



## 2024 MISSION-BASED COMPACT BETWEEN THE COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA AND AUSTRALIAN CATHOLIC UNIVERSITY (ACU)

### PURPOSE

This compact is an agreement between the Commonwealth and the University. Entering into a Compact is one of the quality and accountability requirements, which a higher education provider must meet under the *Higher Education Support Act 2003* (HESA) as a condition of receiving a grant. Specifically, subsection 19-110(1) of HESA requires that Table A and Table B providers must, in respect of each year for which a grant is paid to the provider under HESA, enter into a Mission-Based Compact with the Commonwealth for a period that includes that year.

All strategies should provide qualitative and/or quantitative measures of assessment.

### MISSION AND STRATEGIC PLANNING

ACU is committed to the pursuit of knowledge, the dignity of the human person and the common good. As a leading public Catholic university, ACU's strategic plan, [Vision 2033](#), places the human person and its flourishing at the core by enabling flourishing lives, fostering thriving communities and forging an ethical future. ACU will make a positive impact on society through six distinctive focus areas:

1. Provide a learning environment that emphasises growth of the whole person.
2. Offer a range of educational opportunities that lead to future-ready career outcomes.
3. Serve communities through connection and collaboration.
4. Address issues of national significance.
5. Promote human dignity and advance the common good.
6. Strengthen our institutional foundations.

Over the length of this Compact, coinciding with the inaugural year of ACU's decadal strategic plan, the university will develop cross-institutional enabling plans, finalise objectives for Impact Phase 1 (2024–2026), and align associated programs of work. Outcomes are measured through strategic metrics as well as a range of operational measures to drive business operations to the highest standards and ensure continued compliance with the Higher Education Standards Framework (HESF).

ACU will make practical contributions towards addressing the social challenges facing Australia and engage in mission-aligned programs that benefit Australia and its people to address issues of national significance. These include developing workforce capacity and capability solutions in national areas of critical need (i.e., health and teacher education), translating research into applied and practical impact, partnering with government and industry to find solutions to pressing national issues, and engaging with government on areas of university expertise.

ACU fosters a culture, work practices and environment that enhance staff and student health, safety and wellbeing in a supportive and caring culture. Action plans in ACU's People Plan, focused on supporting our staff, and ACU's Safeguarding and Student Safety Action Plan, uphold the Universities Australia Charter of Sexual Harm, as well as other student safety initiatives including responding to the Australian Human Rights Commission's 'Change the Course' report. ACU is also one of only three universities outside of the United

States that has achieved the Carnegie Community Engagement classification. This recognises ACU as a higher education leader in institutionalised community engagement.

ACU's Foreign Interference and Transparency Committee oversees a whole-of-university approach to integrate key activities, roles and responsibilities in line with national guidelines to counter foreign interference in the university sector. Policies and procedures are in place to assess, report and mitigate potential foreign interference risks, including in international student and partnerships arrangements and cybersecurity. The university recognises the open and honest exchange of diverse views as central to its mission within the Catholic intellectual tradition and upholds the rights of university members to enjoy freedom of speech and intellectual freedom, including [academic freedom](#).

## STRATEGIES FOR IMPROVING EQUALITY OF OPPORTUNITY IN HIGHER EDUCATION

ACU is committed to creating an inclusive, strengths-based and student-centred environment that enables students from under-represented groups to equitably access, participate and succeed in every facet of their academic, social and personal lives. This commitment is articulated in ACU's new 10-year strategic plan, [Vision 2033](#), and is realised through its comprehensive Widening Participation Plan.

The Widening Participation Plan identifies strategic priorities and targets that aim to improve access, retention and the educational experience of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students and students from under-represented groups. These qualitative and quantitative targets are designed to aid the ongoing monitoring and measuring of performance, with specific targets established for access, participation, success and retention. By 2026, ACU aims to improve the participation rate for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, low socio-economic status students, and regional and remote students. The Widening Participation Plan also establishes a governance and accountability framework, which recognises staff and students as partners whose shared responsibility is integral to the success of the plan.

ACU has a range of programs, initiatives and services in place that are designed to widen access, increase participation, and support students' holistic success. This includes:

- Rolling out new / expanded enabling pathway programs (Foundation Studies, Foundation Studies Online).
- Offering a wider range of pathway courses (Diplomas and the Tertiary Preparation Program), with more students enrolled in these programs being from a low socio-economic status background.
- Expanding outreach and enabling pre-access programs. ACU's [Uni Step Up](#) program enables students to complete two units during Year 11 and 12 and gain direct entry in a cognate degree. A subsidiary of this is the *Step Up into Teaching* program which has been operating for 25 years.
- Provision of targeted academic support via ACU's Academic Skills Advisors and [Peer Assisted Study Session \(PASS\) program](#), support and engagement initiatives ([Connect2Uni](#) and mentoring), and increased financial support through scholarships and bursaries.

Specific support for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students and staff includes:

- The appointment in 2024 of ACU's inaugural Pro Vice-Chancellor, Indigenous will strengthen ACU's whole-of-university, collaborative approach and boost the University's ability to support and enrich the experience of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students.
- Increased access for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students from regional and remote areas through ACU's accommodation scholarships.
- Supporting the ongoing growth in ACU's offerings through the [Away from Base](#) programs, such as the addition of the Bachelor of Business Administration in 2023.
- Embedding of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander knowledges into the curriculum and course reviews.
- Ongoing provision of culturally safe, dedicated spaces on all ACU campuses with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff available to support students via our Indigenous Higher Education Units (IHEUs).
- ACU's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples Employment Plan (2023–2026) identifies initiatives to support the growth and development of ACU's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander workforce.

The ACU HECG Equity Plan consists of 12 initiatives impacting access to ACU and provide support in areas as identified in the Australian Universities Accord (placements) or areas of national skills shortage (teaching).

Broadening current initiatives with proven success and impact will support ACU's growing future domestic student enrolments, with dedicated and targeted student support aimed at improving retention. Close monitoring of the Equity Plan funding will ensure that HECG funding is allocated as per plan and that the outcomes are measurable in terms of access, participation and success of students from all permissible equity groups.

**Measures** - *Pre-access engagement, articulation into enabling pathways, access and participation rates, use of support services, scholarships and programs, student satisfaction, retention rate, attainment rate, and graduate employment and outcomes.*

## STRATEGIES FOR IMPROVING TEACHING AND LEARNING

ACU is committed to providing a personalised learning journey for its diverse student cohort that is enhanced by holistic student support, innovative and student-centred curricular, and an evidence-based, scholarly-informed learning and teaching approach as detailed in ACU [Vision 2033](#).

### **Admissions and enrolments**

ACU continues to publish [admissions data](#) according to transparency regulations. In 2024, ACU will publish [bespoke pathway options](#) for prospective non-school leavers who do not have access to in-school career guidance counselling. These groups have previously struggled to navigate the university application process easily.

### **ACU Thrive: a new commencing student teaching model in 2024**

[ACU Thrive](#) supports students to thrive academically by providing opportunities to access learning material and prepare for classes in advance. Students will have access to ongoing 'check ins' that allow them to assess their progress and seek support when they need it. ACU Thrive is also aligned with the ACU's [Support for Students Policy](#) and its commitment to help students succeed in their studies.

This will be achieved through early low stakes assessment, referral, feedback, and targeted communications, in particular for students at risk of not successfully completing their units of study.

Online content is easy-to-navigate, engaging and collaborative. Interactive in-class activities ensure students get the most out of their time spent on campus. ACU Thrive also provides opportunities for students to thrive personally and socially via access to a vast range of student support services, including counselling, academic support, careers services and connection to a vibrant campus community where students can get involved in clubs, societies and events that align with their interests and values. The interactive on-campus classes ensure they meet their fellow students and can exchange ideas and network.

### **Canvas (new learning management system)**

The major benefits for the student experience and retention from implementing Canvas in 2024 will be early identification and intervention of at-risk students via:

- A mobile app and interface designed to be intuitive and straightforward, making it easy for students to find information and complete tasks quickly.
- 24/7 customer support for users to get the help they need when they need it.
- Advanced analytics and reporting features, enabling staff to make data-driven decisions to review and support student learning.

### **Career development**

ACU is implementing its Career Development Learning Framework based on the new ACU graduate attributes and capabilities to better guide the delivery and evaluation of embedded career development inputs. ACU seeks to equip and support students in developing the skills that will sustain them across the first five years post-graduation, requiring a career development approach that scaffolds the entire study journey.

### **International student support**

ACU provides [tailored support](#) to international students through its International Student Advisers. The advisers provide face to face and on-line support to students who may require assistance accessing institutional services and support. They assist with general international student enquiries, accommodation

advice, general student visa information, pre-departure and orientation information and information regarding institutional services and facilities.

**Measures** - *Retention, progression, satisfaction, completion, at risk early warning indicators and graduate outcome data.*

## STRATEGIES FOR IMPROVING RESEARCH, RESEARCH TRAINING, AND INNOVATION

ACU is committed to undertaking high-quality impactful research in areas consistent with its mission and strengths. [Vision 2033](#) and the Research and Enterprise Plan focus on strengthening and integrating ACU's research capabilities and the translation of research into socio-economic good. Consistent with its mission for the common good and dignity of the human person, ACU seeks to become a leader in research in the care economy, education transformation, and human flourishing.

### Research

Knowledge creation:

- Maintain world-class research in all University disciplines while increasing the volume of high-quality publications by enfranchising ACU's academic community, including training a new and larger generation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander researchers, Early Career Researchers (ECRs) and higher degree by research (HDR) students.
- Build strategic partnerships with universities globally and key partners such as the Sydney Partnership for Health, Education, Research and Education (SPHERE), Aikenhead Centre for Medical Discovery and St Vincent's Health Australia, to create knowledge-networks with global impact.

Engagement and impact:

- Work with mission-aligned industry and community partners to promote interdisciplinary solutions that enable flourishing lives, foster thriving communities, and build ethical futures.
- Invest skills and capabilities across the full value-chain of research, from basic research through to translation and adoption, spanning policy changes and commercialisation outcomes that benefit partners and communities.
- Invest in co-creation and co-ownership models of research with Indigenous communities to create tailored programs of research with local / national relevance, leveraging ACU's multi-state presence.

### Research training

Culture and environment:

- Leverage the recently established Graduate Research School to drive research, training and the integration of additional complementary skills to create graduate researchers who can address global challenges.
- Align training to ACU's mission and strategy and elevate ACU's reputation by creating a diverse research community including through a strong and thriving cohort of graduate research students.
- Recognise and promote Indigenous knowledges in HDR admission, research training, and relevant community and industry engagement programs.

Capability and capacity, world-leading researchers:

- Deliver training programs providing access to expert supervision, industry engagement, global mobility opportunities and professional development to support the formation of graduates and ECRs.
- Grow and diversify ACU's graduate research cohort, with a focus on academic excellence and international HDR student recruitment.

Industry engagement:

- Foster co-designed interdisciplinary research projects that connect industry with graduate researchers and academic supervisors through expansion of co-funded programs addressing key challenges.
- Engage with partners to foster the global mobility of graduate researchers and development of enduring partnerships that support joint programs.

### Innovation

- Invest in infrastructure critical to growing Australia's research capabilities in human factors and care economy research, leveraging ACU's major investments i.e. first metabolic chamber in the southern

hemisphere, Aikenhead Centre for Medical Discovery, and Blacktown's Exercise and Sports Technology Hub.

- Support an increase in entrepreneurial training and commercial engagement by leveraging research pipelines via the Enterprise Clinic, which identifies commercially viable concepts for business-ready entities or products.

**Measures** - *Quality / volume research publications, partnerships, research translation and commercialisation, growth and diversification of graduate research cohort, HDR completions, and investment in research infrastructure, training programs and interdisciplinary projects.*

## STRATEGIES FOR ENGAGING WITH INDUSTRY

ACU engages with industry through mission-aligned partnerships that mobilise the University's resources, excellence in teaching and research, and ACU precincts that allow for locally tailored engagements with national significance. ACU's expertise and domain knowledge make the University a differentiated partner for mission-aligned, innovation-driven organisations across multiple sectors. ACU has invested in growing staff capabilities through the establishment of the Industry and Innovation team, which is responsible for providing guidance and tools to engage with industry in an agile and consistent manner across the university while presenting a front-door to external partners.

ACU's Industry Engagement Strategy seeks to understand and respond to industry needs, aligned with ACU's disciplines. It has four key priorities:

- Brand visibility.
- Impact through education with industry.
- Impact through research with industry.
- Impact through ACU precincts.

As a mission-based, multi-campus university, ACU has strong relationships with Catholic, education, public health and community partners. The University's alumni are central to ACU's **brand visibility** with industry, bringing their professional networks and corporate connections to our students through mentoring, work-integrated learning (WIL), guest lectures and events.

Creating **impact through education** with industry positively benefits students through the co-development of curriculum that seeks to address skills shortages in relevant sectors and other workplace challenges through WIL embedded projects and assessment.

ACU's mission aligns with many corporate and socially responsible initiatives making us a partner of choice for ethical engagement and impact. Corporate scholarships, strategic management of placements, knowledge translation and strong alignment with government priorities are all critical to ACU's engagement with industry, such as Teachers Mutual Bank Limited and Microsoft.

**Impact through research** is underpinned by growing consultancy, boosting opportunities for industry-led research and responding to community and industry needs, including challenges in the aged care workforce. ACU leads the Aged Care Workforce Alliance to harness technology that improves recruitment, mobility and retention of aged care workers, and delivers more consistent and higher quality care. With a national footprint and as a preeminent educator and researcher in health, ACU is well-placed to lead this alliance of 20+ Australian aged care providers to achieve wide-reaching impact on the lives of future generations.

ACU manages a rich set of specialised facilities across its seven Australian campuses. The commitment to **impact through ACU precincts** is evidenced by the development of key projects such as the Melbourne Health Precinct with Aikenhead Centre for Medical Discovery, and the Blacktown Exercise and Sports Technology Hub with the Blacktown City Council. ACU's major precinct developments provide for new industry-relevant spaces such as research labs, collaboration thinktanks, and Industry events. ACU has a defined vision, identity and value for each of its campuses to link to locally based industry.


ACU's Industry and Innovation Plan outlines the key strategies and approach to industry engagement at ACU. While leveraging the University's national footprint and strengths in education and health sciences,

ACU strives to expand beyond these sectors to provide impactful outcomes for students and the wider community, responding to and working with industry to solve real world problems.

SIGNED for and on behalf of  
THE COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA  
by

Madonna Morton  
Full name (please print)


First Assistant Secretary  
Position  
of the Department of Education

  
Signature

29/05/2024  
Date


SIGNED for and on behalf of AUSTRALIAN  
CATHOLIC UNIVERSITY (ACU)  
by

**Professor Zlatko Skrbis**  
Full name (please print)

**Vice-Chancellor and President**  
Position  
  
Signature

In the presence of:

**Professor Julie Cugin**  
Witness (please print)

**Provost and Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Academic)**  
Position or profession of witness (please print)  
  
Signature