



2024 Mission-Based Compact Between the Commonwealth of Australia and SOUTHERN CROSS 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

[Southern Cross University \(SCU\)](#) is at the forefront of addressing national sector priorities through strategic focus areas and commitment to revolutionary learning and research with real impact. By aligning its initiatives with key national priorities, SCU is making significant strides in improving accessibility, student success, and research impact.

Education & Student Experience:

SCU's [Southern Cross Model \(SCM\)](#) has propelled the institution to lead regional universities in student success metrics, aligning with the priority of Regional Participation and Success. SCU's Student Success Metric has already grown from 71% in 2019 to 89% in 2023. The university's commitment to improving outcomes for Indigenous students resonates with national goals for accessibility. SCU's initiatives to enhance Equity & Access, such as reducing education costs for students and integrating Indigenous units across degrees, demonstrate dedication to inclusivity.

[SCU's Student Safety Action Plan](#), supports development of a university-wide culture and accountability for student safety. SCU delivers a mandatory online learning module tailored to help students and staff understand what it means to be a respectful community member and promote an inclusive and diverse culture.

SCU's focus on addressing workforce shortages, particularly in regional areas directly supports national priorities related to workforce needs. SCU celebrates the bachelors of Nursing and Education as our largest programs, and planned expansions into Health, Education, and STEM fields (e.g., Physiotherapy or Veterinary Science) reinforce its contribution to addressing regional skills gaps.

SCU publishes a [Statement on Academic Freedom](#) on its website, provides students with information about academic freedom and freedom of speech during Orientation, and encapsulates these values in its [Enterprise Agreement](#).

Research & Impact:

SCU's research strategy aligns with the national priority of Industry Engagement and Collaboration. By investing in research capabilities and support to researchers to access grants, SCU aims to achieve world-standard research. This focus on generating value for industry partners and communities resonates with national efforts to drive innovation and economic growth.

SCU emphasises aligning research strengths with student offerings, evidenced by a greater focus on research in Health and Education and launch of programs like Regenerative Agriculture, and demonstrates commitment to bridging the gap between research and teaching, to enhance the quality of education and address national skills demands.

Enabling Priorities:

SCU's planned investments in campus infrastructure, specifically the creation of permeable campuses and innovation hubs, underscore its commitment to enabling greater community and industry collaboration. Our technology modernisation strategy will improve the education and research experience while mitigating risks such as foreign interference and data breaches, and aligns with national priorities for fostering innovation and safeguarding academic integrity. A whole of organisation Work, Health and Safety transformation has commenced to ensure our processes, policies and reporting support a safe environment for all employees and students.

SCU's approach outlined in the [SCU Strategy 2030](#) document reflects its dedication to transformative education and research with real impact. By addressing national sector priorities such as regional participation, workforce needs, and industry collaboration, SCU is playing a pivotal role in shaping the future of Australian higher education.

Strategies for Improving Equality of Opportunity in Higher Education

SCU is a regional university serving proportionately larger numbers of students from targeted equity groups (measured by participation rates at SCU vs the sector average).

Outreach to regional students

SCU has several outreach programs to support regional and remote area students. These include:

- Southern Cross Advance School Engagement Program offers regional school students (Yrs 9 - 12) within our regions a coordinated suite of engagement activities designed to raise awareness about SCU courses and provides opportunities to experience aspects of programs through engaging and interactive sessions.
- Scholars Program for Year 11 is offered to partner schools in campus regions, successful completion of the unit leads to guaranteed entry, with credit towards approved SCU courses. Units are fee-free, available on-campus and online and can culminate in a Scholarship for the student.

- UniStart for Schools is a free program delivered for Year 12 in participating regional schools, during school time, by school teachers, facilitated by SCU. Successful completion leads to guaranteed entry.

Degree Pathways

A number of enabling, pathway programs support the development of academic skills required to succeed in Bachelor level programs, where a student does not reach academic entry requirements or is returning to study. These include:

- Preparing for Success – this flexible, fee-free course teaches students skills needed to succeed at university and progress towards a new career.
- Transition to Uni - this fee free, intensive preparatory course is for recent school leavers and current ATAR-eligible Year 12 students. The course develops academic literacies students need at university, through interactive online modules and classes and assessment preparation.
- Diplomas - The University also offers eight AQF 5 level diplomas that provide a pathway into a university degree in a range of disciplines. If students do not have a suitable qualification for direct entry into a specialist degree program, they can study one of our 1 year Diplomas.

SCU has seen enrolment growth across 2022/23 for its Diplomas (21.9%) and the Preparing for Success programs (6.6%), as well as completion rate growth – 24% and 31.8% respectively.

Disability Learning Adjustments

SCU is committed to providing an accessible and inclusive study environment for students with disability. This means that SCU will make reasonable adjustments (for example, changes to assessment methods, curriculum delivery or the provision of assistive technology) to enable a student with a disability to participate in their course on the same basis as a student without a disability, where adjustments do not compromise the safety, wellbeing or academic standards. The University applies measures such as the number and success of students with adjustment plans, to continue to improve accessibility and inclusivity.

Indigenous Australian Student Support

The Indigenous Australian Student Services (IASS) unit provides a wide range of information, advice, and support to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students in a culturally appropriate, safe, friendly, and supportive environment. The University has one of the highest rates of participation of First Nations people in the sector (4.56% in 2022 vs sector average of 2.14%).

Strategies for Improving Teaching and Learning

SCU's [strategic priorities](#) for teaching and learning are to deliver outstanding teaching and learning couched in an inspired student experience.

Curriculum Delivery

A significant change to curriculum delivery has been made at SCU with the purpose of improving student performance and retention. Over 2021-2023 the University has fully implemented the SCM, which is an innovative teaching model of six-week blocks delivering more focused, engaged

and active learning approaches, with greater assessment authenticity. The SCM has uplifted student outcomes compared with the traditional model baseline year of 2019:

- Success rate has incr. 17% to 87.9% in 2023;
- Mean GPA has incr. 0.87% to 4.59 in 2023;
- Absent fail rate has decr by 43% to 3.2% in 2023;
- Early withdrawn rate decr. by 35% to 9.2% in 2023.

The SCM has improved overall equity group outcomes; success rates increased as follows:

- for low SES students incr. by 7.6% to 80.5%;
- for Indigenous students incr. by 10% to 74%;
- for students registered with a disability incr. by 8% to 75%;
- for students in regional/remote areas incr. by 5% to 83%;
- for students who are first-in-family to attend university incr. by 3.7% to 79.2%;
- for students from non-English speaking backgrounds incr. by 6% to 81%.

Scholarship of Learning and Teaching

The University's faculty are continuously engaged with scholarly activity, facilitated through our [Scholarship of Learning and Teaching \(SoLT\) Framework](#). The SCM is evaluated through numerous scholarship of teaching and learning projects which examine outcomes for students and explore the approaches taken during implementation; examples can be reviewed in the [Southern Cross University Scholarship of Learning and Teaching Paper Series](#).

Student Support

SCU has support services and initiatives that aim to improve student performance, focussing on students identified at most risk. These include:

- Commencing students: extensive [orientation and transition to uni programs](#), and a First Year Success Program applying engagement and assessment success data to trigger interventions;
- Students in 'high fail' units: a [Peer Assisted Learning](#) program
- Students with previous fail grades a tiered service/intervention approach
- Indigenous Students: the [Indigenous Australian Student Support Service](#)
- International Students: [International Student Support Service](#)
- Students with a disability: [study adjustment planning and support](#)
- Students experiencing hardship: [counselling](#), financial support, special consideration and fee remission
- All students: Learning Coaches, [staff to student](#) and [self-help](#) offerings.

Quality Measures

- **Student Satisfaction** as monitored through internal unit quality measures ([iQILT](#)) and the unit satisfaction survey ([SCU Unit Feedback](#)). The University benchmarks against national QILT, Student Experience, Course Experience and Destination Surveys and the International Student Barometer.
- **Student performance indicators** enable diagnosis of cohort performance with results reported and analysed at the *Academic Standards and Quality Committee* (e.g.

attrition/retention, completions, and student achievement trends) and at *Admissions Committee* (including English Language Proficiency Equivalency Assessments, Articulation Agreements, benchmarking for non-standard admissions etc.).

- **Graduate Outcomes:** full-time graduate outcomes (e.g. employment rates, average salaries in the [Graduate Outcomes Survey \(GOS\)](#)).
- **Employability:** ensuring consistency between University courses and industry expectations through NPILF initiatives, strengthening Work Integrated Learning placements, internships and other professional learning.

Strategies for Improving Research, Research Training, and Innovation

Research and innovation

Key priorities for research and innovation:

Enhance the University's Research and Ranking: improve research in the two-digit Field of Research (FOR) codes for Engineering, Health, and Education.

Measures include: by an increase from one to three subject rankings by 2030.

Increase Quality and Impact of Research: significantly improve research reputation, funding, international co-authorships, and industry-generated income. Promote industry engagement in research to offer researchers and Industry improved opportunities to collaborate on future research projects, and more closely align research to address key environmental, social and practical challenges. Research Impact Clusters have been established to better align research with industry needs.

Measures include a 10% increase signed research funding agreements international co-authorships an industry generated income, an increase of 5% in Q1 journals and a continued FWCI of 1.5.

Expand International Research Collaboration: strengthen international research Measures include a 10% increase international co-authorship.

Research training

SCU prioritises the development of researchers and research candidates through a research excellence framework that rewards high performance and supports researcher development. Key elements are:

Industry engagement: a PhD internship program to ensure candidates acquire transferrable skills that are recognised in the workplace; increased focus on industry co-funded PhD stipends to develop HDR that addresses industry needs; allow industry representatives as part of HDRT supervisory panels.

Measures include:

increased industry engagements (aim for 10% of all future HDR research projects directly linked to industry), industry funding (10% of our higher degree research stipends are industry co-funded),

industry co-supervision of HDR (at least 10% of all HDR students have an industry co-supervisor), co-publications with industry actively promoted and encouraged.

Revision of rules and procedures: revision of PhD admission rules to focus on enrolling high quality research candidates with a strong academic track record; stringent confirmation of candidature procedures, in-candidature review 12 months post confirmation and 6 monthly progress reports; and revisions to examination procedures to ensure the integrity and robustness of the examination process.

Measures include improved completion rates so that 50% of all completion rates are timely completions, and attrition rates are reduced to be less than 30% of new enrolments.

Additional Training mandatory research integrity training and attendance of orientation for candidates, targeted supervisor training for different levels of supervisory and research experience.

Improving Equality of Opportunity: improved pathways to assist Indigenous candidates' direct entry into PhD programs. Increase the value of stipends and research funding for Indigenous candidates. SCU will seek to improve the number of Indigenous candidate PhD applications, completion and attrition rates.

Research Commercialisation

SCU aims to increase commercial revenue by 15% with the following activities:

- regular National Commercial Short Courses on Acid Sulfate Soils for Industry and Government;
- regular advertising in industry media to promote SCU analytical services;
- trade booths at major industry conferences including soil carbon, National Soil Science, Biochar, compost and agricultural;
- active memberships on boards and industry working groups: ASPAC (Australasian Soil Plant Analysis Council), ANZBIG (Australian New Zealand Biochar Industry Group), SoilCare, AORA (Australian Organic Recycling Association), Landcare groups and SSA (Soil Science Australia).

Strategies for Engaging with Industry

Connectivity and collaboration with Industry remains a key element of SCU's overarching strategy. The establishment of a series of platforms that act as focal points to develop coherence and critical mass will continue to be at the centre of our approach to engaging with industry. As a smaller university in regional Australia, the University harnesses its convening power with industry, government and community to form collaborations and to guide activity that applies our research and education strengths to create positive impact.

The establishment and development of cross-cutting [Research Impact Clusters](#) will continue to act as a primary focal point for collaboration with industry and communities. The Clusters act as strategic platforms that enable multidisciplinary research collaborations in domains of direct relevance to industry: [Zero Waste](#), [Harvest to Health](#) and [Catchments, Communities, and Coasts](#). Further Research Impact Clusters are in development centred on our expertise in health and education. Our Higher Degree Research internship program will expand, leveraging existing collaborations with industry and community held by each Cluster, whilst further strengthening our capability and impact in these domains.

In concert with industry needs, the Clusters have spun out specific initiatives that respond directly to known challenges. The Zero Waste cluster generated the [ReCirculator](#) (a regional circular economy accelerator) and Harvest to Health secured a [partnership with AgriFutures](#) to develop the Hemp industry in concert with existing industry stakeholders.

SCU continues to work closely with industry partners, across all disciplines, as a central part of realising [our purpose](#). This includes a strategic partnership with [Mountain Blue](#) Farms to establish new tissue culture capabilities, our collaboration with local STEM firms (e.g. [Richmond Dairies](#)) to co-design new engineering curriculum, through to extensive engagement with the natural products sector to consider how the University can support its development through our research and analytical capabilities.

The recovery from the 2022 catastrophic floods in the Northern Rivers continues to provide a strategic focus for our engagement with government and industry. Through a landmark partnership with NSW Government's Reconstruction Authority, the Living Lab: Northern Rivers will be expanded to enable engagement, dissemination and adoption of research and creative practice work generated in collaboration with our founding partner University of Technology Sydney and other universities in Australia, the US and the UK. [The Living Lab: Northern Rivers](#) acts as a point for connection for industry and community in the Northern Rivers, from the shopfront in Lismore and into the Northern Rivers in partnership with local and state governments.

The Immersive Industry Engagement Project will build on the work undertaken on the introduction of the Southern Cross Model to define an overarching Industry Engagement Framework for the University. Delivered over two years, the Project will define a framework for how each Faculty strategically connects with Industry as part of a strategic dialogue, rather than isolated project consultations. The Project will also act as a vehicle for embedding activities piloted through the National Priority Industry Linkage Fund (NPILF) as we reach the end of the initial phase of NPILF.

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



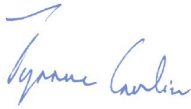
Signature

29/05/2024

Date

SIGNED for and on behalf of
SOUTHERN CROSS UNIVERSITY

by



Full name (please print)

PROFESSOR TYRONE CARLIN

Position

VICE-CHANCELLOR

Signature

In the presence of:

Annie Zorzo

Witness (please print)

Acting Executive Assistant to the Vice Chancellor

Position or profession of witness (please print)



Signature