SAGE Cygnet Award Application

Institutional context

Equity, Diversity & Inclusion
Division of People and Culture

Name of Institution: Charles Sturt University
Date of Application: 30/06/2025
Contact for Application: Carli Baker
Email: edi@csu.edu.au

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Acknowledgement of Country

We respectfully acknowledge the traditional owners and custodians of the lands on which we live and work together. Charles Sturt University and its staff pay respect to Elders within First Nations communities and acknowledge the continuity of cultures, languages, leadership and knowledge systems.

We acknowledge First Nations peoples' continuous connection to Country, recognising the unique, diverse identities and cultures of peoples in our communities, regions and nation. As such, we value the collaboration to strongly position First Nations peoples in our university, through languages, leadership, cultures, knowledges, research and ceremonies.

About Charles Sturt University

Established as a statutory body by the *Charles Sturt University Act 1989* (NSW), the university is dedicated to advancing the careers of its students, delivering research excellence and driving regional outcomes with global impact. In accordance with the Act, the university has particular regard to the needs and aspirations of residents of western and south-western New South Wales. Guided by the ethos Yindyamarra winhanganha – the wisdom of respectfully knowing how to live well in a world worth living in – and the vision to be Australia's leading regional university, Charles Sturt strives to make a significant difference in its communities and beyond. We have a proud history and are fortunate to have an outstanding group of diverse, passionate and engaged people working within our community.

As a values-driven organisation, everyone at the university plays a vital role in bringing those values to life and incorporating them into their daily activities. Underpinning the university's ethos is our commitment to fostering a dynamic and inclusive environment that aligns with our core values of being Insightful, Inclusive, Impactful and Inspiring. These values are not just ideals but are actively embodied in our practices and initiatives.

We deliver higher education in regional areas of NSW, interstate, nationally and internationally in on-campus and online delivery modes. Our locations are shown in Figure 1 below, with main campuses located in Albury-Wodonga, Bathurst, Canberra, Dubbo, Orange, Port Macquarie and Wagga Wagga, with additional specialist campuses in Goulburn, Sydney, Parramatta and Wangaratta. In 2024, we established a specialist campus in Melbourne for students commencing study in February 2025.

Figure 1. Charles Sturt University campus locations


Governance and structure

Charles Sturt is led by the Vice-Chancellor and President, Professor Renée Leon, PSM, and the Executive Leadership Team, which includes:

- Provost and Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Academic)
- Acting Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Research)
- Chief Operating Officer
- University Secretary
- Executive Dean, Faculty of Arts and Education
- Executive Dean, Faculty of Business, Justice and Behavioural Sciences
- Executive Dean, Faculty of Science and Health
- Chief of Staff, Office of the Vice-Chancellor

The University Council is the governing body of Charles Sturt University; Academic governance matters are delegated to the Academic Senate, with management and operations delegated to the Vice-Chancellor.

Executive staff have portfolio responsibilities for key areas that report to the Vice-Chancellor as shown (Figure 2).

Figure 2. University structure

University structure
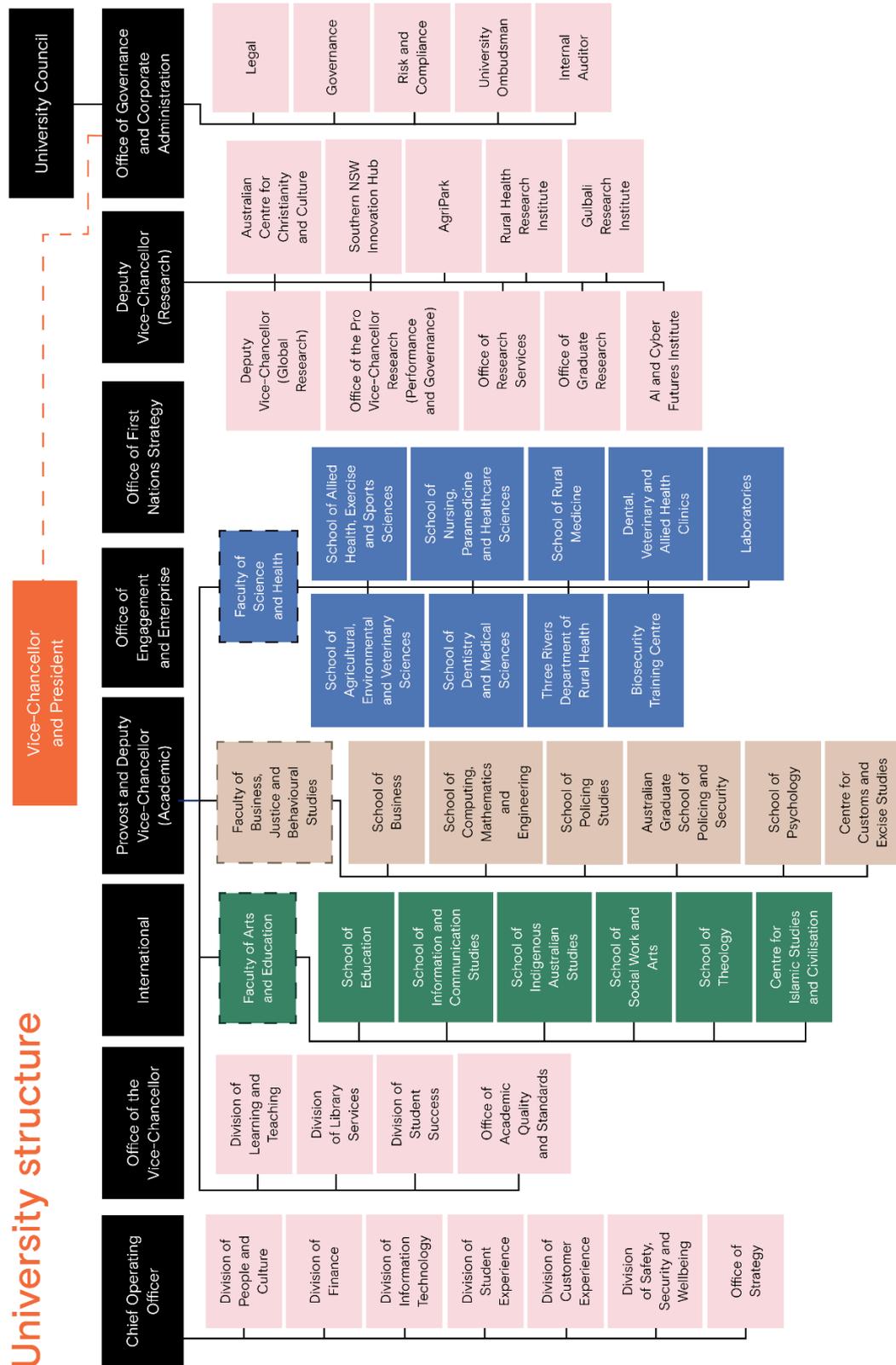
Strategic plans and frameworks

The University Strategy 2030 provides the pathway to achieving our vision – Australia's leading regional university, committed to advancing the careers of our students, inspiring research excellence and driving regional outcomes with global impact. The strategy establishes four strategic focus areas: Students, Research, People and Social Responsibility (Figure 3).

Figure 3. Strategic focus areas in the Charles Sturt 2030 Strategy.

Enabler strategies

To deliver on our University Strategy 2030, Charles Sturt seeks to create the right environment with the appropriate support so everyone can excel. Enabler strategies work together with the four strategic focus areas to support successful progress and change.

- **Technology and business innovation:** We will develop technology and business processes that are simplified and innovative to support our success. Removing barriers in current processes and systems will result in better experiences and outcomes for students, staff and stakeholders.

- **Safety, security and wellbeing:** Our holistic and proactive approach to safety, security and wellbeing is a key priority. If students, staff and stakeholders don't feel safe, they won't succeed with the university. We will work hard to promote and be accountable for inclusion, equity and diversity – because it is the right thing to do and contributes to shared success.

- **Vibrant campuses:** Our campuses and world-class facilities will become sustainable and vibrant meeting points for staff, students, industry, government and community. Our campuses' strengths, relationships and communities will be respected and leveraged to deliver a unique and valued experience.

- **Financial sustainability:** Financial responsibility and governance in all operations, investments and future decision-making will ensure a sustainable and prosperous future for Charles Sturt.

Demographic profile

Staff

As of March 2024, Charles Sturt University employed 2423 staff, which was comprised of 60% professional staff. Women made up 72% of professional staff, 57% of academic staff and 66% of the overall workforce (Table 1). As less than 1% of staff identified as non-binary or another gender in March 2024, these figures are not provided in the table below to avoid any possible disclosure of these staff.

Table 1. Charles Sturt workforce headcount data in March 2024.

	Women		Men			
	HC	%	HC	%	Total HC	Total %
Professional	1052	43	410	17	1463	60
Academic	547	23	412	17	960	40
Total	1599	66	822	34	2423	100

Students

As of March 2024, Charles Sturt had 35, 135 enrolled students, 68% were women, 32% were men and <1% identified as non-binary or another term (Figure 4). The majority of students (70%) were enrolled in an undergraduate course, 25% were completing postgraduate study and the remaining 5% were completing a non-award course. The majority of students (69%) were completing their degrees via an online mode of study while the remainder studied internally at one of Charles Sturt main, specialist or third-party provider campuses.

Figure 5. Charles Sturt student demographics, end March 2024.
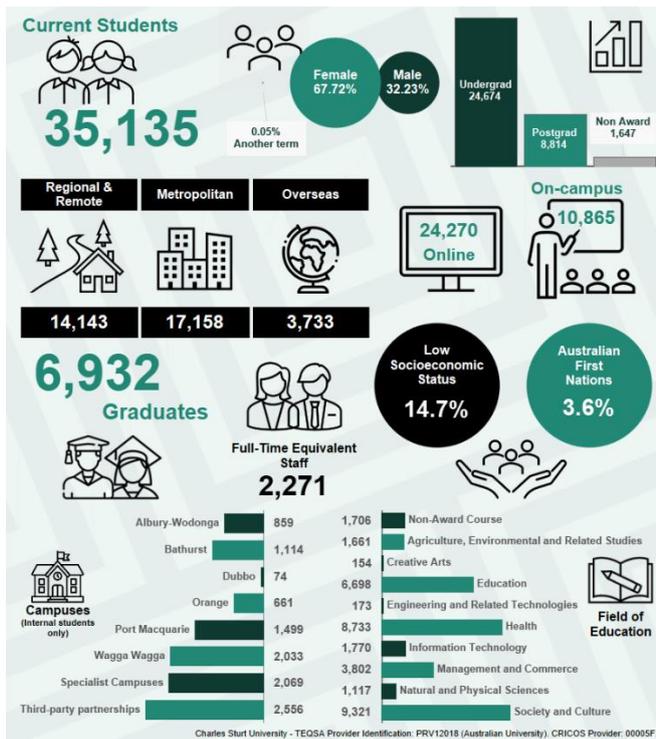
Contextual factors

As a regional University, Charles Sturt's campuses are spread across vast geographic areas, with nearly 1,000 kilometres between our Southernmost (Albury-Wodonga) and Northernmost (Port Macquarie) main campuses. Courses are taught across multiple campuses, and teams are usually located across all main campuses. This means that some staff who have collaborated across subjects or projects for years, may have never met in person.

Similar to the rest of the higher education sector, COVID-19 had a significant impact on the University both financially and structurally, with waves of reorganisation and change throughout 2020 and 2021. These wide-sweeping changes resulted in an all new executive leadership team who were not previously involved with Athena Swan. Additionally a new equity, diversity and inclusion (EDI) team, which has oversight of gender equity and Athena Swan initiatives, was also appointed. This turnover of staffing led to lost momentum and knowledge of the Athen Swan program.

In the seven years since the Bronze Award application, many initiatives and improvements were enacted. However many were not officially implemented by those leading Athena Swan initiatives, so much of this information and data is no longer available. Some of these initiatives include:

- Introducing a hybrid working policy to allow staff (where their role permits) to work from home up to 40% of the time. This includes flexibility about how or when staff apportion that 40%, for example two days per week, or banking the time to use during school holidays.

- Introduction of paid parental leave for secondary carers, and no waiting period for paid parental leave for new staff

- Formally reviewing the Academic Promotion Process in 2020 and again in 2024

- Trialling a return to research scheme in the Faculty of Science to support researchers returning from parental leave to recommence their research

- Offering face-to-face Unconscious Bias and Inclusivity training on all main campuses, prioritising attendance by leaders. This has now evolved to two sequential sessions titled 'Diversity and Inclusion Foundations' and 'Unconscious Bias and Inclusivity' which are offered bi-monthly via videoconference.

The SAGE Athena Swan journey

Charles Sturt University received its Athena Swan Bronze Award in 2018. The resulting Action Plan included 43 strategic actions targeting improvements in recruitment, career progression, the gender pay gap, flexible work, research participation, and inclusive workplace practices. These actions were designed to be implemented institution-wide and not limited to STEMM.

With the commencement of a new equity, diversity and inclusion team, the original Action Plan was identified as being too ambitious and unfocused, and a new plan needed to be developed. To align with the University's strategic focus on wellbeing, equity and inclusion, Charles Sturt has taken an intersectional focus on gender equity and invested in initiatives for staff from marginalised groups as outlined in the Workplace Diversity and Inclusion Plan (Figure 6).

Figure 6. Workplace diversity and inclusion plan overview

Workplace Diversity and Inclusion Plan 2023–2025 overview
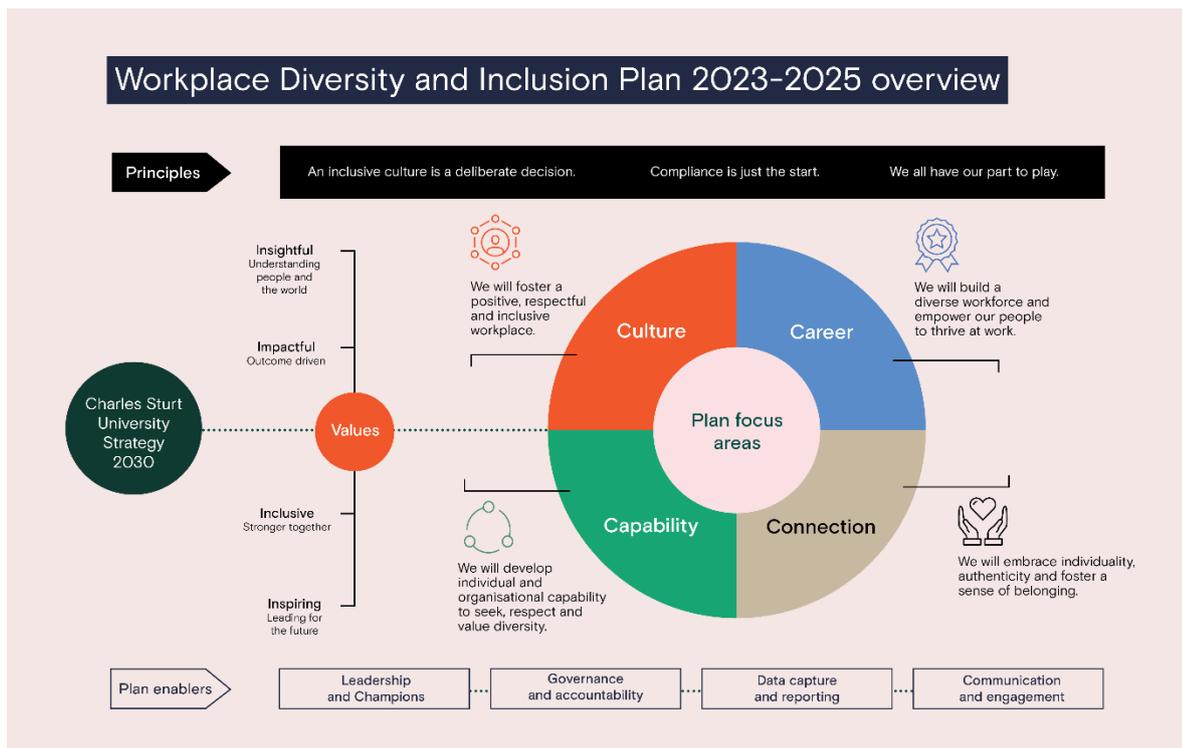
The Diversity and Inclusion Plan outlines actions across four key priority areas: Culture, Career, Capability and Connection, with an additional focus on the following key diversity groups:

- Accessibility and neurodiversity
- Carers
- Cultural and linguistic diversity
- First Nations
- Gender Equity
- LGBTIQA+.

While our first Cygnet application focuses on the Academic Promotion process, future Cygnet applications will reflect the key priority areas above and the key diversity groups listed above.