

Australian Government Department of Education



# 2024 Mission-Based Compact Between the Commonwealth of Australia and Avondale University

#### 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

Avondale University was founded in 1897 with deep roots in the community and a commitment to prepare graduates with a greater vision of world needs. Over 120 years, Avondale has upheld its values of Excellence, Spirituality, Wellbeing, Integrity, and Service.

Our recent Strategy Refresh 2024-2027 (<u>Appendix 1</u>) updated the previous <u>Avondale University</u> <u>Strategic Plan 2022-2024</u>. It highlights these values and our ongoing commitment to goals and targets for growth in areas that align with current national and sector priorities as a Table B provider. These areas include:

1. Exceptional student experience (Ensuring student and staff safety)

As a faith-based institution, Avondale University has always sought to maintain a high standard of quality, professionalism, transparency, equity, and personalised support for the wellbeing and safety of students and staff. This was recently addressed in the updating of our <u>Support for Students</u> <u>Policy and Procedure</u> as well as our <u>Sexual Misconduct & Sexual Harassment Policy</u> and others. Our measurements for success include continued high (Top 10 in Australia) student satisfaction measures (QILT), improved student retention rates, and positive indicators of satisfaction with student support services.

#### 2. Securing our future (*Student success*)

Avondale is committed to growth in student numbers over the coming years to enhance local regional HE participation rates while contributing to labour market shortfalls in teaching and nursing nationally. In the context of our regional location, we are prioritising initiatives that promote diversity, equity, and enhanced support for students from equity groups. Plans are already underway for additional staff and new software to assist with early identification of need and increased support.

#### 3. World-class research engagement with impact (Academic Freedom)

Avondale continues to prioritise maturation in research engagement and discovery in a context of academic freedom and intellectual inquiry. Annual growth in research outputs emphasises community engagement and social impact outcomes. This is measured through output and impact measures including funding, partnerships, publications, citation rates, and impact surveys. Our commitment to academic freedom is reflected in a recent revision of our <u>Academic Freedom</u> <u>Statement</u> and the Academic Freedom and Freedom of Speech Policy.

#### 4. Staff talent and culture (Workforce and skill needs)

Avondale is focusing on fostering staff talent and wellbeing. Outcome measures include staff satisfaction surveys regarding culture, professional learning, spiritual engagement and wellbeing, as well as the ratio of senior academic leaders and overall staffing profiles.

5. Operational efficiency and excellence (*Countering foreign interference and cyber and data security*)

A systemic program is underway to enhance data management and automation, improve monitoring of student progress and identification of students at risk, and to counter threats to academic integrity and cyber security. These efforts include investment in systems, research, and education. Avondale benchmarks with other universities through CAUDIT and similar to maximise cyber risk mitigation and data security.

A university renewal plan is in place to prioritise financial sustainability and risk mitigation. The University Council and subcommittees receive regular updates on progress and monitor performance closely within a robust risk framework.

### Strategies for Improving Equality of Opportunity in Higher Education

Starting in Semester 1, 2024, Avondale University is implementing a near real-time 'Students at Risk' monitoring and intervention system to deliver timely and relevant support services. A new position, 'Student Success Coordinator', has been established to maintain and coordinate the system across the range of student support services. The system accounts for a variety of risk factors including those covering the identified equity groups and tracks the provision of support services including those specific to equity groups. The effectiveness of this system will be measured through the comparison of disaggregated student retention and attrition figures with historical data as well as the QILT student satisfaction survey and internal student surveys. An emphasis is placed on ensuring that equity group retention is found to be comparable or better than the wider student cohort.

Also starting in 2024, Avondale is establishing a student support committee to identify and monitor student needs and barriers to access, including those specific to equity groups, and to work with the University's support providers to match these with appropriate support services. This includes improvements to existing support services as well as recommending new student support initiatives. The committee will recommend changes to policies and procedures, and research relevant to industry best practice. The effectiveness of this committee will be measured against the goals and standards set out in the new <u>Support for Students Policy and Procedure</u>.

The Avondale website is being updated to improve the accuracy, clarity, and relevance of information provided to prospective and current students with a focus on facilitating timely access to Avondale student support services. Procedures are being revised in relation to communication of information about student support services through the Learning Management System, and via SMS, email, and phone, to ensure all students have every opportunity to learn about and use the academic and wellbeing support available. The effectiveness of these initiatives will be measured by their successful implementation in 2024 and ongoing student and staff feedback.

Avondale will be a recipient of the HECG in 2024 and is developing an equity plan to substantially increase student support and community outreach for the identified equity groups. Key initiatives under consideration or development include:

- Establishing a student success coordinator role and student academic advising role.
- Expanding the learning advisor tutoring program with additional literacy and numeracy support.
- Expanding disability support including assistive technology for both on campus and distance students.
- Providing hardship grants and accommodation subsidies, as well as other cost-of-living and financial support initiatives.
- Introducing a peer assisted study program and first year advisor program.
- Creating a dedicated student advocacy officer.
- Providing additional equity scholarships.
- Introducing a new subsidised uni pathways program, equivalent to enabling-funded programs; Avondale does not currently receive enabling funding.
- Creating ties with GP services to provide bulk billed medical services (including telehealth) to students (providing both health and cost-of-living support).

The specific details of the initiatives selected, including key targets and timeframes will be included in the Avondale University Equity Plan.

#### Strategies for Improving Teaching and Learning

The **Avondale University Learning and Teaching Plan** (<u>Appendix 2</u>), updated every three years, provides the blueprint for learning and teaching improvement and enhancement. It specifies key metrics across the areas of curriculum renewal, quality enhancement and assurance, and wellbeing, sustainability, and community engagement. Core to this plan are the Threshold Standards in the Higher Education Standards Framework and TEQSA guidelines for quality assurance and enhancement.

Avondale takes seriously its responsibility to design, deliver and evaluate teaching and learning experiences that are engaging and underpinned by benchmarked quality indicators. Avondale has a sustained track record of the highest level of performance in QILT surveys of quality of teaching and the student experience compared to peer higher eduction providers and universities. Nevertheless, we take seriously all opportunities for improvement, particularly in relation to improving student retention and learning outcome success across courses.

A longstanding commitment to holistic, personalised learning in a faith-based environment forms the core of our learning and teaching approach. Innovative curriculum design, evidence-based practices and values-driven approaches to student engagement are hallmarks of Avondale's good practices in teaching and learning. We have invested in additional learning design support to improve the quality of student experiences online and via the learning management system. In 2024-25 we are investing in further improvements to address the unique needs of students with disabilities and those from linguistically and culturally diverse backgrounds, particularly in online and blended learning settings.

Avondale's Centre for the Advancement of Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (CASTL) runs workshops and good practice roundtables to advance staff knowledge in learning and teaching including assessment design and feedback. In 2024 we have prioritised professional learning workshops for staff to support them in working with increasingly diverse learner cohorts with

diverse learning and support needs. This includes workshops on support for students from First Nations backgrounds and those from Pacifika language and cultural groups. Outcomes will be assessed through analysis of student feedback, student pass rates and retention.

Ongoing curriculum improvement is supported by the scholarly activities of staff to foster a research-informed approach to holistic curriculum innovation. This is evidenced by the participation of all permanent academic staff in scholarship activities (up to 100 hours per year). Improvements in teaching, curriculum, and assessment are monitored through annual course/unit reviews, monitoring of annual course reports, course advisory committees and required unit self-reviews. Casual staff are included in course and unit-level team meetings to ensure holistic approaches to teaching and learning improvement.

The Avondale University community is characterised by close collaborative work between academic and professional staff, lecturers and support service providers. The University's wellbeing focus prioritises integration of student support service information and subject/course curriculum design. Where possible, all academic support services are available in person and online, including the University's investment in Studiosity to enable 24/7 access to learning support services. Outcome measures include student retention, student engagement with support services, and responses to Avondale's Student Academic Evaluation Questionnaire, all measured against historic baselines.

### Strategies for Improving Research, Research Training, and Innovation

#### Strategies for improving research

<u>Avondale University Research</u> is characterised by its longstanding focus on applied, interdisciplinary research that aligns with course offerings in three Broad Fields of Education (06,07,09). As part of Avondale's application for university status in 2021, the **Avondale University Research Plan, 2021-2024** (<u>Appendix 3</u>) was developed. This plan will be revised in 2024. Avondale will be assessed on interim research performance in 2026 as part of the 5- and 10-year transition to world standard research performance consistent with the HESF Provider Category Standards.

Research improvement strategies focus on:

- a workforce plan for attracting and retaining research-active and/or research-focused academic staff – from early career to professor level – aligned with research focus areas and prioritised research programs;
- b. 4ultidisciplinary research programs, partnerships and resources to maximise the quality of project outcomes;
- c. investing in expertise to benchmark current research outputs and advise on strategies for achieving world standard research outcomes and publications (in terms of high quality and quantity) across BFOEs; and
- d. investment in research management systems and research culture.

Avondale has benchmarked research performance and investment with several universities including ACU, Notre Dame and the University of Canberra. Benchmarking, citation and impact analysis has been supported by the expertise of Research Strategies Australia who also assisted with an ERA-type benchmarking analysis to guide Avondale's research planning and performance assessment [Annual Research Reports].

Strategies to improve researcher capability and research capacity include:

- research-focused roles;
- workload models that prioritise research;
- revision of research-related policies to include capacity-building strategies;
- funding to incentivise research seed grants through the University's Research Centres; and

• training programs to increase competitive grand funding success.

#### Strategies for improving research training

Avondale has a longstanding commitment to support for, and improvement of, research training. The <u>Research Training Support Framework</u>, developed in 2014/2015, has been updated, reviewed and extended to provide a nationally benchmarked framework for research training activities. The **Research and Supervisor Training Program** comprises activities for researchers, HDR supervisors and HDR candidates (see <u>Appendix 4</u>). Online resources have been developed to improve research practices, HDR supervisor training and HDR candidate support. These include <u>HDR Hub</u> (a dynamic online resources for HDR candidates), and <u>Supervisor's Little Helper</u> and <u>Researcher's Little Helper</u> (Guest access password: *collaboration*). Outcomes are evaluated through candidate feedback, staff feedback and external examiner reports and feedback.

#### Priorities for improving innovation

A substantial portion of Avondale's research is in collaboration with school, healthcare, church and manufacturing industries who fund research projects. These collaborations drive innovation priorities. Priorities include: to improve sector knowledge and improve operations in schools, hospitals, welfare agencies, and church administration across the South-Pacific region. Innovation examples include: succession planning in schools, dealing with post-COVID education, and discovering how different sections of a world-wide church relate to its mission in diverse global communities.

Externally-funded research projects, including ARC and NHMRC projects in the areas of lifestyle medicine, wellbeing, and infection prevention and control prioritise innovation in response to social and public health challenges. Innovation improvements are fostered through ongoing collaborations with industry partners and advisory groups and expanded exposure to research and research management in the university sector.

### Strategies for Engaging with Industry

Avondale adopts several strategies for engaging with industry and commercialising our research. The applied and multidisciplinary nature of our research focus areas and projects means that industry engagement is a particular strength on which we aim to build. Avondale's church-related industry stakeholders represent hospitals, schools, aged care, churches, and health food production. We also look for ways to expand these networks beyond the Seventh-day Adventist church for there are many transferable outcomes in such areas as healthcare, lifestyle medicine, and education. Staff prioritise consultative processes for assessing stakeholder interests and needs as part of the industry engagement process. Alignment with the university's mission and values is equally important. Avondale prioritises research that has the potential for solving real-world problems, building long term relationships and positively impacting our communities across the South Pacific region and internationally. We also recognise the importance of developing ideas that have the potential for commercialisation or widespread translation, as illustrated in our Annual Research Reports.

Connections with industry are both national and international. A case study of this is Avondale's industry engagement in health (06) and wellbeing. An evidence-based lifestyle and wellbeing program has been developed in our Lifestyle Medicine and Health Research Centre and has been adopted by schools, universities, and local government regions both nationally and internationally. Industry partners include:

National		International		
• L S N	Schools: Avondale School, Barker College, Taree Christian College Local Councils: Lake Macquarie, Sunshine Coast, Adelaide City, Maroondah Hunter New England Health Network	•	Universities: La Sierra (USA), Andrews (USA), Ava Maria School of Law (USA), Pacific Union College (USA), Southern University (USA), Hong Kong Adventist College. American College of Lifestyle Medicine Rochester Lifestyle Medicine Local Councils: Riverside County (CA, USA), Lakes District (NY, USA), Lee District (FL, USA)	

Professor Brett Mitchell AM recently received Australia Day Honours for his work in infection control. He and his research teams have extensive industry collaborations, for example:

- Central Coast Local Health District (<u>https://cleenstudy.com/</u>)
- Hunter Medical Research Institute (<u>https://hmri.org.au/research/infection-research-program</u>)
- Royal Melbourne hospital
- Sydney Adventist Hospital (<u>https://happenstudy.com/</u>)
- Cabrini Health
- Bushlands Health (aged care)
- GAMA Healthcare Australia (<u>https://wp.avondale.edu.au/news/2022/09/23/industry-invests-in-brett/</u>) (research contract)
- MEZRIT (research contract) (<u>Resources Mezrit</u>)
- TimerTag Pty Ltd
- NSW Clinical Excellence Commission
- Australasian College of Infection Prevention and Control
- Australian College of Nursing
- Sigma Nursing

Avondale's work in education is closely connected to Adventist Schools Australia and other schools in Australia and New Zealand and partner tertiary institutions in Papua New Guinea and the Pacific Islands. Research conducted on behalf of the church stakeholders is both national and international as illustrated below:

National	International
<ul> <li>Australian Union Conference of Seventh- day Adventist Family Ministries</li> <li>Adventist Development and Relief Agency Australia</li> <li>Aboriginal Torris Strait Islander Ministry</li> <li>New South Wales War Memorial</li> </ul>	<ul> <li>Office of Archives Statistics and Research, General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists</li> <li>Department of Education, General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists</li> <li>Mission Institute, Andrews University</li> <li>Adventist Human Studies Research Association</li> <li>New Zealand Pacific Union Conference of Seventh- day Adventists.</li> <li>Mana Pacific Consultants Limited, New Zealand</li> <li>New Zealand Ministry of Business Innovation and Enterprise</li> </ul>

#### 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

MMat

Signature

29/05/2024

Date

In the presence of:

AVONDALE UNIVERSITY LTD

by

Kerri-Lee Krause		Stephanie Lockton			
Full name (please print)		Witness (please print	)		
Vice-Chancellor, and Pres	ident	Executive Assistant to	o the Vice-Chancellor		
Position		Position or profession	n of witness (please print)		
Signature	6 May 2024	Signature	6 May 2024		

# Appendix 1: Strategy Refresh 2024

For each strategic priority we need to know what success looks like. We will monitor progress at the University level in the following ways. Each Department and School team will develop local plans to contribute to the priorities.							
Our priorities	1 Exceptional student experience	2 Securing our future	<b>3</b> World-class research engagement with impact	4 Staff Talent and Culture	<b>5</b> Operational efficiency and excellence		
		Spiritualit	y and Faith Engagement				
What will success look like?	KPI 1a. Top 10 in Australia for high quality student experience KPI 1b. Annual growth in spiritual engagement indicators	KPI 2. Annual average revenue growth to achieve break-even in 2027.	KPI 3. Annual growth in research quality, productivity, partnerships and high impact industry engagement.	KPI 4. Workforce plan in place to deliver fit-for-purpose workforce profile and staff engagement.	KPI 5. Operational efficiencies place to enable cost containment/savings, growth, and excellence		
How will we	Quality, mission-aligned student experience 1.1 Spiritual engagement indicator(s) – survey feedback 1.2 Student support services - overall satisfaction	Student load growth targets 2.1 Total higher education student load (EFTSL) 2.2 VET student income	Research quality and productivity 3.1 Submissions to Q1/Q2 journals 3.2 Field-weighted citation impact score (Clarivate metrics)	Staff wellbeing and engagement 4.1 Wellbeing & spiritual engagement indicator(s)- survey 4.2 Staff engagement, learning & culture survey - overall satisfaction	Operational savings/efficiencies 5.1 Increased resource utilisation 5.2 Operational efficiencies & savings		
measure success?	Student retention and success 1.3 Commencing bachelors student retention 1.4 Student satisfaction (QILT)	Financial sustainability 2.3 Total operating income 2.4 Operating deficit reduced	Research income, partnerships, impact 3.3 Research grant & contract income - annual growth 3.4 Partnerships growth & impact - SPD SDA institutions	Workforce profile 4.3 Senior academic leader ratio by Broad Field of Education 4.4 Staffing profile casual staff by BFOE	Digital investment for efficiency and excellence 5.3 Pulse software implemente to automate processes 5.4 CMS & SMS projects in train to streamline & automate		

## Appendix 2: Avondale University Learning and Teaching Plan, 2021-2024

CURRICULUM RENEWAL Design a distinctive Avondale educational offer	1.1 Design and deliver a three-year holistic curriculum renewal program that starts with a review of Avondale's current course offerings, includes stakeholder engagement and market testing, and	A suite of accredited, nested and short-	
that builds on key strengths and is student- centred, mission-aligned, innovative and relevant to diverse student learning needs.	<ul> <li>benchmarks with existing curriculum renewal good practice.</li> <li>1.2 Develop and implement Avondale's Learning and Teaching Principles to inform online and blended curriculum and assessment design, delivery and evaluation across disciplines.</li> <li>1.3 Facilitate diverse learner pathways through an innovative, sustainable approach to nested and short-course offerings that support lifelong, life wide learning.</li> </ul>	course offerings, known as the Avondale offer, that is characterised by quality, flexibility, market appeal, curriculum innovation, coherent Learning and Teachin Principles and Avondale's distinctive values-driven approach.	
QUALITY ENHANCEMENT AND ASSURANCE Create a learning environment that is known fr authentic, faith-based best practice in learning and teaching, benchmarked against recognise sector standards and underpinned by a culture of scholarship, quality and consistency.	to ensure that academic governance processes facilitate institutional quality assurance and enhancement.	supported by fit-for-purpose quality	
WELLBEING, SUSTAINABILITY AND COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT Promote student and staff wellbeing through Avondale's holistic commitment to Christ- centred education for the public good.	ITY ENGAGEMENT         approach to promote, monitor and report on student and staff wellbeing needs and initiatives, in curricular, co-curricular and extra-curricular contexts.           d staff wellbeing through commitment to Christ-         3.2 Develop and implement a strategy for monitoring and reporting on staff and student public scholarship and civic engagement activities related to learning and teaching, particularly in co-curricular settings.		

# Appendix 3: Avondale University Research Plan, 2021-2024

AVON	IDALE UNIVERSITY RESEARCH PLAN ON A PAGE, 2021	- 2024		
Strategic Overview: The Three-Year Vision for Research at Avondale, 2021-2024				
Conduct applied, multidisciplinary research that addresses real- world challenges through strategic partnerships with industry, government, and community.	<ul> <li>Key deliverables over three years</li> <li>1.1 Audit and document current and prospective industry, community and government research partners. Use this baseline to shape a 5 year strategy to: <ul> <li>a) further develop industry, government and community partnerships; and</li> <li>b) increase Category 2 and 3 research income, including a focus on diversity of income sources.</li> </ul> </li> <li>1.2 Conduct an Engagement and Impact Assessment Performance (NISA) initial self- assessment, followed by external validation and annual update.</li> <li>1.3 Increase collaborative research partnerships with researchers from universities, both nationally and internationally, prioritising Avondale's chief investigator status.</li> </ul>	What will success look like? Increased Category 3 research income with quantifiable improvements in industry partnerships and performance on engageme and impact metrics.		
Achieve research outcomes that are benchmarked at world standard or above using best practice indicators.	<ul> <li>2.1 Commission external expert(s) to conduct ERA-equivalent assessment to verify and validate existing research outcomes across BF0Es/F0Rs.</li> <li>2.2 Strengthen university research networks to conduct discipline benchmarking across each BF0E/F0R for baseline data to guide 5-year strategic research activities.</li> <li>2.3 Deliver targeted professional learning and expand national and international research networks to support researchers to publish in high quality journals.</li> </ul>	Targeted improvements in research productivity, research quality, research incor and reputation for world standard or above, applied research.		
Foster a research culture that builds staff capacity, enhances educational offerings, and invests strategically in a sustainable research future.	<ul> <li>3.1 Adopt a strategic approach to workforce planning, high citation staff appointments, staff retention and succession planning.</li> <li>3.2 Review promotion policy to provide for appropriate mix of teaching-focused, research-focused staff.</li> <li>3.3 Invest in staff capability building through promotion mentoring workshops, mentoring for early career academics and emerging research leaders.</li> </ul>	Demonstrable improvements in proportion or senior academic leaders, with a commensur increase in research investment and staff capability building, underpinned by increase overall student load income		
ligh level summary of research an	d reputational targets by December 2024			
REPUTATION 10% increase in p	submission to higher ranking journals, based on discipline standards and world standard benchmarking. performance against selected Times Higher Education Young University performance indicators, including citat competitive research grant income.			
	orities may be refreshed on an annual basis. e, with targets and accountabilities for internal use. asearch, the Research Committee and Academic Board.	AVONDALE RESEARCHERS here for good		

2024		2024	2023	2022	2021
Type of session	Description	No.	No.	No.	No.
HDR Hangout sessions	Informal get-together of HDR candidates and supervisors to share ideas, support each other and learn to be researchers	8	8	8	9
Shut Up & Write sessions	Regular academic writing periods which provide participants with sustained time for scholarly writing and instruction on writing-related issues.	8	8	9	9
Research presentations and expert panel discussions	Including external (e.g., visiting scholars, guest speakers) and internal (e.g., academic staff, HDR candidates) researchers and experts	8	10	5	7
Research skill-based workshops	Instructional workshops that guide researchers and HDR candidates to develop their writing and researcher skills	4	5	7	6
Supervisor skill-based workshops	Instructional workshops that guide researchers to develop their supervision skills of HDR candidates	4	5	6	7
Induction, orientation and re- orientation sessions for HDR candidates	Induction and orientation sessions are facilitated for new HDR candidates. Re-orientation sessions are offered to continuing candidates.	11	11	4	6
TOTAL		43	47	39	44

### Appendix 4: Avondale University's Research & Supervisor Training Program: Summary of events, 2021-2024