



Social Justice Highlights

2025



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Acknowledgement of Country

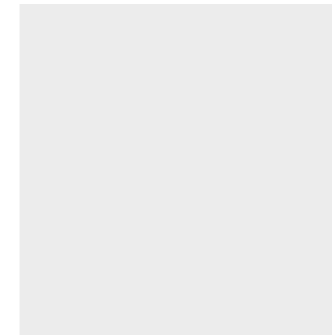
UTS acknowledges the Gadigal people of the Eora Nation, the Boorooberongal people of the Dharug Nation, the Bidiagal people and the Gamaygal people upon whose ancestral lands our university stands. We would also like to pay respect to the Elders both past and present, acknowledging them as the traditional custodians of knowledge for these lands.

Social justice at UTS: A curated snapshot

As UTS transitions to a new Social Impact Framework, 2025 marked a shift in how the university understands and reports on social justice and impact. Rather than publishing a full Social Justice Report aligned to the previous framework, this brochure presents a curated snapshot of activity during the year. It offers an interim view of how UTS continued to advance social justice across teaching, research, operations and community engagement. It is intentionally selective, and we encourage readers who would like further detail to reach out to the Centre for Social Justice and Inclusion.

Despite a challenging year for the UTS community, staff and students across the university continued to advance equity, inclusion and social impact across every area of operation. The initiatives featured here span the breadth of UTS and the many different approaches to advancing social justice. Together, they reflect the varied, often interconnected ways this work takes shape at UTS.

As always, it is the dedication of our staff, students and community partners that carries this work forward. This brochure highlights just a small cross-section of that work – a glimpse of the commitment and care that underpins social justice at UTS.



Removing barriers to education

In 2025 UTS launched its Pathways Plan – a whole of institution commitment to removing longstanding barriers to higher education, broadening access and supporting student success. The Plan reflects a deliberate shift away from narrow measures of merit towards recognising student potential in all its forms and redesigning systems that replicate inequality.

The Plan brings together a suite of targeted programs that create multiple routes into university, alongside the support needed to succeed once students arrive.

U@Uni Academy

UTS's flagship widening participation initiative, U@Uni, supports students from low-socioeconomic (SES) backgrounds in partner schools to aspire to, access and succeed in university. Through long-term engagement, mentoring and an alternative entry pathway, the program recognises potential beyond the ATAR and provides a supported transition into study.



U@Uni Academy students taking part in a workshop

UTS consistently outperforms the sector average in student success, achieving a low-SES success rate of

90%

compared to the sector average of 82.45%

Since the program's launch in 2019,

977

students from low-SES backgrounds have been offered a place to study at UTS through U@Uni

UniReady

Launched in 2025, UniReady is a new enabling program designed to provide a supported pathway into undergraduate study for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, and students who have experienced financial disadvantage. The program is focused on building academic confidence, skills and preparedness for university learning.

Jumbunna Admissions Program

The Jumbunna Admissions Program offers a culturally supportive pathway into university for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students. It recognises a broader range of strengths, experiences and community leadership, providing an alternative entry scheme grounded in equity and self determination.

Thrive: Finishing School Well

Thrive is a research-led initiative run by the UTS Human Technology Institute that brings together data science, lived experience and community co-design to better understand what supports young people to finish school well. By combining machine learning with qualitative insights, the program identifies practical, community informed solutions to improve educational outcomes for students across NSW.

Humanitarian Scholarship Program

The UTS Humanitarian Scholarship supports students seeking asylum or on temporary visas to access undergraduate study. By covering tuition fees and providing financial support for study costs, the program removes structural barriers to participation and reflects a university-wide commitment to education as a pathway to safety, dignity and opportunity.

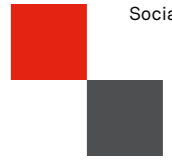
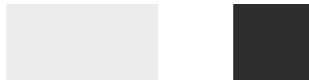
UTS humanitarian scholars are supported throughout their studies through dedicated academic mentoring, helping them navigate university processes, plan their future careers, and build confidence.

In 2025, the program was further strengthened through UTS's participation in the Australian Government's new Refugee Student Settlement Pathway scholarship, expanding access to higher education for students from refugee backgrounds who are eligible for Commonwealth Supported Places.

In 2025 the UTS Humanitarian Scholarship Program supported

56

students – the largest cohort of students from refugee and asylum seeker backgrounds of any Australian university.



Pasifika Program

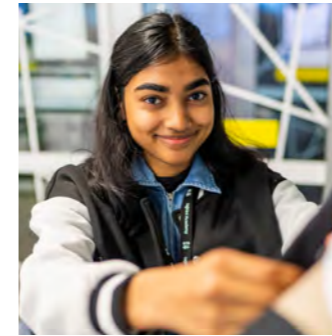
The Pasifika Program provides culturally responsive support for Pacific Islander students, from pre-university engagement through to success in higher education. Through academic support and community building, the program strengthens pathways into university while fostering belonging and connection.

These initiatives move equity from the margins to the centre of how the university operates. Together, they reflect a shift from asking whether students are 'ready' for university, to asking whether the institution is doing enough to recognise potential, respond to context, and create fair conditions for success.

Priority Student Success Program

The Priority Student Success Program prepares students from UTS's widening participation programs as they transition to university. Students from the U@Uni Academy, UniReady and the Humanitarian Scholarship Program are supported through a coordinated approach to help them navigate the early stages of university life.

Through academic bridging workshops, social activities and peer mentoring, students build confidence, develop study skills and learn key UTS systems and processes. By strengthening their sense of belonging, the program supports overall success and retention, while contributing to more inclusive teaching and support practices across the university.



Students and staff across the UTS community reflect the many pathways into study and the diverse perspective and experiences that shape life at UTS.



Research **spotlight**

As a university committed to engagement and applied research, our research outcomes focus on real world problems and the communities most affected by them.

UTS researchers work across disciplines and in close partnership with industry, government and community organisations to generate knowledge that informs policy, challenges inequality and delivers practical, positive change.

Remembering disability institutions

UTS researchers from the Faculty of Design and Society and the Faculty of Law are reshaping how Australia confronts its disability history — and how governments plan for the future.

Led by Associate Professor Linda Steele and Associate Professor Phillippa Carnemolla, this UTS research works with people with disability and advocacy organisations to prevent the erasure of former disability institutions as sites are sold or redeveloped.

For more than a century, these institutions caused profound harm through segregation, violence and neglect. In response, the team developed a reparative disability planning framework, grounded in lived experience and built around acknowledgement, dialogue and accountability. With several major NSW sites now under redevelopment, the research is already influencing policy conversations — demonstrating the power of social justice driven, collaborative research to challenge historical injustice and shape more just futures.

Indigenous-led review of Closing the Gap

In 2025, the Jumbunna Institute for Indigenous Education and Research was selected to conduct the inaugural independent Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander review of the National Agreement on Closing the Gap – a significant, Indigenous-led piece of work of one of Australia’s most important policy frameworks.

Delivered in the first half of the year, the review drew on consultation with more than 500 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, including community members, peak body representatives and policy experts. It examined how governments and communities are working together under the Agreement, with a focus on the four Priority Reform areas and whether intended changes are being realised in practice.

The review found that while the Agreement’s overall framework is sound and broadly supported, progress has been constrained by ongoing implementation challenges, including a lack of the systemic change required across government.

The findings will inform future iterations of the National Agreement, reinforcing the central role of self-determination in achieving lasting outcomes. It is one of the institute’s most impactful pieces of work to date.

Next generation robotic aid for vision impaired people

UTS researchers, working with Guide Dogs NSW/ACT, are trialling a walking, talking robot designed to support people who are blind or have low vision to navigate busy public spaces.

Program lead and Director of the UTS Robotics Institute, Professor Sarath Kodagoda, brought together advanced robotics, artificial intelligence and accessible design expertise to create the prototype.

More than 2.2 billion people worldwide are blind or have some degree of near or distance vision impairment. While Guide Dogs are the current industry standard for supporting independent travel, the 3-year project seeks to harness robotics to offer greater choice. The robot uses sensors and AI to detect obstacles and people, giving polite verbal cues and guidance in real time, walking at human pace and moving naturally through crowds. Rather than replacing guide dogs, the program explores how technology can complement existing supports – particularly in environments where traditional aids may be limited.

3D bioprinting breakthrough in pregnancy research

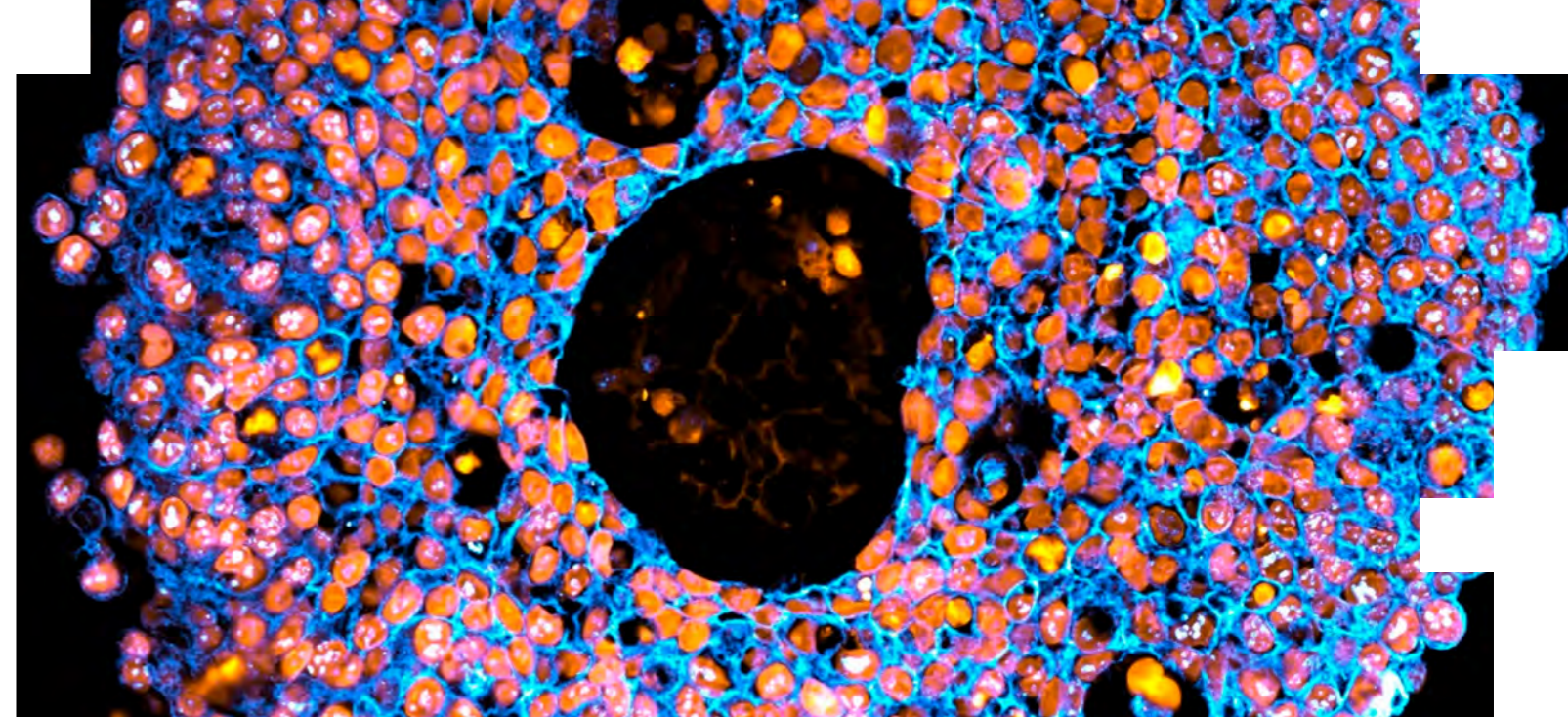
In 2025, researchers at the UTS School of Life Sciences made a breakthrough in understanding pregnancy complications, using 3D bioprinting to create miniature placentas. Led by Associate Professor Lana McClements and Dr Claire Richards, the research offers a new way to study early pregnancy, which is challenging to study in real people.

The work responds to a critical global challenge: pregnancy complications contribute to more than 260,000 maternal deaths and millions of infant deaths each year.

By developing more accurate models of the placenta, the team is opening up new possibilities for earlier intervention and treatment, such as testing new drugs to address pregnancy complications safely.

“As we refine these models, we move closer to a future where pregnancy complications can be predicted, prevented and treated before they put lives at risk.”

Dr Claire Richards,
UTS School of Life Sciences



Microscope image of placenta organoid (mini placenta). Images acquired at the UTS Microbial Imaging Facility by Dr Claire Richards.



Students walked on Lego in different ways in order to evaluate how different conditions impact sensations of pain. Photo: UTS.

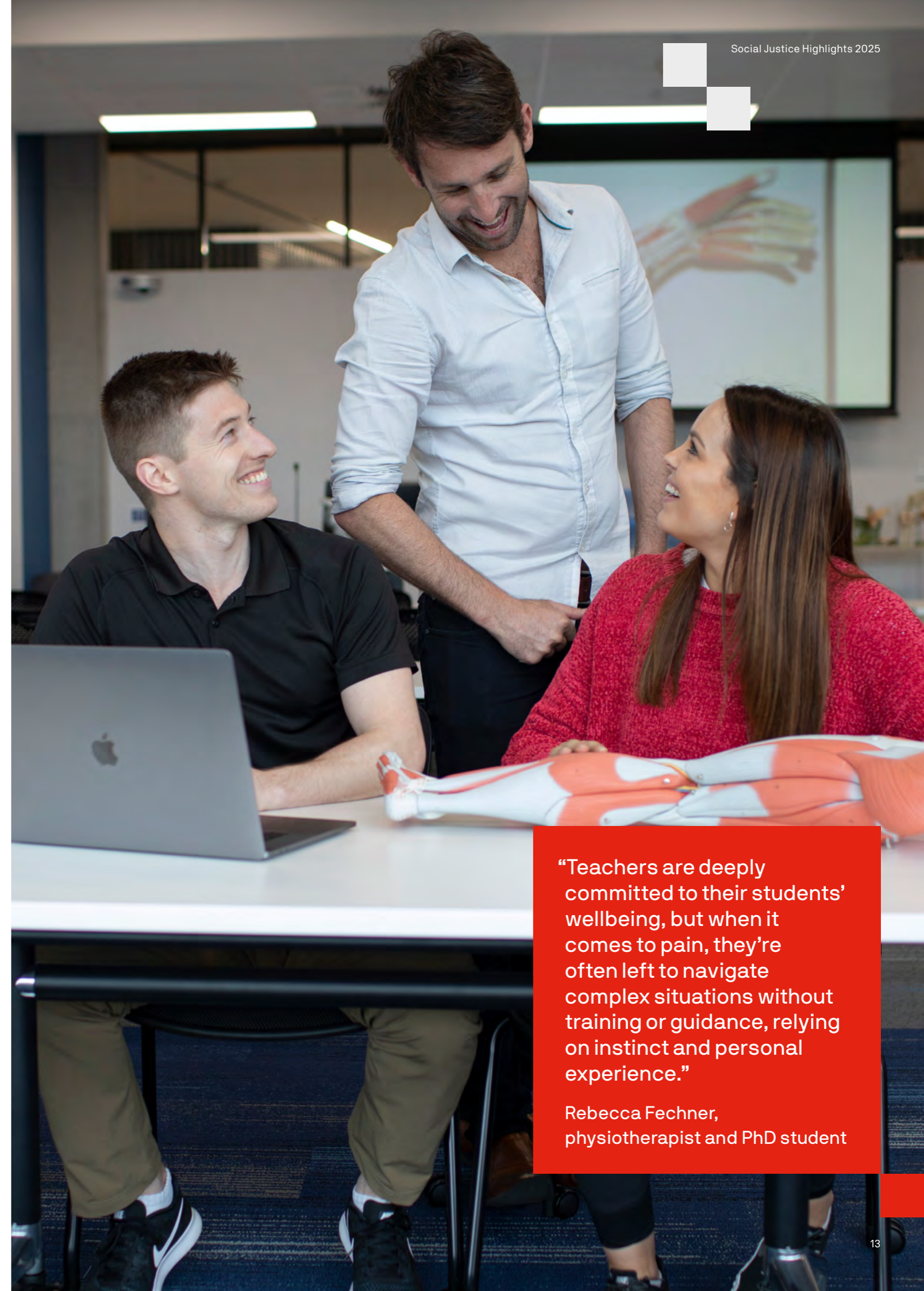
Supporting students with chronic pain

Research led by UTS PhD student and physiotherapist Rebecca Fechner is highlighting the often-overlooked role teachers play in supporting students living with chronic pain – and the impact this responsibility can have on their wellbeing.

Chronic pain affects around one in five children and adolescents and can significantly disrupt learning, attendance and social participation. While the effects on students are well understood, the study found that teachers are frequently left to manage complex and ongoing needs without formal training or guidance.

Teachers described navigating issues such as fatigue, concentration difficulties and the need for flexible classroom adjustments, often drawing on personal experience rather than evidence-based approaches. The research identifies opportunities to better support both students and educators through targeted pain science education, stronger school-wide approaches, and greater recognition of the relational role teachers play in shaping student wellbeing.

Building on the findings of this study, Fechner's PhD explores how pain science can be embedded into the school curriculum through a teacher-led approach, and in collaboration with two pilot schools she has codesigned Australia's first teacher-led pain science education program for teachers and students.



“Teachers are deeply committed to their students’ wellbeing, but when it comes to pain, they’re often left to navigate complex situations without training or guidance, relying on instinct and personal experience.”

Rebecca Fechner,
physiotherapist and PhD student

Students as agents for social justice

Finding purpose in volunteering

Many UTS students are active contributors to social change. Through volunteering, advocacy and community engagement, they are applying their skills, lived experience and values to issues that matter, from gender-based violence to regional community support.

For students like Amelia Grace Wilson Williams, this work is deeply personal. Growing up in Western Sydney, she witnessed inequality first-hand. Through her volunteering with What Were You Wearing? Australia, Amelia has co-led major rallies, contributed to policy change, and helped amplify the voices of victim-survivors. She also volunteered in North Sumatra in Indonesia to support a local NGO with environmental law work.

“Volunteering has always been that gap filler for me... bring some joy to someone else’s life, and you bring some joy to your own.”

For Mahir Munot, volunteering has been a way to build connection and purpose. From supporting new students as a peer networker to working with regional communities through The BIG Lift, his experiences have shown how acts of service both large and small can have meaningful impact.

Through various volunteering and student leadership programs, UTS recognises service as a pathway to leadership, personal growth and social responsibility. Supporting students to act beyond the classroom helps contribute to more just and connected communities.

“It was an incredible opportunity to give back in a meaningful way. It reminded me that change can happen anywhere – and that we all have a role to play.”

Across some of UTS’s key volunteering and leadership programs, the scale of student engagement in 2025 included:

UTS SOUL Award

2657
students enrolled



383
students graduated



24,322
hours of social impact action logged



UTS SOUL Award students volunteering



Mahir volunteering at community radio station 2SER.

UTS BUILD (Beyond UTS International Leadership Development)

1778

BUILD members

796

new registrations

44

events

140

program completions

1571

participants across events and endorsed experiences

ActivateUTS volunteering

262

active volunteers across all programs

1103

volunteer opportunities completed

5492

volunteer hours recorded



UTS SOUL students volunteering at the Ultimo Community Garden

Law students launch Fair Play magazine

In 2025, the UTS Law Students' Society launched *Fair Play: Equity, Justice & Resistance*, their inaugural social justice magazine. The publication highlights the role students play in questioning, challenging and reimagining the law.

Centred on the theme *Equity, Justice, Resistance*, the first edition brings together diverse student voices to explore some of the most pressing legal and social issues of our time.

Through analysis, personal reflection and critical insight, contributors examine how legal systems can both reinforce and resist inequality – and how they might be transformed to better serve communities.

By creating space for dialogue, critique and creativity, the magazine empowers students to engage deeply with questions of justice and to see themselves as future leaders in shaping a more equitable legal landscape.



Fair Play asks: what does law look like when we centre justice?

Staff leading change

UTS staff are key drivers of social justice – using their expertise to respond to community needs, initiate new approaches, and deepen their understanding through direct engagement with communities.

Walking together: staff learning through Jawun

The Jawun secondment program places staff within Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations to support community-led priorities while building deeper cultural understanding.

For UTS professional staff member Zain Warsi, a six-week secondment with the Ngaanyatjarra Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara Women's Council in Central Australia was both professionally challenging and personally transformative. Working alongside an organisation delivering critical health, social and cultural services across remote communities, Zain focused on strengthening recruitment and communications – helping better articulate the scale and impact of work that is often under recognised.

Zain's most significant learning came from the experience of working within an Indigenous-led organisation, where priorities, pace and measures of success are shaped by community. It required a shift from delivering outcomes quickly, to listening deeply and responding in ways that are genuinely useful.

Jawun is grounded in this principle: communities lead, and secondees contribute their skills in support of self-determined goals. The experience builds cultural capability, strengthens leadership, and fosters more thoughtful and effective engagement with First Nations communities.

Returning to UTS, staff bring these insights back into their work – shaping how the university teaches, researches and partners with community, while deepening the university's capacity to act with care, humility and purpose.

“The red earth would teach me more about listening than any boardroom ever could.”

Zain Warsi

Speech pathology practise with a purpose

Speech pathologist Dr Cath Gregory recognised a significant gap in access to gender affirming voice training, a service that can be critical to the wellbeing of trans and non-binary people but is often inaccessible or unaffordable.

In response, she helped establish this offering within the student-led Speech Pathology Reaching Out at UTS clinic, part of the Graduate School of Health. Including gender-affirming voice training as part of the clinic offerings created a space where clients can develop a voice that aligns with their identity in a supportive environment, and students can gain the skills and confidence to include gender-affirming voice training in their future practise.

The initiative reflects a broader approach at UTS: translating expertise into real-world impact. By embedding this work into student learning, the program not only expands access to care, but helps build a future workforce equipped to deliver more inclusive, responsive health services.

Reclaiming the narrative of the First Nations workforce

Spearheaded by Professor Nareen Young, the UTS Business School's Centre for Indigenous People and Work was launched to improve employment outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

The Centre draws on Indigenous-led research and lived experience to better understand workplace culture, participation and barriers to equity. Working in partnership with industry, government and community, it will develop practical responses to systemic issues including racism, underemployment and exclusion from leadership.

“Our goal is to create a recognisable, self-determined Centre that reclaims and redevelops the narrative and speaks from the real, lived experiences of First Nations workers.”

Professor Nareen Young,
Director of the Centre for
Indigenous People and Work

Networks and communities driving change

Across UTS, staff and researchers connect through networks and communities of practice that support collaboration, shared learning and collective action. These networks create space to exchange knowledge, build capability and strengthen connections across disciplines, roles and lived experience. In doing so, they help translate individual expertise into more coordinated and impactful approaches to advancing equity and social justice.

Multicultural Women's Network

The Multicultural Women's Network (MWN) is a staff-led initiative that connects multicultural women across UTS to build visibility, support and community, while creating opportunities for networking, learning and peer connection. It also contributes to institutional change by amplifying multicultural women's perspectives to inform policies, strategies and programs, and advocate for greater equity, representation and inclusion.

As part of the UTS Collaboration Grant Scheme, MWN developed the *Say Our Names* mini-documentary and best-practice guide, highlighting the importance of names in identity, belonging and social inclusion, and challenging Eurocentric linguistic norms to foster more inclusive classrooms and communities.

Disability Research Network

The Disability Research Network connects researchers across disciplines to collaborate on inclusive, impactful research led by and with people with disability. Drawing on diverse expertise and lived experience, the network supports the development of interdisciplinary research and practical solutions that addresses complex challenges across areas including education, employment, health and community participation.

In 2025 researchers from the network co-organised the 2025 *Accountability, Resistance and Disruption* conference, hosted by UTS to convene regional experts to advance research and dialogue on disability, law and society, with a focus on human rights and lived experience.

UTS Research Community on Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence

UTS Research Community on Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence strengthens collaboration on one of the most urgent and complex social issues. By connecting researchers across disciplines, this community supports the sharing of knowledge, development of joint projects and translation of research into policy and practice.

Through this collaborative approach, the research community helps drive more effective prevention strategies, improve support systems, and contribute to evidence-based responses to domestic and family violence.

In 2025, this included amplifying the continued national impact of Dr Anne Summers AO, Professor of Domestic and Family Violence within the UTS Business School, whose decades of advocacy continue to shape public understanding and inform long-term policy reform.

LGBTQIA+ Researchers Network

The LGBTQIA+ Researchers Network is led by UTS academics who identify as LGBTQIA+ or whose research centres LGBTQIA+ populations. Through events, engagement and peer support, it strengthens a visible and connected research community, contributing to more inclusive, equity-focused research across the university.

Indigenous Policy Hub

Based in the Jumbunna Institute for Indigenous Education and Research, the Indigenous Policy Hub works proactively with communities, governments and organisations to advance self-determination and support Indigenous-led policy reform

In 2025, the Hub played a key role in supporting the independent NSW Treaty Commissioners, Naomi Moran and Aden Ridgeway, as they undertook statewide consultations on potential treaty pathways. Acting as official scribes for the consultation period and leading data collection and analysis, the Hub has supported engagement with Aboriginal communities across NSW, ensuring their perspectives are captured in culturally appropriate and meaningful ways. This work contributes to a significant and history making process, laying the groundwork for future treaty conversations and long-term structural reform.

Engaging with community

UTS is redefining what it means to be a civic institution through collaboration, co-design and community-led impact.

Nationally and globally, and with a focus on our own local neighbourhood, UTS partners with organisations, community leaders and residents who bring deep lived experience and insight into what their communities need to thrive. We seek to connect university expertise, resources and infrastructure in ways that strengthen community-led action, generating social impact that is grounded, reciprocal and enduring.

UTS SOUL: Excellence in student community engagement

UTS SOUL, the university's flagship co-curricular community engagement program, was recognised nationally at the 2025 Engagement Australia Awards for Excellence in Student and/or Alumni Engagement. The award acknowledges SOUL's long-standing success in connecting students with community organisations through hands-on volunteering and leadership development.

Since launching in 2013, SOUL has grown into one of UTS's most impactful programs, engaging around five per cent of students each year.

Communities leading the way to a sustainable city

Throughout 2025, UTS partnered with residents and community organisations in Glebe, Ultimo, Haymarket and Pyrmont to explore what sustainability looks like when it is led by communities. Through the Community-led Sustainable Cities project, supported by funding from the City of Sydney, the Centre for Social Justice and Inclusion worked alongside more than 120 local residents, listening to lived experience and supporting local priorities.

The project focused on relationship-based engagement, trust and shared leadership. One tangible outcome was the Elger Street Community Garden at a social housing estate in Glebe. Over nine months, a neglected rooftop was transformed into a shared garden through working bees, workshops and tenant-led activities. Supported by Community Greening from the Royal Botanic Gardens Sydney, the project also built gardening skills and confidence. What was once an overlooked space associated with isolation became a place of pride, wellbeing and connection.



UTS SOUL students engaged in volunteering, leadership and community connection activities

“This project showed what happens when universities stop talking at communities and start working with them. It's slower, it's messier, but it's also where the most meaningful change happens.”

Dr Kathleen Blair, Research and Evaluation Manager at the Centre for Social Justice and Inclusion, and Community-led Sustainable Cities co-lead

Advancing equity, diversity and inclusion



Staff and students pose with one of the iconic Tower Hats

Celebrating community at Mardi Gras

Each year, Sydney Mardi Gras brings colour, energy and celebration to UTS, and 2025 was no exception. With the theme *Free to Be*, the university embraced the opportunity to celebrate and uplift its LGBTQIA+ community, and welcome allies to take part in a vibrant program of events on campus and beyond.

From Pride Picnic gatherings on UTS's Alumni Green to Drag Trivia and the Mardi Mixer at The Underground, students and staff came together to connect, celebrate and show their support. UTS also had a strong presence across the broader festival, with a Fair Day stall and a standout Mardi Gras float featuring the now iconic Tower Hats created in a Design, Architecture and Building workshop.

These moments reflect UTS's ongoing commitment to fostering a campus where diversity is not only welcomed but celebrated, and where everyone can feel free to be their best selves.



Celebrating community, inclusion and the theme Free to Be.



UTS staff engaging with anti-racism messaging and practice

Cultural diversity and anti-racism: shaping a shared commitment

In late 2025, UTS released our Cultural Diversity and Anti-Racism (CDAR) Action Plan. This marks an important step in strengthening the university's commitment to diversity, inclusion and systemic change. Ahead of its formal launch in 2026, the framework reflects a significant body of work grounded in consultation, listening and collaboration across the UTS community.

The CDAR was shaped through extensive engagement with students, staff and community partners, drawing on lived experience, research expertise and sector knowledge to inform its direction. This process ensured the framework responds to the realities of racism in contemporary settings, while recognising the diversity of perspectives within the UTS community.

At its core, the CDAR sets out a whole-of-institution approach focusing not only on culture and behaviour, but on the systems and structures that shape inclusion and exclusion. It represents a shared commitment to creating a more equitable university, where cultural diversity is valued and racism is actively addressed in all its forms.



Two students pose in front of the #racismnotwelcome sign on UTS's Alumni Green



Advocacy and thought leadership through dialogue

Across UTS, events provide opportunities to engage with social justice issues — connecting research, lived experience and community voices in considered, informed discussion.

In 2025, these conversations spanned some of the most pressing issues facing communities. Some key highlights include:

- The national **Right to Housing report** launch brought together advocates, researchers and community leaders to examine housing as a fundamental human right and call for policy reform grounded in dignity and need.
- During **National Reconciliation Week**, a truth-telling event invited leading voices to confront Australia's colonial history and its ongoing impacts, highlighting the role of honest dialogue in advancing reconciliation.
- To mark **International Women's Day**, Matildas goalkeeper Lydia Williams shared her advocacy for gender equality in sport, demonstrating the power of visibility and leadership to challenge entrenched barriers.
- UTS's 2025 Andrew Jakubowicz Annual Lecture, **Envisioning trans futures**, examined rights, experiences and future possibilities for trans and gender diverse people, underscoring the role of inclusive research and dialogue in advancing equity.
- Hosted by the UTS Business School, the **Social Enterprise Festival** was the largest market for social enterprise products and services in NSW and the ACT, showcasing how business can drive social and environmental impact.
- As part of UTS's Global Game Changers event series, **Too young to scroll? Policy, practice and the bigger picture** explored proposed social media age restrictions and their implications for privacy, inclusion, mental health and digital rights.

These events represent just a small sample of the many conversations hosted at UTS — each contributing to a broader culture of advocacy, awareness and engagement across the university and wider community.





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