*). The discussion paper recognises that this issue is not unique to NSW, and we welcome the Department's proposed framework for a *Women in Innovation Precinct Strategy* and associated tool kit.

How can innovation precincts maximise women's economic participation?

The discussion paper recognises the important role of anchor institutions within innovation precincts when it comes to implementing and promoting global best practice to improve women's economic participation and representation. As an anchor institution of Tech Central, UTS's sphere of influence means we can actively work to improve gender equity within our precinct, building on many years of experience in working towards gender equality. UTS is one of just three Australian universities who has been recognised as a Workplace Gender Equality Agency Employer of Choice for Gender Equality nineteen times since the Award's inception in 2002.

UTS is committed to continuing this leadership and is keen to partner with the NSW Government on initiatives that we may be able to accelerate, expand or initiate with NSW Government support. UTS is particularly keen to showcase the application of the principles and methodology behind the UTS Social Impact Framework across Tech Central. The UTS Social Impact Framework — the first of its kind at an Australian university — was developed in 2017 and committed us to a new strategic direction with a whole-of-institution agenda to harness our resources towards public benefit. Co-designed with our staff, students and other members of our community, the Framework provides a roadmap of transparent, rigorous, and evidence-based outcomes by which to measure our impact at a local level and beyond. An innovation precinct-wide social impact framework, developed with appropriate community consultation, would assist Government and other anchor institutions to track Tech Central's performance against women's economic participation and inclusion (as well as other social impact goals) over time.

More broadly, innovation precincts have a unique role as a meeting point between universities and enterprise. The opportunities for proactive partnerships between a university, like UTS, and its adjacent enterprises means that work integrated learning opportunities, internships and placements naturally emerge thus enabling graduates (especially women) unique opportunities to reach for roles in the emerging and scaling enterprises in innovation precincts, such as Tech Central.

Do you have examples of interventions under the pillars that should be specifically considered?

UTS is acutely aware that in some of the areas where we as a university have strengths – computer science, engineering, artificial intelligence for example – men continue to be overrepresented both among students and academics. For some time now, we have taken very deliberate steps to address this. For example, our UTS Women in Engineering and IT (WEIT) program, based in the Faculty of Engineering has been working since 1981 on a suite of programs with industry, schools, government and the community to encourage girls into STEM (science, technology, engineering and math) careers and create STEM workplaces where women can reach their full potential.

The national Women in STEM Decadal Plan identifies a range of barriers to participation in STEM for girls in primary and secondary education including stereotypes, bias, lack of role models, lack of understanding of

STEM career options, disengagement from STEM education, and family/cultural expectations. The UTS WEIT program offers some tested examples of the kinds of interventions that a precinct strategy could focus on, that create meaningful community engagement for women and girls such as:

- [Primary School STEM x Play Program](#)
- [High School STEM x Impact Program](#)
- [Engaging girls in regional and remote communities](#)
- [Extra-curricular STEM](#).

These sit alongside initiatives including [UTS Wanago Program](#) which is delivering NSW STEM electives for high-school students (majority female) at UTS to address national STEM workforce gaps and [Women in Engineering and IT Scholarships](#) that aim to encourage and support women into STEM fields at university that would be similarly worthwhile to consider in terms of successful innovation precinct strategies.

In terms of our approach to supporting women in STEMM (science, technology, engineering, maths and medicine) our key focus is on the Athena SWAN (Scientific Women's Academic Network) program, an internationally recognised program that accredits and grants awards to tertiary education and research institutions for gender equity, diversity and inclusion.

From an initial rigorous assessment as part of our application for a Bronze Award in 2018, UTS identified five key barriers to gender equity in STEMM and are working to address those barriers.

The priority areas are:

1. **Building the pipeline** through outreach to attract women to Engineering and IT in early education. Currently, low numbers of women are drawn to Engineering and IT disciplines. This pipeline begins in early primary and continues through secondary and undergraduate education and is a focus in the programs mentioned above.
2. **Supporting career progression** for Higher Degree Research (HDR) students: along with many other tertiary and research institutions, UTS is losing talent due to lack of career progression pathways that work for women, especially for women HDRs and Early Career Researchers.
3. **Targeting recruitment** to combat the gender imbalance in applications for STEMM positions. This is being done via targeted recruitment campaigns and by using an exemption granted by Anti-Discrimination NSW to address the unequal number of women and men that are applying for positions in the Faculty of Science and the Faculty of Engineering and IT (FEIT).
4. **Making flexible work the norm** across STEMM work areas. Flexible work arrangements are often not well known or adopted in STEMM work areas. Flexible work provisions need to be applied equally across the university.
5. **Promotion pathways** to increase the number of women ascending to senior positions in STEMM. This will address the unequal number of women applying for promotion in Science and FEIT.

Evidence from the Athena SWAN program, both at UTS and in other Australian and international universities and research institutions, offers considerable scope to assist in building a robust *Women in Innovation Precinct Strategy*.

Highlighting the contributions of women is also a valuable way of encouraging and supporting inclusion and participation of women. As an example of this kind of promotion, throughout March 2022 UTS celebrated the many ways UTS's policies, programs, practice and research is making an impact for our organisation and in the community more broadly via a [gender equity showcase](#) in our main public facing space on Broadway.

The discussion paper also highlights the underrepresentation of women in the startup ecosystem. UTS is committed to supporting technology-enabled entrepreneurship and UTS Startups is the largest community of startups in Australia. UTS leverages our growing community of startups to provide peer learning for less experienced entrepreneurs, which we are able to do at a significant scale given the size of our community. We're proud to provide 250 desks of free coworking space to our startups, lowering the barrier to entry for



people that only need occasional space use, and accommodating a more diverse community of entrepreneurs with which to collaborate.

Pleasingly, UTS Startups currently has 33% female members compared to 22% in the wider startup community. Our positive gender ratio reflects our effective outreach to both UTS students and school students (years 9 and 10), with the bulk of our work focused on inspiring tech entrepreneurship as early as possible.

This unique model connects entrepreneurs of all stages, industries and experience levels with the relevant people, resources and opportunities needed most. UTS highly recommends that the Department take the opportunity to visit UTS Startups (<https://www.uts.edu.au/current-students/opportunities/uts-startups>).

As a final observation, the toolkit is valuable to inform better decisions in the precincts, however we urge government to lead on initiatives (e.g. more housing options in proximity to precincts, affordable childcare and school options) that will support more women to participate in the future industries in NSW.

In conclusion, we submit that the various programs and initiatives described in this submission could be case studies of interest to the Department regarding the *Women in Innovation Precinct Strategy*. UTS would be more than happy to invite Department officials to be briefed on these initiatives ahead of the finalisation of the strategy. UTS is also keen to continue conversations about developing a social impact framework for Tech Central.

UTS appreciates the opportunity to contribute and would welcome future engagement over this important issue. Please do not hesitate to contact Amy Persson, Head of Government Affairs and External Engagement, on amy.persson@uts.edu.au to discuss further.