



UNTAPPED TALENT

Western Sydney's remarkable but inequitable labour market

A CENTRE FOR WESTERN SYDNEY ISSUES PAPER



**CENTRE FOR
WESTERN SYDNEY**



ACKNOWLEDGMENT OF COUNTRY

With respect for Aboriginal cultural protocol and out of recognition that its campuses occupy their traditional lands, Western Sydney University acknowledges the Darug, Eora, Dharawal (also referred to as Tharawal) and Wiradjuri peoples and thanks them for their support of its work in their lands (Western Sydney and beyond).

UNTAPPED TALENT

Western Sydney's remarkable
but inequitable labour market

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Images by Sally Tsoutas

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UNTAPPED**TALENT****KEY POINTS**

- 1** Newly released 2021 Census data shows for the first time, the proportion of highly qualified workers in Western Sydney exceeds the national average.
- 2** Just on 27.2 per cent of Western Sydney residents now hold a university degree, compared to 26.3 per cent nationally, and 27.8 per cent across NSW.
- 3** The ranks of university qualified people in Western Sydney rose by 34.6 per cent over the past decade, faster than the national increase of 28.5 per cent.
- 4** Despite the skills surge, Western Sydney falls behind the Rest of Sydney (43.7 per cent) in the attainment of university qualifications.
- 5** Digital exclusion in Western Sydney threatens the goals of education equity in the region.
- 6** 24.8 per cent of households in Western Sydney LGAs earned a high income and 19.2 per cent were low-income households, compared with 30.1 per cent and 17.9 per cent respectively for the Rest of Sydney.
- 7** Females in Western Sydney in 2021 provided more unpaid childcare and earned less compared to females in the Rest of Sydney
- 8** Addressing the spatial inequalities between Western Sydney and the Rest of Sydney requires urgent government investment and evidence-based policy interventions.

* 'The Rest of Sydney' refers to those areas of Greater Sydney excluding Western Sydney.

UNTAPPED**TALENT**

A SKILLS SURGE

WESTERN SYDNEY HAS REGISTERED a significant increase in its educational attainment over the past decade. The region's proportion of higher skilled residents now sits on par with the national average. In some areas it exceeds that level. The shift is profound but uneven within the Western Sydney region, producing complex implications.

The latest census (2021) revealed just over 27 per cent of Western Sydney residents now have a university degree. That's a remarkable achievement for an area once synonymous with educational disadvantage and labelled as a 'problem'. This highlights that Western Sydney is an asset - home to a young, skilled and diverse population.

The shift is profound but uneven.

Yet, increasingly isolated but profound inequity persists that, without meaningful policy and funding redress, will deepen Greater Sydney's social and economic fissures.

Western Sydney's skills surge has not been reciprocated by a corresponding push in knowledge job creation. Relevant Commonwealth and NSW government initiatives – including the Western Sydney City Deal – have not kept pace with re/up-skilling efforts of residents. These government programs have been insufficiently targeted to address areas of lower educational attainment, as well as the under-representation of women and multicultural residents in the labour force.

UNTAPPED**TALENT**

A STUNNING TURNAROUND

WESTERN SYDNEY'S CONCENTRATIONS of knowledge economy workers are clustering in distinct areas. The Parramatta Square redevelopment, the regenerated Olympic Park peninsula, and the expanding Westmead hospital precinct are, unsurprisingly, proving attractive to highly skilled workers.

Affluent areas of the Hills district continue to steadily build Western Sydney's ranks of university-educated residents. Growth in other areas, however, has defied expectations.

Growth... has defied expectations.

In 2016, eight of the 14 federal electorates comprising Western Sydney had university degree attainment levels below the national average (22 per cent) at the time (see Figure 1, University Qualifications 2016, p.6) .

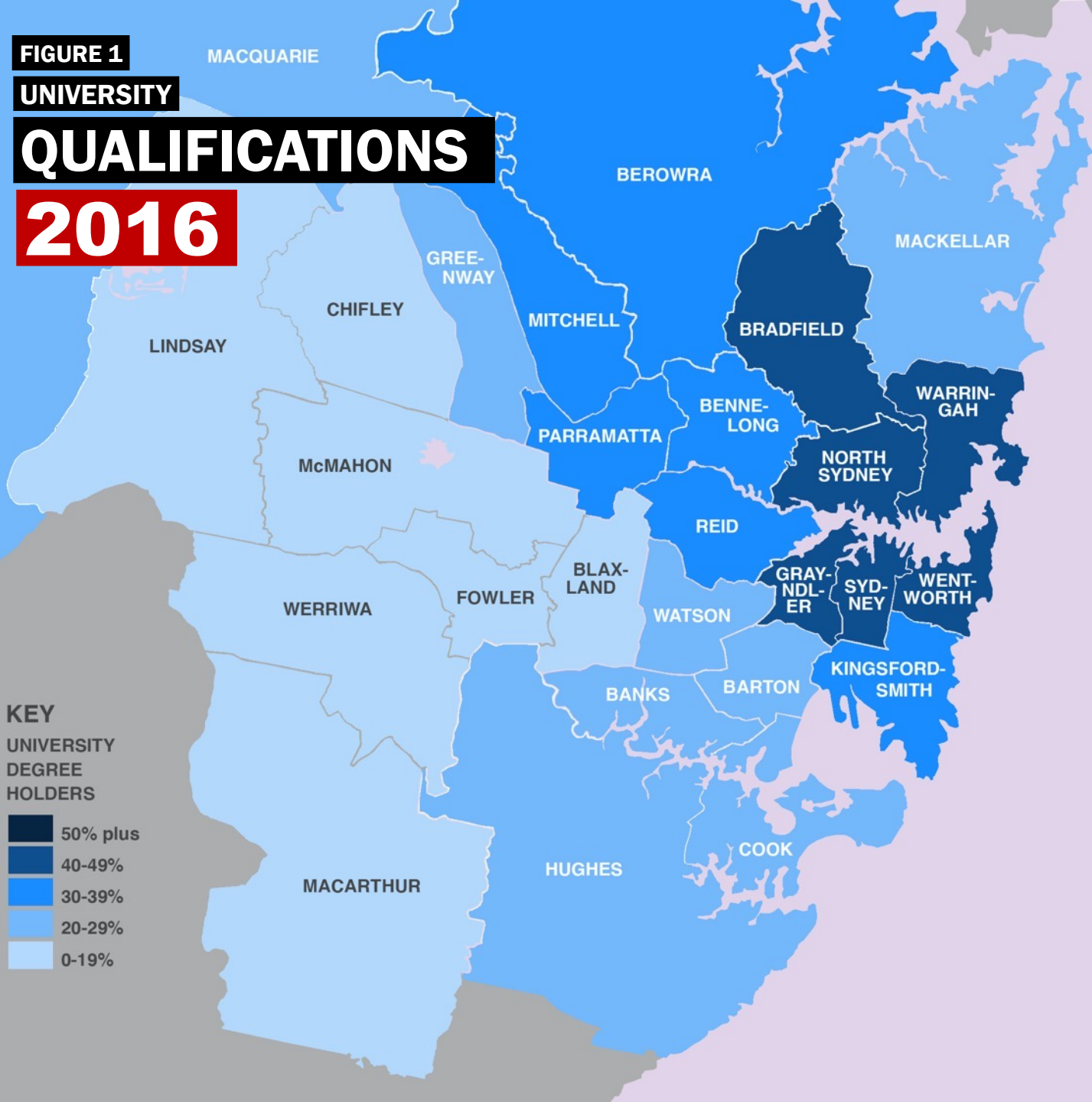
The most recent figures reveal a stunning turnaround in areas like Macarthur, which includes Campbelltown, Oran Park, Ingleburn and surrounds. Strong surges were also registered in Greenway, encompassing areas of Blacktown, and new housing developments to the electorate's north (see Figure 2, University Qualifications 2021, p.7) .

Substantial increases in university-qualified residents were also seen in Werriwa and Lindsay. In 2021, both electorates registered a 24 per cent increase in University educational attainment figures from 2016, yet rates have remained markedly low compared to other areas of Western Sydney.

FIGURE 1
UNIVERSITY

QUALIFICATIONS

2016



KEY
UNIVERSITY
DEGREE
HOLDERS

- 50% plus
- 40-49%
- 30-39%
- 20-29%
- 0-19%



Greater Sydney federal electorates and university degree attainment (2016)

People aged 15 years and over with a Bachelor Degree level qualification and above.

Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2016 Census

49.8	North Sydney	27.1	Greenway
47.2	Bradfield	25.8	Banks
46.8	Wentworth	23.7	Hughes
43.8	Sydney	23.3	Cook
42.6	Grayndler	22.9	Watson
42.3	Warringah	22.0	Australia
39.8	Bennelong	21.0	Macquarie
37.6	Reid	17.8	Chifley
35.4	Berowra	17.3	Blaxland
34.2	Kingsford-Smith	15.2	Werriwa
34.0	Parramatta	14.5	McMahon
33.4	Mitchell	14.4	Macarthur
29.7	Barton	13.5	Lindsay
27.8	Mackellar	12.7	Fowler

FIGURE 2

UNIVERSITY

QUALIFICATIONS

2021

MACQUARIE

BEROWRA

MACKELLAR

GRE-
NWAY

CHIFLEY

MITCHELL

BRADFIELD

LINDSAY

BENNE-
LONG

WARRIN-
GAH

McMAHON

PARRAMATTA

NORTH
SYDNEY

REID

GRAY-
NDL-
ER

SYD-
NEY

WENT-
WORTH

WERRIWA

FOWLER

BLAX-
LAND

WATSON

KINGSFORD-
SMITH

BANKS

BARTON

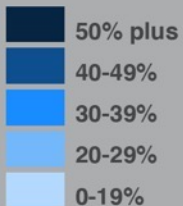
COOK

MACARTHUR

HUGHES

KEY

UNIVERSITY
DEGREE
HOLDERS



Rank change
from 2016

- 1 (green triangle up)
- 2 (red triangle down)



CENTRE FOR WESTERN SYDNEY

Greater Sydney federal electorates and university degree attainment (2021)

People aged 15 years and over with a Bachelor Degree level qualification and above.

Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2021 Census

55.7	North Sydney	1	32.9	Mackellar
53.6	Wentworth	1	30.2	Banks
52.7	Bradfield	1	28.0	Hughes
52.4	Sydney		28.0	Cook
49.3	Grayndler		26.6	Watson
47.9	Warringah		26.3	Australia
46.9	Bennelong		25.0	Macquarie
43.6	Reid		24.7	Chifley
40.9	Berowra		20.4	Macarthur
40.8	Mitchell	3	20.4	Blaxland
40.2	Kingsford-S.	1	20.0	Werriwa
39.9	Parramatta	1	17.7	Lindsay
35.0	Greenway	2	16.4	McMahon
34.4	Barton	1	15.6	Fowler

**UNTAPPED****TALENT**

CAPACITY FOR CHANGE

THE MYTH THAT WESTERN SYDNEY is a region lacking in skilled and talented workers is firmly put to bed by the 2021 census data. While pockets of the region still experience challenging employment, housing, and health outcomes, rising education levels overall are building capacity for positive change.

The risk lies with how the Federal Government responds to the data, particularly in clearly identified subregions deserving of targeted and evidence-based policy interventions. To date, these disparities have not provoked sufficient political will.

The gulf between Greater Sydney's areas of widespread university degree attainment (North Sydney, 55.7 per cent) and its regions of scarcity (Fowler 15.6 per cent) is unviable on labour market terms (see Figure 3, p 7). Worse, it is an intolerable political, policy and funding legacy for both major parties.

An intolerable political, policy and funding legacy.

If allowed to stand educational and related inequity can also profoundly influence voting behaviours. This was evident in Fowler, the former Labor stronghold snatched at this year's federal election by independent, Dai Le. The electorate's exceptionally low rates of university qualifications are compounded by well below average vocational credentials. Still, Commonwealth and NSW government educational strategies neither benchmark nor plan to redress these stark inequities.

UNTAPPED**TALENT**

HOW IT HAPPENED

RECENT IMPROVEMENTS IN WESTERN SYDNEY'S skills base come on the back of sustained increases over time. The region's current university degree attainment rate (27.2 per cent) hovered around 9 per cent two decades ago. Immigration and rapid population growth have contributed very significantly to this increase more recently.

Increased access to universities has also been a factor in educational improvements, with the University of New England, UNSW, the University of Wollongong, Swinburne University, the University of Sydney and, most pointedly, Western Sydney University, establishing or expanding across Western Sydney over the past five years.

Immigration and rapid population growth...

While gains have been made, educational attainment rates can differ substantially across Western Sydney jurisdictions. The federal electorate of Greenway is illustrative of the range of social, cultural and economic factors giving rise to marked diversity in educational outcomes across a relatively contained subregion (see Figure 3, University Degree Holders in Greenway', p. 10).

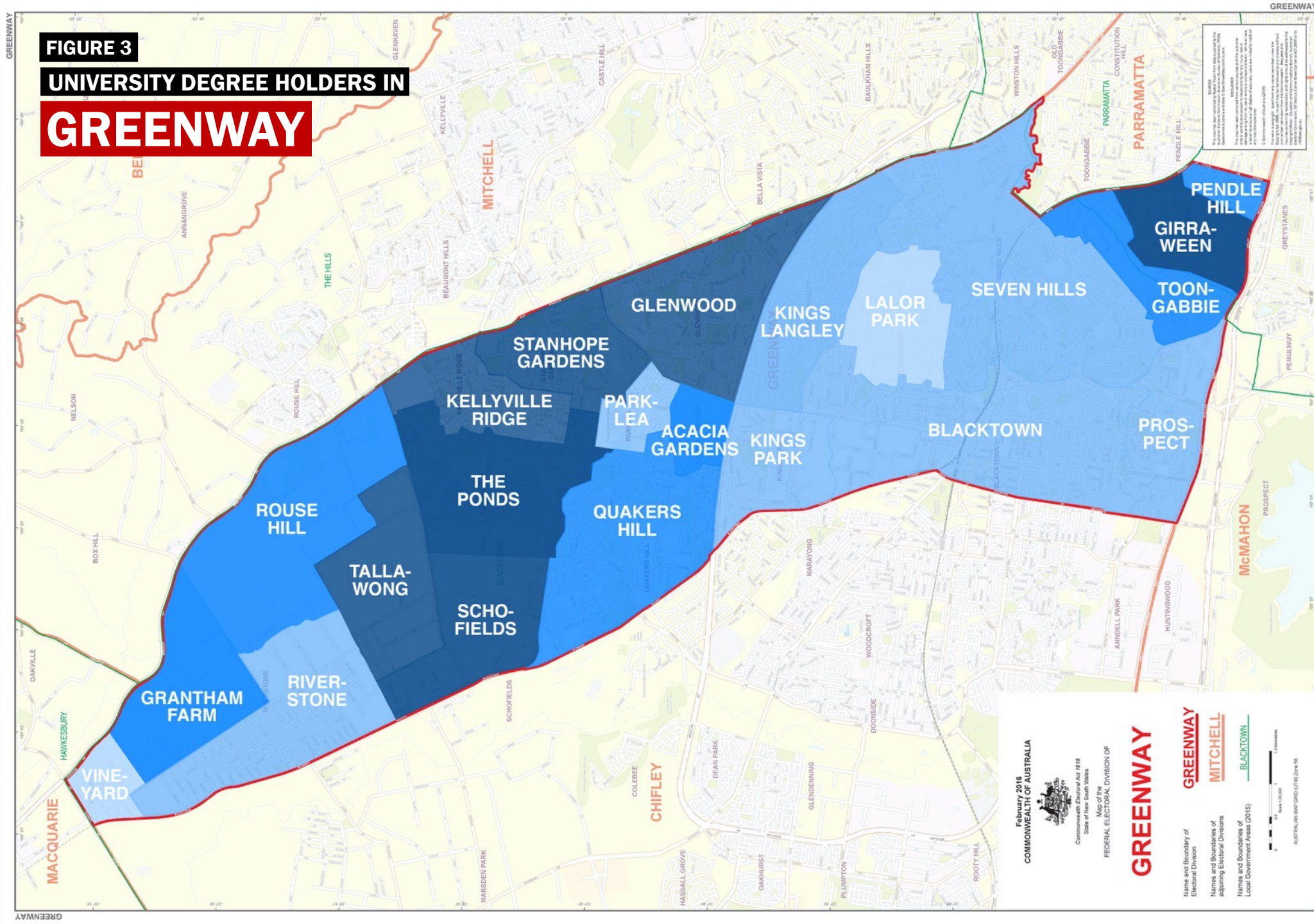
Greenway's above average proportion of university degree holders (35 per cent), encompasses lows of 9.8 per cent in established peri-urban suburbs like Vineyard, through to 48.2 per cent in new housing areas like The Ponds. Interestingly, Greenway's zones of high qualifications align closely with its areas of linguistic diversity. This trend is borne out across other areas of the outer west (see Figure 4, Non-English languages spoken in Greenway, p.11).

University degree holders in Greenway (by suburb)

48.2	The Ponds
47.3	Girraween
47.1	Schofields
43.7	Tallawong
42.1	Stanhope Gardens
41.0	Glenwood
40.5	Kellyville Ridge
39.6	Grantham Farm
36.9	Acacia Gardens
36.2	Toongabbie
36.0	Rouse Hill
35.4	Pendle Hill
33.3	Quakers Hill
29.1	Kings Langley
28.2	Seven Hills
27.5	Blacktown
25.7	Riverstone
25.4	Prospect
25.1	Kings Park
24.4	Parklea
18.4	Lalor Park
9.8	Vineyard

Source: 2021 Census (ABS)
Australian Electoral Commission

FIGURE 3
UNIVERSITY DEGREE HOLDERS IN GREENWAY



February 2016
COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA
Commonwealth Electoral Act 1918
State of New South Wales
FEDERAL ELECTORAL DIVISION OF
GREENWAY

Name and Boundary of Electoral Division
GREENWAY

Names and Boundaries of adjoining Electoral Divisions
MITCHELL
BLACKTOWN

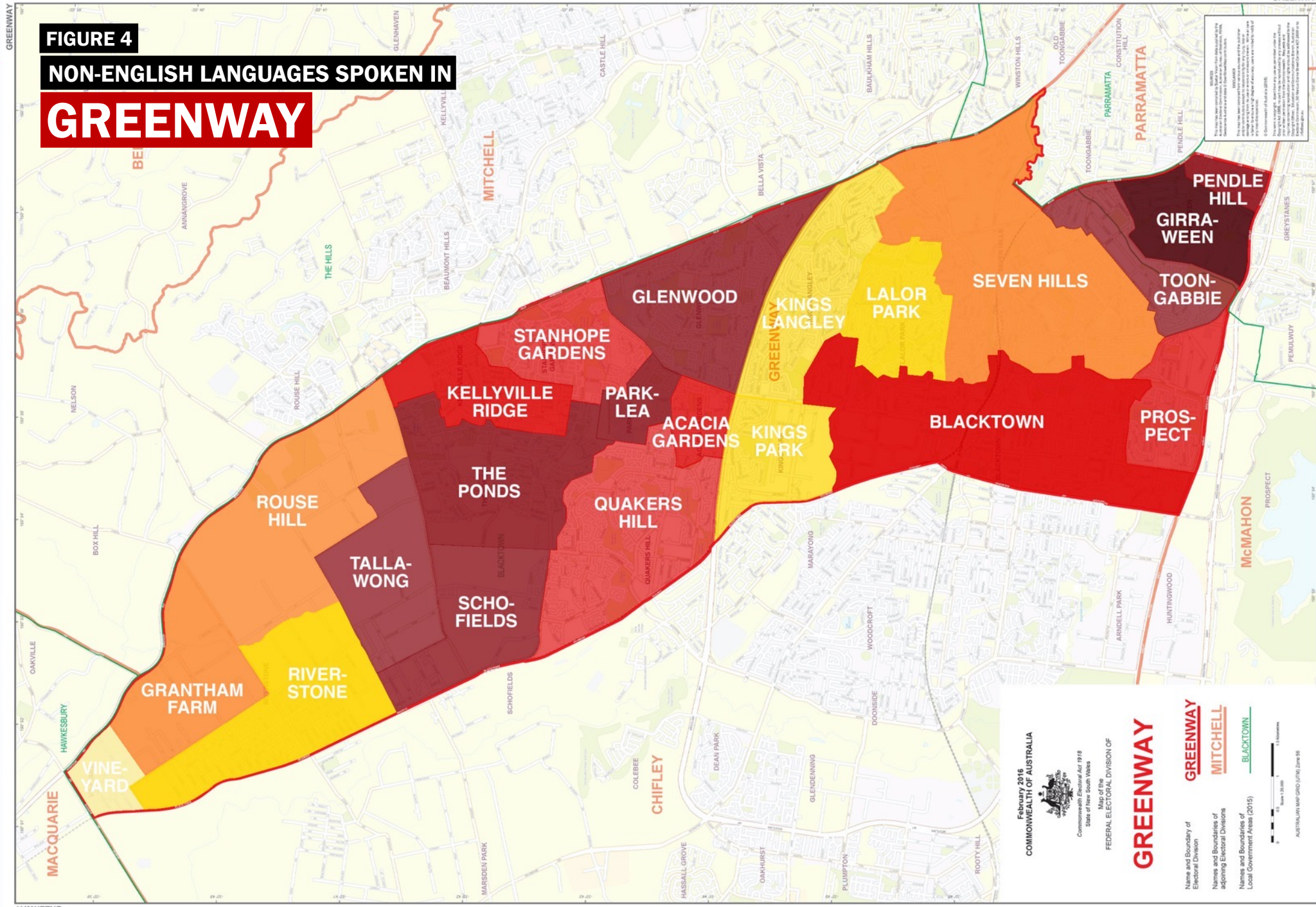
Names and Boundaries of Local Government Areas (2015)
Scale 1:50,000
AUSTALIAN MAP GRID (UTM) Zone 58

Non-English spoken in Greenway (by suburb)

75.9	Girraween
67.4	Pendle Hill
64.2	Parklea
64.2	The Ponds
62.9	Schofields
61.8	Glenwood
61.6	Tallawong
60.2	Toongabbie
59.5	Blacktown
52.8	Kellyville Ridge
52.4	Acacia Gardens
52.2	Prospect
51.7	Stanhope Gardens
50.1	Quakers Hill
48.6	Seven Hills
48.3	Grantham Farm
42.4	Rouse Hill
32.5	Riverstone
31.5	Lalor Park
30.8	Kings Park
30.3	Kings Langley
17.7	Vineyard

Source: 2021 Census (ABS)
Australian Electoral Commission

FIGURE 4
NON-ENGLISH LANGUAGES SPOKEN IN
GREENWAY



Map of the Greenway Federal Electoral Division (FED) showing the percentage of non-English speaking residents by suburb in 2021. The map is based on the 2021 Census data. The percentage of non-English speaking residents is shown in the legend. The map is based on the 2021 Census data. The percentage of non-English speaking residents is shown in the legend. The map is based on the 2021 Census data. The percentage of non-English speaking residents is shown in the legend.

February 2016
COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA



Commonwealth Electoral Act 1918
State of New South Wales

FEDERAL ELECTORAL DIVISION OF

GREENWAY

GREENWAY

MITCHELL

BLACKTOWN

Name and Boundary of Electoral Division
Names and Boundaries of adjoining Electoral Divisions
Names and Boundaries of Local Government Areas (2015)



AUSTRALIAN MAP GRID (UTM) Zone 59

**UNTAPPED****TALENT****‘WHERE YOU LIVE’**

IMMIGRATION, NEW HOUSING DEVELOPMENTS and population growth are likely to sustain Western Sydney’s growth in university qualified residents. The inequity, however, compared to the Rest of Sydney, confirms much more needs to be done.

Governments, State and Federal, have not set the necessarily nuanced frameworks nor set incentives to support greater educational participation and progression. This must change if the region’s deeper potential is to be realised.

The knowledge economy risks passing parts of Western Sydney over for no other reason than a person’s address and socioeconomic circumstances. Western Sydney MP and Minister for Education, Jason Clare emphasised this fact in a recent speech.

Much more needs to be done.

“Where you live, how much your parents earn, whether you are Indigenous or not,” he told university leaders in July, “is still a major factor in whether you are a student or a graduate of an Australian university.”

“I don’t want us to be a country”, he added, “where your chances in life depend on your postcode, your parents, or the colour of your skin.” There are few places where that scenario is more pointed than the minister’s own electorate, which is among Australia’s most socioeconomically and culturally diverse.

SPATIAL INEQUITIES

THE LATTE LINE

THE LATTE LINE – a term used to describe the reality that Western Sydney and the Rest of Sydney is socio-economically divided – remains firmly entrenched in Sydney. Despite higher rates of qualification attainment in Western Sydney, these rates are lower than in the Rest of Sydney, accompanied by lower income and socio-economic advantage in Western Sydney compared to the Rest of Sydney.

Income, education and women's labour

**participation are lower in Western Sydney than
the Rest of Sydney**

This is reflected in key 2021 Census figures related to:

- Persisting disparity in educational attainment rates and rates of digital exclusion;
- Lower income levels and disparity in economic opportunities related to industry type; and
- Lower levels of women's labour force participation, lower income levels and higher rates of unpaid care provision amongst females in Western Sydney compared with the Rest of Sydney.

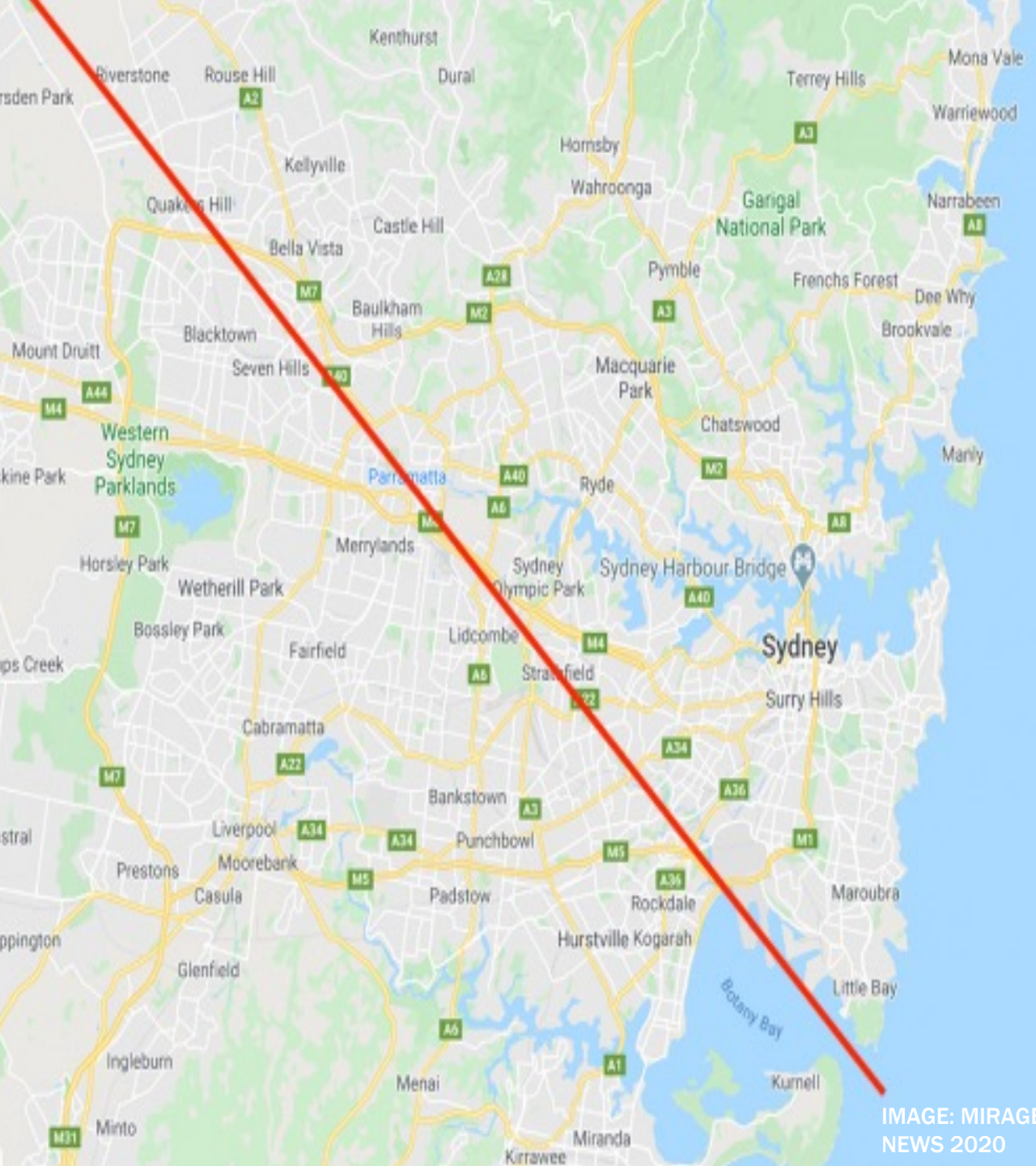


IMAGE: MIRAGE
NEWS 2020

FAULT LINES

An independent review
into Australia's response
to COVID-19

Peter Shergold AC
Jillian Broadbent AC
Isobel Marshall
Peter Varghese AO

20 October 2022

EDUCATION INEQUITIES: DIGITAL DIVIDES

LOWER LEVELS OF EDUCATION ATTAINMENT PERSIST in Western Sydney LGAs compared with the Rest of Sydney. In 2021, 126,656 people in Western Sydney were attending university (4.9 per cent) compared to 5.5 per cent in the Rest of Sydney. Within Western Sydney, 59 per cent of people aged over 15 years had completed Year 12 schooling (or equivalent) as of 2021. This was less than the Rest of Sydney at 64.5 per cent.

Digital exclusion: (re)producing education inequity.

A recent review panel on the impacts of COVID-19, led by Western Sydney University Chancellor Professor Peter Shergold AC, found that one-in-five students did not have access to a laptop or computer at home in low-socio-economic postcodes.¹

The Australian Digital Inclusion Index (ADII) measures digital inclusion across three dimensions: 1. Access, 2. Affordability and 3. Digital Ability (see Figure 5). ADII scores range from 0 to 100, whereby higher scores indicate a greater level of digital inclusion. LGAs in Western Sydney overall had a lower overall ADII score (72.4) than the Rest of Sydney (76.2). Within the Western Sydney region, Canterbury-Bankstown (67), Fairfield (69), Cumberland/Liverpool (70) and Blacktown (71) indicated the lowest levels of digital inclusion.

There is a need to address the digital divide. Key actions must include reinstating questions in the Census on digital access, creating a universal service obligation for free WIFI, and prioritising digital access for low-income neighbourhoods, particularly vulnerable groups such as children attending school.

FIGURE 5

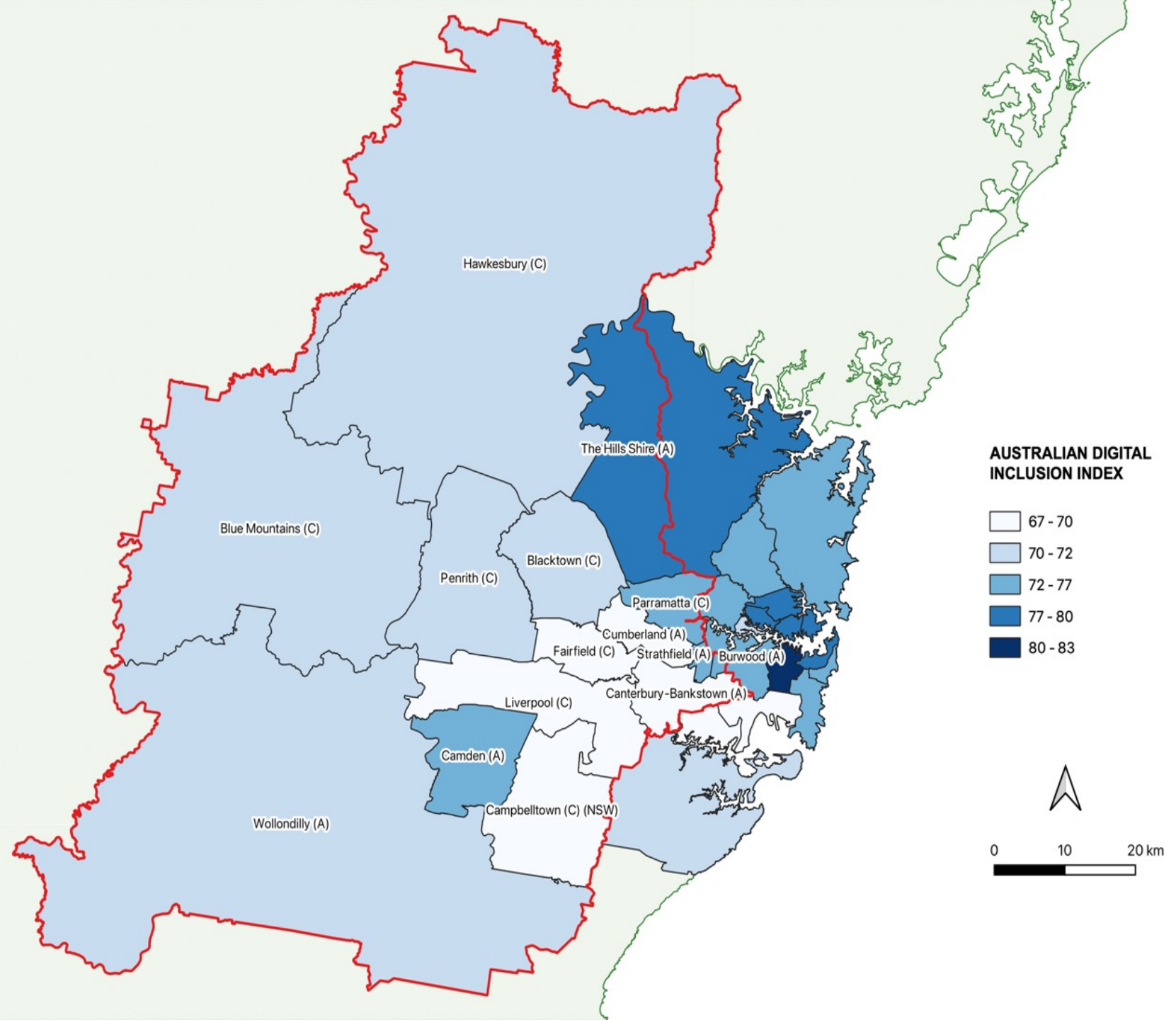
AUSTRALIAN

DIGITAL INCLUSION

INDEX | OVERALL SCORES

WEST INVEST LGAs

2021



Source: Dufty-Jones, Rae. (2022). Australian Bureau of Statistics (2022) Australian Statistical Geography Standard (ASGS) Edition 3. Using QGIS [GIS software]. Version 3.16. Sydney, Western Sydney University

ECONOMIC INEQUITIES: INCOME DISPARITIES

LOWER LEVELS OF INCOME IN WESTERN SYDNEY compared with the Rest of Sydney are evident in the 2021 census data. Overall, 24.8 per cent of households in Western Sydney LGAs earned a high income (over \$3,000 per week) and 19.2 per cent were low-income households, compared with 30.1 per cent and 17.9 per cent respectively for the Rest of Sydney.

Bring in high-productivity jobs.

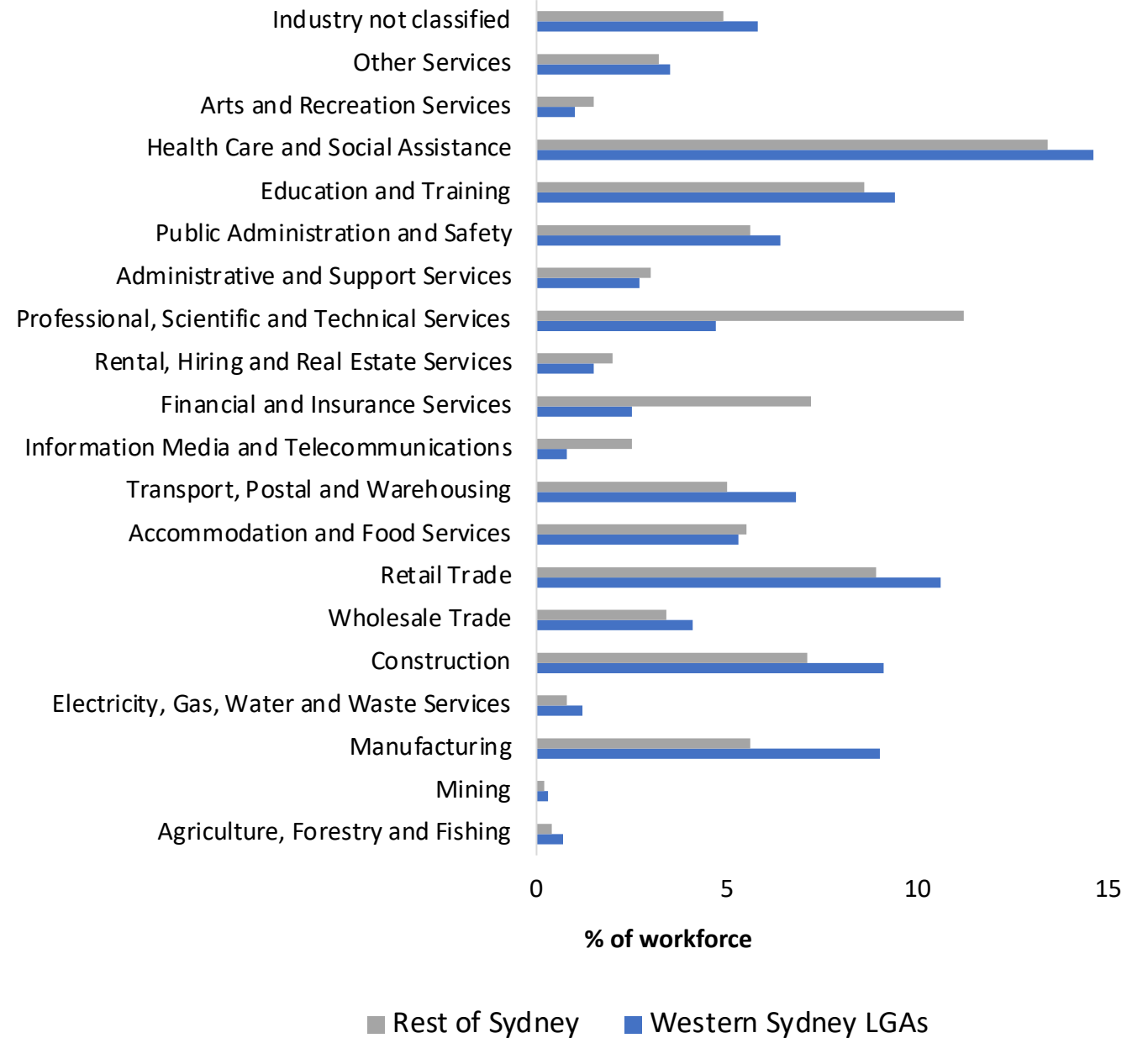
In addition to lower educational attainment rates in Western Sydney, lower income levels may be influenced by the dominance of low productivity industries in Western Sydney LGAs compared with the Rest of Sydney. As represented in Figure 6 (p. 17), there is a disparity between Western Sydney and the Rest of Sydney as follows:

- A smaller percentage of local workers employed in the field of Professional, Scientific and Technical Services (4.7 per cent compared to 11.2 per cent), and in Financial and Insurance Services (2.5 per cent compared to 7.2 per cent) in Western Sydney compared with the Rest of Sydney;
- A larger percentage of local workers are employed in the field of Manufacturing (9 per cent compared to 5.6 per cent), Construction (9.1 per cent compared to 7.1 per cent) in Western Sydney compared with the rest of Sydney; and
- Health Care Social Assistance, is the largest employer in the Western Sydney region, making up 14.6 per cent of total employment.

There is a critical need for significant investment that continues to attract economic anchors to the region, to drive the increased presence of high-productivity jobs and industries in Western Sydney.²

FIGURE 6
EMPLOYMENT
(CENSUS) | BY INDUSTRY SECTOR
2021

Industry



Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics, Census of Population and Housing 2021

ECONOMIC INEQUITIES: GENDER DISPARITIES

WOMEN AREN'T PARTICIPATING IN THE LABOUR FORCE at the rate of attaining education. Women's qualification attainment in Western Sydney LGAs between 2011 and 2021 increased significantly (see Figure 7, p. 19). In 10 years, over 140,000 females have gained Bachelor's or Higher degrees (+142,947 females) between 2011 and 2021. Despite this exponential growth in educational attainment, women's labour force participation in Western Sydney remains lower than in the Rest of Sydney.

30 per cent of women in Western Sydney

provide unpaid childcare.

As represented in Figure 8 (p. 19) the female population in Western Sydney in 2021 **provided more unpaid childcare** either to their own or to other children (29.6%) compared to females in the Rest of Sydney (27.8%). Overall, 29.6% of the female population. The number of females who provided unpaid childcare for their own and/or other people's children in Western Sydney LGAs increased by 1,096 between 2016 and 2021.

This **negatively affects female income levels** whereby 6.6% of the female population earned a high income, and 40.8% earned a low income, compared with 11.3% and 35.8% respectively for the Rest of Sydney.

Recent research on working women in Western Sydney³ has suggested the need for:

- High-quality flexible working, particularly hybrid working arrangements;
- Employment options closer to home within Western Sydney; and
- Affordable care systems and options.

FIGURE 7
CHANGE IN HIGHEST
QUALIFICATION
ACHIEVED
(2011 TO 2021)

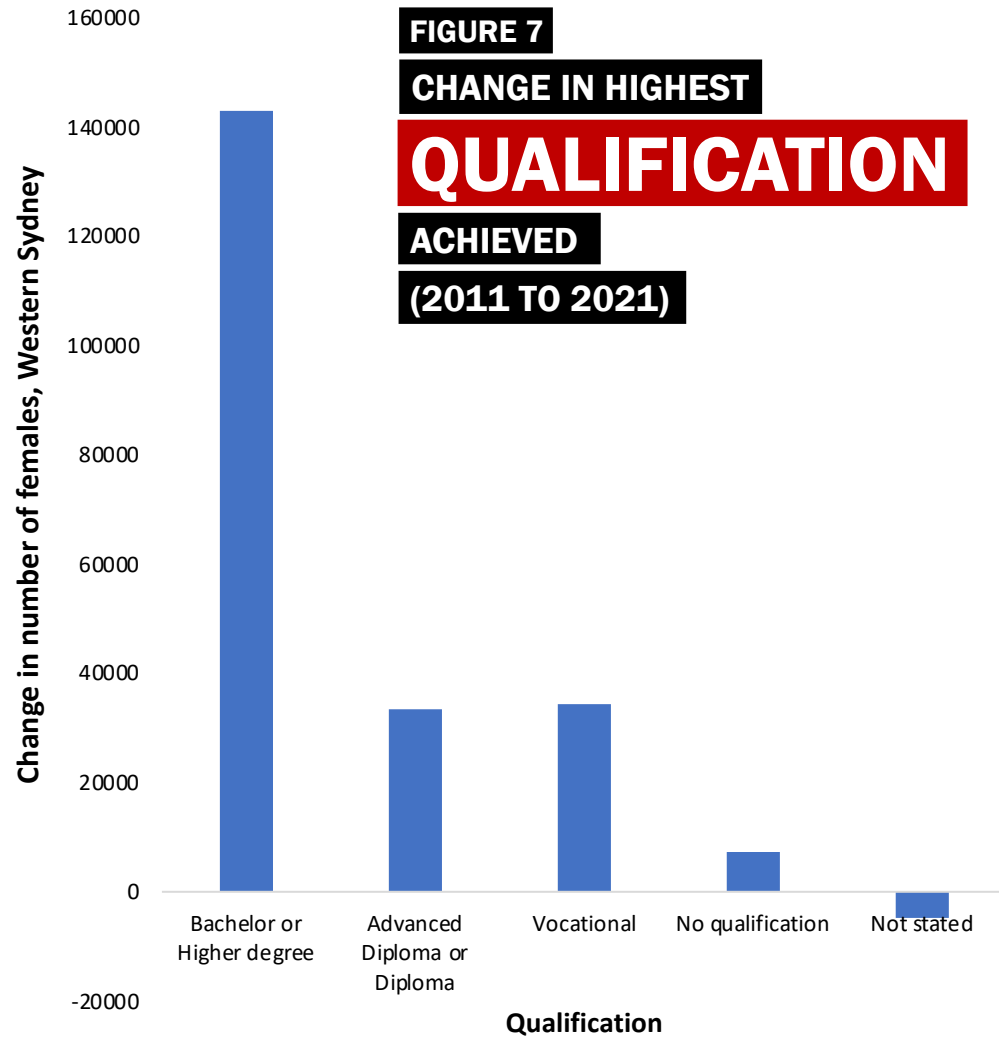
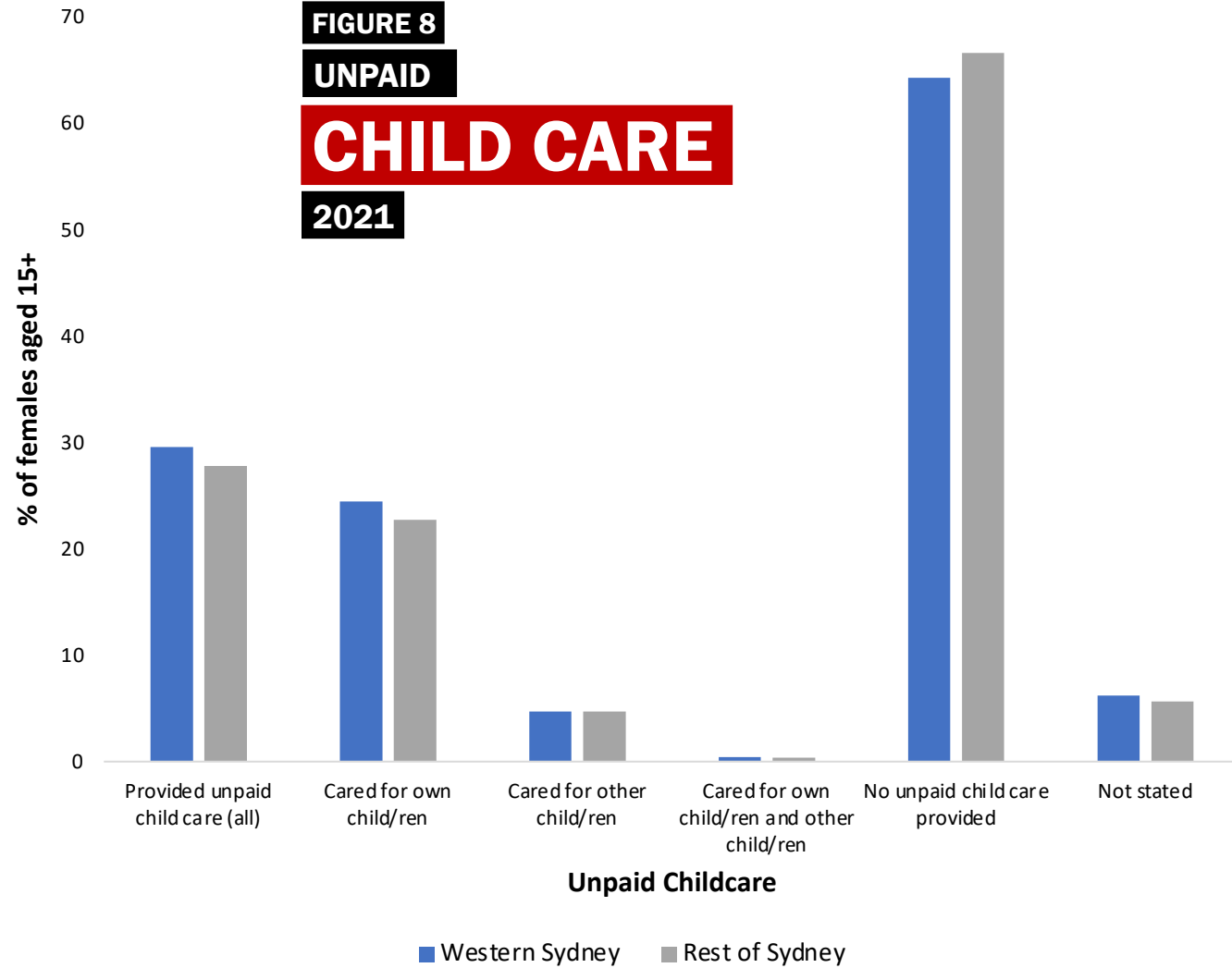


FIGURE 8
UNPAID
CHILD CARE
2021



Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics, Census of Population and Housing 2021

Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics, Census of Population and Housing 2021

TAPPING INTO**TALENT****KEY ACTIONS****1**

Address the spatial inequality in qualification attainment between Western Sydney and the Rest of Sydney through urgent, and at scale, Federal Government investment in evidence-based policy interventions.

2

The digital divide between Western Sydney and the Rest of Sydney must be addressed. This can be achieved by reinstating questions in the Census on digital access, creating a universal service obligation for free WIFI, and prioritising digital access within low-income neighbourhoods particularly among vulnerable groups such as children attending school.⁴

3

There is a critical need for significant investment that continues to attract economic anchors to the region, driving the increased presence of high-productivity jobs and industries.²

4

Support the participation of women in the labour force by providing high-quality jobs within the region, in addition to flexible/hybrid working arrangements. These work options must be accompanied by affordable care options.³



UNTAPPED

TALENT

REFERENCES

¹ Shergold, P., Broadbent, J., Marshall, I., & Varghese, P. (2022). *Fault Lines: An independent review into Australia's response to COVID-19*. Retrieved from <https://www.smh.com.au/interactive/hub/media/tearout-excerpt/10854/FAULT-LINES-1.pdf>.

² Business Western Sydney. (2022). *Closer to Talent*. Retrieved from <https://www.businesswesternsydney.com/content/dam/nswbc/businesswesternsydney/Closer-to-Talent.pdf>.

³ Cooper, R. and Hill, E., (2022). *What women want from work post-pandemic: Experiences and expectations of Western Sydney working women*, Gender Equality in Working Life Research Initiative. The University of Sydney.

⁴ Recommendation proposed by community group, Wester'ly – Digital Inclusion for Western Sydney.



**CENTRE FOR
WESTERN SYDNEY**



About the Centre for Western Sydney

WESTERN SYDNEY UNIVERSITY is the only university in NSW with a legislated commitment to conduct research that meets the needs of Western Sydney communities. Fulfilling this unique mandate for research, the University established the Centre for Western Sydney in 2014.

The Centre combines world-class research expertise with frank and fearless advocacy on issues of importance to Western Sydney. The Centre's work is guided by its ambition for a thriving Western Sydney that is understood and respected for its strengths and contributions regionally, nationally, and internationally. Delivered through a strong politics of listening, the Centre aims to drive informed dialogue and action for, and with its region.



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