

HE FEST

Australasia's Premier Marketing, Recruitment and
Advancement Conference for the Tertiary Education Sector

CONFERENCE PROGRAM

22 – 23 September 2026

Ainsworth Building, 1 Wally's Walk
Macquarie University, Sydney

PRESENTED BY



HOSTED BY



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HE FEST DAY 1

Tuesday 22 September 2026

PLENARY — MORNING

8:15 AM	Registration
8:50 AM	Welcome & Opening Remarks
9:00 – 9:30 AM	Keynote: Challenges and Opportunities Ahead <i>Professor S. Bruce Dowton, Vice-Chancellor, Macquarie University</i>
9:30 – 10:10 AM	Keynote: No Budget, Huge Need <i>Luke Sheehy, CEO, Universities Australia</i>
10:10 – 10:40 AM	Keynote: Truth in an AI World <i>Michael Miller, Executive Chairman, News Corp Australasia</i>
10:40 – 11 AM	MORNING TEA

CONCURRENT SESSIONS

	STREAM A	STREAM B
11 – 11:30 AM	How we built a campaign around care <i>Neil Cullingford, Murdoch University</i>	Insights from the Govt Relations Desk <i>Robin Shuck, Director of Government Relations and Policy, UNSW</i>
11:30 AM – 12:00 PM	It's not just a university, it's UTS — Insights into a UTS marketing campaign <i>David Rogan and Millie So, UTS</i>	SurfStrong: Recruiting a national research cohort without paid advertising <i>Natalie Schenken, PR Mgr, Bond University</i>
12 – 12:30 PM	Reframing the message — the Wicked Problems campaign <i>Peta Pool, Director, Strat Research Profile and Engagement, Flinders U</i>	Change Agents: Better Results In Partnership With Agencies <i>Michaela Lobb, Director of Marketing, University of New England</i>
12:40 – 1:10 PM	LUNCH	
1:10 – 1:40 PM	Why PR is having its glow moment <i>Lindsay Bennett, Global Comms & Content Lead, Ideally</i>	Building brand while also delivering on short-term enrolment growth <i>Justin Laing, CMO Uni of the Sunshine Coast</i>
1:40 – 2:20 PM	Western's New Brand — In Conversation <i>George Williams, Vice-Chancellor, & Andrew Younis, CMO, WSU</i>	Reddit, Rent and Rankings: What AI Reveals About Student Choice <i>Mathew Granfield, ED Customer Exp, CSU</i>
2:20 – 3:00 PM	Insight from the Media <i>Sally Rawsthorne, HE Reporter, SMH</i>	The “U CAN @ UC” Brand Identity Relaunch Campaign <i>Renee Murphy, Director, Student Recruitment & Marketing, Uni Canberra</i>
3:00 – 3:20 PM	AFTERNOON TEA	

PLENARY — AFTERNOON

3:20 – 4:00 PM	Keynote: The Future of Australian HE <i>Julian Leeser, Shadow Minister for Higher Education</i>
4:00 – 4:50 PM	Feature Panel: What Do Schools Think? <i>Chaired by Professor Eric Knight, with Robin Chand (Chatswood High School), Christine Cawsey AM (Rooty Hill High School), Brother Stephen Hogan (Oakhill College) and Phillip Heath AM (Barker College)</i>
4:50 – 5:00 PM	The Wrap

EVENING – SOCIAL ACTIVITIES

- 5:00 – 6:00 PM**

Networking Drinks & 2026 Future Campus Awards
Informal networking with delegates and speakers in the Foyer.
- 7:00 PM**

Conference Dinner
Evening conference dinner.

HE FEST DAY 2

Wednesday 23 September 2026

PLENARY — MORNING

8:15 AM	Registration
8:50 AM	Welcome & Opening Remarks
9:00 – 9:45 AM	University Brands — and How to Rehabilitate Them <i>Zeenat Fayaz, Founder, The Brand Education</i>
9:45 – 10:20 AM	12 Months is a Long Time in the HE Sector <i>Professor Andrew Norton, Monash University</i>
10:20 – 11:00 AM	From Xero to Hero — Five things tertiary education needs to change, from commercialisation to agility <i>David Thodey, Chancellor, University of Sydney; Chair of Xero</i>

11 – 11:20 AM MORNING TEA

STREAM A		STREAM B
11:20 AM – 12:00 PM	Key trends in Advancement through Philanthropy and Alumni Engagement <i>Marcus Ward, VP Advancement, Griffith University</i>	Workshop — bridging the gap between internal thoughts on AI use and community perceptions <i>Professor Mollie Dollinger, Director of Assessment 2030, Curtin University</i>
12 – 12:30 PM	Deadly Pathways: Building a Relationship-Led First Nations Recruitment Ecosystem <i>Matthew Granfield, Executive Director, Customer Experience, CSU</i>	

12:40 – 1:20 PM LUNCH

1:20 – 2:00 PM	Understanding Impact — What Donors Really Want <i>Adj Professor Maree Meredith, Snow Foundation</i>	Six students walk into your inbox <i>Elissa Newall, Senior Partner, Edified</i>
2:00 – 2:40 PM	New Approaches to Measuring Research Impact <i>Professor Abid Khan, DVC (Research & Enterprise) ACU</i>	Insights into communications and the future for HE <i>Professor Merlin Crossley, DVC (Academic Quality) UNSW</i>

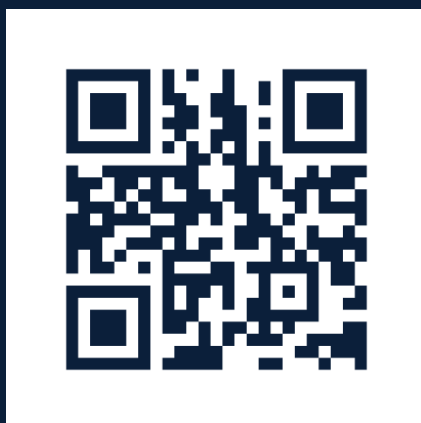
2:40 – 3:00 PM AFTERNOON TEA

PLENARY — AFTERNOON

3:00 – 3:45 PM	Good to Sea U — A case study in knowledge transfer and research impact <i>Vanessa Pirota, NSW Woman of Excellence 2025, Lecturer, Macquarie University</i>
3:45 – 4:30 PM	Why Universities Matter More in the Age of AI <i>Professor Eric Knight, Deputy Vice-Chancellor People & Operations, Macquarie University</i>
4:30 – 4:45 PM	Conference Wrap & Close <i>Stephen Matchett, Future Campus</i>

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