



# 2024 Annual Report



# Acknowledgement of Country

SSE acknowledges that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders are the First Peoples and Traditional Custodians of the lands and waterways of Australia and the oldest continuing culture in the world. We pay respect to Elders past and present as the original storytellers, innovators, and place-makers, and together we celebrate their traditional sovereignty of these lands, which has never been ceded.

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# A Message from our CEO and Chair

Reflecting on 2024, I am continually inspired by the extraordinary individuals and communities we have worked alongside—people whose innovative ideas and transformative solutions are not only expanding opportunities but reshaping lives. These changemakers are redefining the bounds of possibility across sectors, tackling society's most pressing challenges, and paving the way toward a brighter future for us all.

At SSE, we recognise that human needs and global challenges drive meaningful innovation. Unlocking the potential within these challenges often requires an entrepreneurial mindset, and we are proud to support visionary individuals and collaborate with like-minded organisations to pursue bold, transformative goals that push the boundaries of possibility.

Together, we have seized opportunities to foster innovation, champion inclusivity, and drive economic growth. Every milestone we reach is a testament to our shared vision of a more entrepreneurial, equitable future. This year, we celebrated significant achievements that enriched our mission and engaged our community. We remain committed to advancing gender equality in entrepreneurship, supporting more women in establishing and succeeding in their businesses, and unlocking female employment potential—a critical driver of individual, community, and economic well-being.

Empowering Indigenous Australians and amplifying their invaluable contributions to the entrepreneurial ecosystem is a core tenet of our mission. Through partnerships with communities in Albury, Batemans Bay, Nowra, Armidale, and beyond, we see Indigenous-led businesses generating economic impact while enriching our cultural landscape, sharing unique insights, and practising sustainability informed by generations of wisdom. Equally inspiring is the enthusiasm of young Indigenous students who, with support from SSE programs in partnership with the Department of Regional NSW and the National Aboriginal Sporting Chance Academy (NASCA), are cultivating creativity, building business acumen, and developing lifelong skills. It is an honour to support Indigenous entrepreneurs as they create transformative change across industries and economic pathways that reflect their heritage, wisdom, and resilience. Their contributions are essential to Australia's shared future, and we are dedicated to uplifting Indigenous voices as they lead with innovation and self-determination in their communities.

Our commitment to fostering opportunity and equity also extends to empowering young people from disadvantaged backgrounds and supporting their teachers, who play a crucial role in guiding and inspiring them. In 2024, our partnership with the NSW Department of Education expanded the Youth Accelerator to 2,200 public schools, reaching nearly 300 young people. This collaboration and others have helped students develop the skills and confidence to bring their ideas to life, harnessing creativity and determination to solve real-world problems. Additionally, teachers across NSW benefitted from SSE's NESA-accredited programs, equipping them with the tools and resources to instil curiosity, resilience, and a sense of possibility in their classrooms.

We continue to see the powerful impact of our Discovery program—a term-long, project-based innovation journey designed for high school students. This year, Hoxton Park High School joined us for the third consecutive year, bringing critical thinking and entrepreneurial skills to Year 9 iSTEM students through experiential learning.

We take equal pride in our support for individuals from Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CaLD) backgrounds, recognising the invaluable role of diverse perspectives in building a vibrant entrepreneurial ecosystem. This year, we strengthened our commitment by creating inclusive platforms and resources, empowering nearly 200 CaLD individuals to bridge cultures and contribute fresh, innovative solutions to the Australian economy.

CaLD entrepreneurs enrich the social fabric of our society and drive progress through their unique perspectives and skills. By supporting them, we promote shared goals of inclusion, economic growth, and community resilience. Our partnerships, including the 6-week Startup Success program with the City of Sydney and the Invest in Yourself program for women with the Liverpool City Council, enable these entrepreneurs to thrive, innovate, and lead.

Looking ahead, our vision is clear: to build a future where entrepreneurial spirit, inclusive growth, and resilience come together to empower individuals from all backgrounds. Together, with each of these remarkable communities, we are shaping a legacy of impact and possibility that will inspire generations to come.



**Dr Sarah Jones,**  
GAICD, FRSN  
CEO

**Emeritus Professor**  
**Annabelle Duncan**  
Independent Director  
and Board Chair



# Our Impact

## Statistics 2018-2024

>22,000 Participants	>18,000 tertiary education students	>450 students from 48 NSW schools	19% Indigenous participation	
>40% Regional participation	>50% Female participation	>78 Unique languages spoken at home across participants	>100 Industry and community partners	10 NSW Councils
5 Government Departments	>145 Countries participating in SSE programs	>50 Local and international conferences and events	2 Interdisciplinary research projects	>40 Articles and thought-leadership pieces
Issued >2,300 digital credentials	6 Digital internships	5x AQF level 7 Units of Study	>12 Professional Development programs	5 International bootcamps

# Sustainable Development Goals



The UN's 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) are “an urgent call for action by all countries” to partner globally to take active steps towards implement “strategies that improve health and education, reduce inequality, and spur economic growth,” especially for those most in need.

As a social enterprise, SSE is committed to pursuing environmental, social and economic sustainability through all facets of our organisation, a commitment that enables us to work responsibly towards several targeted SDGs, namely:



## Goal 1: End poverty in all its forms everywhere

SSE champions entrepreneurship as a catalyst for economic independence. By equipping learners with tools to create businesses, access funding, and navigate dynamic markets, SSE directly contributes to breaking the cycle of poverty and fostering economic resilience.



## Goal 4: Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all

Education is at the heart of SSE. Through co-designing educational experiences and entrepreneurship programs with a growing network of partners, communities, and supporters, we provide all our learners with practical and sustainable pathways to lifelong learning.



## Goal 5: Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls

SSE prioritises gender equality and creates inclusive learning environments that address gender disparities and encourage women of all ages to develop the skills needed to build confidence and financial literacy, and succeed in business.



## Goal 8: Promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all

By promoting vocational skills, digital literacy, and sustainable practices, SSE empowers learners to access – and in many cases, self-create – decent work, and create bigger, better lives for themselves, their families and communities, and the world around them.



## Goal 10: Reduce inequality within and among countries

Reducing inequality in these systems is an important driver for SSE. All of our programs are created to help uplift and inspire marginalised and underrepresented groups including Indigenous Australians, CaLD communities, women, and young people.

# Moonshot Goals

Empowering and uplifting historically under-represented communities is essential to advancing Australia's economic and social prosperity and enhancing the well-being of more Australians. To maximise social impact and achieve our strategic vision, SSE has developed a set of 'Moonshot Goals': ambitious, collaborative missions that aim to inspire innovation, mobilise collective resources, and drive enduring, positive change across Australia.



## Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Communities (CALD)

**Facilitate the establishment of 500,000 successful businesses owned by CALD community members** through culturally sensitive, tailored entrepreneurship education designed to address economic and social disparities for community empowerment and financial freedom.



## Young People (aged 12-24)

**Enable 1 million young people to find purpose through self-employment** and/or gain the acquisition and development of transferable skills through entrepreneurial education that embeds industry mentoring to help them become work-ready and set them apart from their peers.



## Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples

**Upskill 2,500 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to overcome economic disadvantage** through self-employment by delivering culturally safe and sensitive entrepreneurial education, creating a ripple effect where the Aboriginal-owned business employs at least 1-3 more community members.



## Women and Girls

**(includes non-binary and female-identified people)**

**Advance the careers of 1 million women and girls through entrepreneurship education**, fostering a supportive network for pursuing entrepreneurial endeavours and leadership roles, and promoting gender equity, purpose, and opportunities for personal and professional growth.



# Program Highlights

SSE programs are designed to equip learners with the knowledge and skills needed to create lasting impact—for themselves, their families and communities, as well as for the planet. We believe entrepreneurship is a powerful catalyst for change, and our mission is to unlock the potential and talent of people from diverse backgrounds, building a brighter, more inclusive future for all Australians.





# Startup Success

*Startup Success* is one of SSE's Signature Programs, a comprehensive six-part program designed to introduce learners to entrepreneurship as a mindset and explore the processes involved in ideating – and the basic framework for launching – a new business.



## City of Sydney

Supported by City of Sydney, SSE partnered with Haymarket Chamber of Commerce and Business in the Peninsula (Pyrmont+Ultimo+Darling Harbour) to deliver *Startup Success* for over 100 startup founders and small businesses with a personal or commercial connection to the City of Sydney.

*"Startup Success is a testament to the power of collaboration in fostering sustainable growth for small businesses. It's incredibly rewarding to witness the ripple effect of this program and its role in helping nurture a dynamic entrepreneurial community."*

**Cherie Karlsson**  
Educational Design Manager



# Soo Lee: from comfort zone to embracing the startup journey



When Soo Lee's partner told her he was enrolling in *Startup Success*, a little spark ignited. While she didn't have a specific project in mind, the former MBA student decided she was keen to explore what it might actually take, in a practical sense, to get a great idea out of her head and off the ground.

"As we discussed the course more at home, I realised I definitely wanted to know more, also to meet like-minded people in our local area, and hopefully make some new professional connections at the same time," she said.

## Journey Genius, the genesis of a great idea

It wasn't long before the ideas were flowing! Soo is now in the early stages of developing Journey Genius, an innovative micro travel planner tailored for individuals and groups. The concept of micro travel focuses on same-day travel locations or shorter visits, often centred around local areas.

What sets the application apart is its ability to provide tailored experiences that consider various preferences and potential travel challenges.

Soo says, "the platform employs artificial intelligence (AI) to generate personalised travel guides and recommendations. Users can select their physical preferences and other travel nuances prior to the actual trip planning process.

"The AI algorithm then crafts an itinerary that aligns with these preferences, offering a seamless and efficient planning experience, all based on earlier travellers' firsthand experience feedback," she added.

## Innovate to elevate

We asked Soo what innovation meant to her and her response was simple: to create positive change and improvement. "It's about enhancing the current state of things for the benefit of those who haven't yet experienced [something]," she said, adding that "innovation, in essence, is a dynamic force that drives progress and strives to make a meaningful difference in people's lives."

Entrepreneurship, in contrast, Soo ventures is "the process of transforming that idea into a commercially viable venture."

"Great ideas are countless, whereas entrepreneurship takes their potential and brings them to market. It involves direct competition with existing products or service solutions, fostering an environment where each player is challenged to enhance and improve what is currently being offered, pushing for continual improvement and innovation within a competitive landscape."

## On applying *Startup Success* to life beyond the classroom

Energised by the course, Soo plans to apply the insights gained from *Startup Success* to incorporate the use of 'personas' to help identify real problems that need addressing, a process that has proven effective in creating solutions that resonate with users and have a meaningful impact.

"I also hope to leverage my learnings to enhance my pitching skills," she said. "I want to be able to articulate my ideas persuasively and confidently, which will allow me to present my ventures effectively wherever and whenever the opportunity arises.

"[*Startup Success*] has equipped me with the confidence and insights I need to embark on this journey, knowing that with sustained effort, I can strive towards my entrepreneurial aspirations."



# Invest in Yourself: Exploring Money and Self-Employment

*Invest in Yourself* combines financial literacy and entrepreneurship into a fast-paced, activity-based learning environment that engages learners through collaborative and creative group-based exercises designed to build self-confidence and increase financial literacy.



## Department of Regional NSW

After a successful 2023 series launch, in 2024 we partnered with the NSW Government to deliver *Invest in Yourself* to a further 52 First Nations young people from schools in regional NSW including Albury, Batemans Bay, Nowra and Armidale.

“Invest in Yourself has given me structure and knowledge, and shown me how to turn my skills, like gardening or weaving, into business ideas.”

Shaila T.



## Liverpool City Council

With the support of Liverpool City Council, we were engaged to deliver *Invest in Yourself* free of charge to women living, working, studying, or planning to do business in Liverpool.



## National Aboriginal Sporting Chance Academy (NASCA)

As part of the NASCA's CareerFit Expo 2024, we led 24 First Nations young people through a high energy workshop designed to build participants' strengths and skills and develop both a side hustle concept and a plan to put their idea into action. In September, we were invited back to run the program again for 10 more youngsters!



# Small Business Spotlight: Midnight Dreaming



SSE was proud to welcome Renae Lamb as Cultural Mentor and Satellite Facilitator. Renae is a proud descendent of the Wiradjuri/Wongaibon people of Central West NSW and the owner of Midnight Dreaming Studio, a fully Aboriginal-owned business showcasing Renae's art and providing dance lessons for children.

Renae's art is reproduced in multiple different formats, from prints and larger commissions, through to swimwear, beach attire and accessories, while Midnight Dreaming's studio dance lessons are tailored to be culturally safe and to encourage children to learn and embrace their spiritual connection to Country, and express their cultural identity through movement and storytelling.

## What made you want to start a business?

I was very lucky in 2019, when I was studying to be a primary school teacher, I noticed the gaps in how children's ways of truth telling was being assessed and realised the need for change in this area.

Midnight Dreaming was borne from a need for more avenues than the traditional English views of the curriculum and syllabus through which to use professional practice to teach, guide, and nourish young children.

## What's the best piece of advice you have ever received?

My father has been my biggest inspiration. I grew up watching him run his greyhound farm and he's really instilled in me that sense of self-belief, achieving within the context of my Dreaming, and never giving up.

## In thinking about your role as an SSE Cultural Mentor, how does your Indigenous heritage influence the values, mission, or services of your business?

Country gives me a deep sense of pride and belonging. When I feel my ancestors guiding me through my creations, and the connections from loved ones up above, I feel strong. I feel honoured. And I feel a sense of belonging and acceptance of the authentic and unique 'me', someone who loves to create and share my purpose and my Dreaming.

My role as Cultural Mentor is an opportunity for me to use leadership and mentoring to help create opportunities for others to pursue, to help them 'have a go' and achieve their dreams.

## Reflecting on your journey as a First Nations entrepreneur, what unique challenges have you faced and how have you navigated these?

Being in such high demand has been challenging, so lacking the tools and resources (finances) I need to really achieve what I want to is difficult. But staying positive helps me keep working towards reaching my goals and outcomes.

Fortunately, both my local and wider communities have been a great support in helping create and drive not only my revenue but also my following.

## Could you share a collaboration or partnership that has helped your small business survive or thrive?

I have done many collaborations. I've worked with local schools in creating Aboriginal dance programs and cultural camps. My artwork and swimwear range has been showcased in Melbourne and globally.

I've also worked with the University of Newcastle, collaborating with students in creating their own artworks, and on a commission for the university's Office of Alumni & Philanthropy.

# Discovery

*Discovery* is a fun, ambitious program blending innovation and entrepreneurship to uncover a world of possibility and a future filled with opportunity. During a *Discovery* delivery, participants learn how to adopt an entrepreneurial mindset to develop and commercialise a solution to a real-world problem.



## International Grammar School

In May, over seventy Year 9 Commerce students from International Grammar School in Sydney's inner city began their *Discovery* journey, which included a full-day excursion at the start and end of the program and 3 face-to-face mentoring sessions for each class.



## Hoxton Park High School

Two dozen Year 9 STEM students from Hoxton Park High School in Sydney's south west launched their 10-week *Discovery* journey with a fun, full day workshop at SSE HQ in June designed to introduce students to the fundamentals of innovation and entrepreneurship.

"Discovery gave me lots of ideas and showed me how to take small ideas and make them into something big."

**Salwa M.**

# Digital Internship Program



SSE's *Digital Internship Program* gives learners the opportunity to explore the world of startups and build the transferable skills and entrepreneurial mindset required to work in one—or create their own! Online modules co-designed and delivered with leading Australian startups.

**Tech Central:** showcased startups and scaleups operating in the Tech Central ecosystem, an inner city precinct home to some of Australia's most exciting startups.

**Future Cities (WSU):** with WSU Launchpad, co-designed with three leading, future-focused startups from Western Sydney's Bankstown region of New South Wales.

**Pioneera:** expanding on its previous Tech Central delivery, learners were invited to zero in on some unique challenges facing this award-winning digital workplace wellbeing platform.



## Workshops



### KNK Global entrepreneurship workshop

July 2024, SSE

We hosted a group of young Korean students in collaboration with KNK Global, a Korean-based organisation dedicated to providing young people with opportunities to learn and explore business and life beyond their local and national boundaries. The bespoke 1-day workshop introduced the students to the fundamental concepts of entrepreneurship.

### Venture Makers Global Exchange

September 2024, SSE

SSE hosted a group of Japanese university students as a part of the Venture Makers Global Exchange Program with WSU Launchpad. The students visited the SSE campus for an interactive workshop on Validation and Prototyping.

### ICC Sydney Design Thinking

July 2024, ICC Sydney

An opportunity was identified for SSE to support ICC in achieving its entrepreneurship and innovation goals and provide ICC with workshop and presentation options that can be offered to event or conference hosts. Participants comprised 12 members of the executive leadership team including directors, GM, and CEO.

### ICC Sydney Intrapreneurship

August 2024, ICC Sydney

Further to July's Design Thinking workshop (above), SSE worked with ICC Sydney's executive team to develop an Intrapreneurship workshop suitable for participants comprising 15 of ICC's highest performing staff including functional managers, senior marketing, IT, and business development team members.

### Invest in Yourself short workshop

June 2024, Woollahra Library at Double Bay

In partnership with Woollahra Council, SSE presented a 2-hour workshop for women tailored towards local women wanting to understand and explore the foundations of entrepreneurship and small business ownership.





# Entrepreneurship without borders: insights from Chitral, Pakistan



When Tahir Ud Din, an entrepreneur from the Chitral region in the mountainous reaches of northern Pakistan, embarked on his *Digital Internship Program (DIP)* journey with SSE, he hoped to gain some practical insight into the entrepreneurship experience, and to “broaden [his] network by connecting with like-minded individuals and mentors.”

In practice, he said, he was met with a wealth of knowledge and connections that have empowered him with new, innovative problem-solving techniques and effective communication strategies, both of which he’s looking forward to integrating into his work as both a local business founder and as a consultant for an international NGO.

## Purpose-driven self-empowerment

It’s clear that Tahir’s entrepreneurial spirit and commitment to impact was ingrained, long before he enrolled in our digital internship.

As the founder of the popular Nan Cafe, his commitment to women’s social and economic empowerment has created “opportunities for women in [his] community, fostering economic independence and social inclusion”.

Similarly, his role as an Economic Development Consultant enables him to leverage his expertise and networks to implement strategies that “empower individuals and communities to thrive economically.”

We asked Tahir about his own personal influences. Quick to shine the spotlight on Swiss-born British-Portuguese philanthropist and business magnate, His Highness the Aga Khan IV, he said Khan’s efforts to promote pluralism, education, and economic development serve as a “guiding light” for Tahir’s own attempts to achieve a meaningful impact in Chitral.

## What’s the difference between innovation and entrepreneurship?

For Tahir, innovation means “exploring creative solutions to social and economic challenges,” whether through new products, services, or business models. This ethos of continuous evolution is mirrored in his view of entrepreneurship, which is to “build a sustainable business, preferably one that also makes a positive impact in your community.”

He’s also excited to integrate digital tools for market research and customer feedback, to enable his teams to tailor their offerings more effectively to the needs of their communities. “I plan to integrate digital solutions into our operations, to streamline processes and improve efficiency,” he said.

Fortunately, Tahir has been able to do just that since completing his course, “leveraging the knowledge gained from SSE to further innovate and refine the business models” of both Nan Café and his consultancy work to amplify impact, foster a culture of resilience and innovation, and drive sustainable change in his hometown, and beyond!



“I would like to once again express my utmost gratitude to SSE for the passion and generosity you have put into teaching and guiding our students. I really appreciate your patience in helping them open their eyes and minds to reach their goals!”

**Mariko Jitsukawa**  
Kansai University of International Studies



# 2024 In Review

## Features

### Thought Leadership

#### OPINION

##### Smart Company

'Closing the gender pay gap requires redefining Australia's modern workplace'

#### OPINION

##### InnovationAus

'Nurturing Australia's skills economy: a strategic blueprint for growth'

#### FEATURE

##### EducationHQ

'Creative thinking: pioneering entrepreneurship PD for teachers'

### NSW Small Business Month

25 October 2023



Panel discussion and networking event titled 'How to Innovate to Lead with Industry 4.0 for Small Business Resilience'.

### International Women's Day (IWD)

7 March 2024



Community 'pizza and networking' night titled 'Count Her In: Invest in Women. Accelerate Progress', in celebration of IWD.

### Mariana Mazzucato Australian Tour

11-14 March 2024



SSE sponsored global economist and public policy commentator Professor Mariana Mazzucato's Australian tour.

### Sydney Business Awards Finalist

29 May 2024



In the category of Outstanding Community Organisation, working to improve wellbeing of the local community.

### Billion Dollar Benefit coalition

20 June 2024



SSE allied itself with BDB to support skilled refugees and migrants to be able to work in their areas of expertise.

### National Skills Week panel event

23 August 2024



Critical panel discussion featuring industry leaders titled 'Tackling Today's Skills Crisis(?) to Build Australia's Future'.

### Telstra Best in Business Awards NSW State Finalist

9 September 2024



In the category of Building Communities, celebrating our commitment to entrepreneurship education for all Australians.



# Partners and Supporters



Barsalli Buyers Agency  
Beau Champion  
Billion Dollar Benefit  
Bold Botanicals  
Café the Bethel  
City of Sydney  
Dave Widders Consultancy  
Drew Longbottom  
Erum Nasser  
Haymarket Chamber of Commerce  
Hoxton Park High School  
ICC Sydney  
International Grammar School  
Jordan Boney  
KNK Global  
KWC Image  
Liverpool City Council  
Lynne Testoni  
Mariana Mazzucato  
Midnight Dreaming  
Mridula Tirumala

NASCA Australia  
Native Secrets  
NSW Department of Communities and Justice  
NSW Department of Education  
NSW Department of Regional NSW  
NSW Government  
Pioneera  
Professor Barney Glover AO  
Pyrmont Ultimo Chamber of Commerce  
Rebels N Misfits  
Ruth Davys  
Stephen Brady  
Suzie Matthews  
Sydney Startup Hub  
Tech Central  
The Hon. Gabrielle Upton  
The Site Coach  
Two Good Co  
Western Sydney University Launchpad  
Woollahra Libraries  
Liverpool City Library

# Our Staff



**Dr Sarah Jones,**  
GAICD, FRSN  
CEO



**Nic Harcourt-Baldwin**  
Chief Operating Officer  
and Chief of Staff



**Lynn Erkens**  
Chief Commercial Officer



**Nicole Swanson**  
Chief Marketing Officer



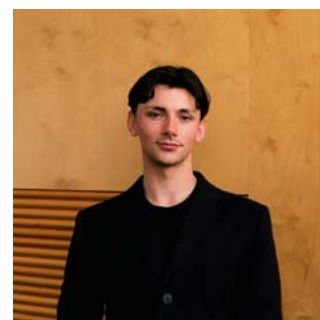
**Cherie Karlsson**  
Educational Design  
Manager



**Todd Puumalainen**  
Marketing Manager



**Frank Newman**  
Lead, Facilitation and  
Engagement



**Caine Wilkins**  
Community Connections  
and Partnerships Lead



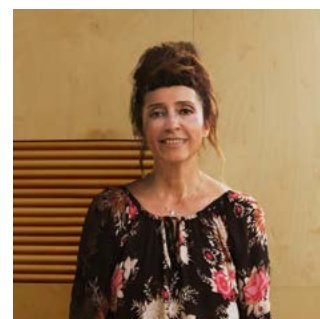
**Suzanne van Gastel**  
Senior Operations Officer



**Vanessa Hung**  
Graphic Designer



**Annie de Merindol**  
Communications  
Specialist



**Alla Bekker**  
Learning Designer

# Our Governance Structure



**Emeritus Professor  
Annabelle Duncan**  
Independent Director  
and Chair



**Associate Professor  
Paul Martin**  
Company Secretary



**Professor Renée Leon**  
Member Representative  
Director



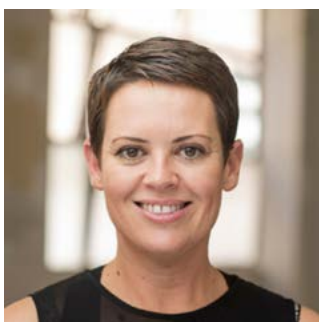
**Raf Marcellino**  
Member Representative  
Director



**Liza Noonan**  
Government Nominee



**Tze Masters**  
Independent Director and  
Chair of Audit, Finance  
and Risk Committee



**Liane Gawne**  
Independent Director



**David Caspari**  
Independent Director and  
Member of Audit, Finance  
and Risk Committee



**Zoe Williams**  
Member of Audit, Finance  
and Risk Committee





## Our Founding Partners

Australian Catholic University  
Charles Sturt University  
Macquarie University  
Southern Cross University  
TAFE NSW  
The University of Newcastle  
The University of Sydney  
UNSW  
University of New England  
University of Technology Sydney  
University of Wollongong  
Western Sydney University  
NSW Government