

# HE FEST

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

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## CONFERENCE PROGRAM

**22 – 23 September 2026**

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

PRESENTED BY



HOSTED BY



**MACQUARIE**  
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SYDNEY · AUSTRALIA

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

## CONCURRENT SESSIONS

|                     | STREAM A                                                                                                                                     | STREAM B                                                                                                                                     |
|---------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 11 – 11:30 AM       | <b>How we built a campaign around care</b><br><i>Neil Cullingford, Murdoch University</i>                                                    | <b>Insights from the Govt Relations Desk</b><br><i>Robin Shuck, Director of Government Relations and Policy, UNSW</i>                        |
| 11:30 AM – 12:00 PM | <b>It's not just a university, it's UTS — Insights into a UTS marketing campaign</b><br><i>David Rogan and Millie So, UTS</i>                | <b>SurfStrong: Recruiting a national research cohort without paid advertising</b><br><i>Natalie Schenken, PR Mgr, Bond University</i>        |
| 12 – 12:40 PM       | <b>Reframing the message — the Wicked Problems campaign</b><br><i>Peta Pool, Director, Strat Research Profile and Engagement, Flinders U</i> | <b>Why the Best Agency Relationships Aren't Entirely Rational</b><br><i>Michaela Lobb, Director of Marketing, University of New England</i>  |
| 12:40 – 1:10 PM     | <b>LUNCH</b>                                                                                                                                 |                                                                                                                                              |
| 1:10 – 1:40 PM      | <b>Why PR is having its glow moment</b><br><i>Lindsay Bennett, Global Comms &amp; Content Lead, Ideally</i>                                  | <b>Building brand while also delivering on short-term enrolment growth</b><br><i>Justin Laing, CMO Uni of the Sunshine Coast</i>             |
| 1:40 – 2:20 PM      | <b>Western's New Brand — In Conversation</b><br><i>George Williams, Vice-Chancellor, &amp; Andrew Younis, CMO, WSU</i>                       | <b>Finding the Right PG student for the Right Course in the Age of AI</b><br><i>Justin Lyster, CMO, OES</i>                                  |
| 2:20 – 3:00 PM      | <b>Insight from the Media</b><br><i>Sally Rawsthorne, HE Reporter, SMH</i>                                                                   | <b>The “U CAN @ UC” Brand Identity Relaunch Campaign</b><br><i>Renee Murphy, Director, Student Recruitment &amp; Marketing, Uni Canberra</i> |
| 3:00 – 3:20 PM      | <b>AFTERNOON TEA</b>                                                                                                                         |                                                                                                                                              |

## PLENARY — AFTERNOON

|                |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    |
|----------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 3:20 – 4:00 PM | <b>Keynote: The Future of Australian HE</b><br><i>Julian Leeser, Shadow Minister for Higher Education</i>                                                                                                                                                                                                          |
| 4:00 – 4:50 PM | <b>Feature Panel: What Do Schools Think?</b><br><i>Chaired by Maria Souris, Executive Director, Future Students at Macquarie University, 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 | <b>The Wrap</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    |

## EVENING – SOCIAL ACTIVITIES

**Networking Drinks and the Conference Dinner will be held at Henry Deane at Hotel Palisade, 35 Bettington St, Millers Point NSW 2000.**

**The venue:** Henry Deane is on the fourth floor of the Hotel Palisade, offering exceptional cuisine and drinks with extensive views across Sydney Harbour and the CBD.

**How to get there:** The Palisade Hotel is 5 minutes walk from the Barangaroo metro station.

**6:00 – 7:00 PM      Networking Drinks & 2026 Future Campus Awards**  
*Informal networking with delegates and speakers and presentation of the 2026 Future Campus Awards*

**7:00-9:00 PM      Conference Dinner**  
*Evening conference dinner. A conference dinner ticket is required to attend.*



## 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   | <b>University Brands — and How to Rehabilitate Them</b><br><i>Zeena Fayaz, Founder, The Brand Education</i>                                                                          |
| 9:45 – 10:20 AM  | <b>12 Months is a Long Time in the HE Sector</b><br><i>Professor Andrew Norton, Monash University</i>                                                                                |
| 10:20 – 11:00 AM | <b>From Xero to Hero — Five things tertiary education needs to change, from commercialisation to agility</b><br><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 | <b>Key trends in Advancement through Philanthropy and Alumni Engagement</b><br><i>Marcus Ward, VP Advancement, Griffith University</i>                            | <b>In depth session — Bridging the gap between what we do with AI and what communities think we do</b><br><i>Professor Mollie Dollinger, Director of Assessment 2030, Curtin University</i> |
| 12 – 12:30 PM       | <b>Deadly Pathways: Building a Relationship-Led First Nations Recruitment Ecosystem</b><br><i>Matthew Granfield, Executive Director, Customer Experience, CSU</i> |                                                                                                                                                                                             |

### 12:40 – 1:20 PM LUNCH

|                |                                                                                                                       |                                                                                                                            |
|----------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 1:20 – 2:00 PM | <b>Your Social Future</b><br>TBC                                                                                      | <b>Six students walk into your inbox</b><br><i>Elissa Newall, Senior Partner, Edified</i>                                  |
| 2:00 – 2:40 PM | <b>New Approaches to Measuring Research Impact</b><br><i>Professor Abid Khan, DVC (Research &amp; Enterprise) ACU</i> | <b>Insights into communications and the future for HE</b><br><i>Professor Merlin Crossley, DVC (Academic Quality) UNSW</i> |

### 2:40 – 3:00 PM AFTERNOON TEA

### PLENARY — AFTERNOON

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

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