



## 2024 Mission-Based Compact Between the Commonwealth of Australia and UNIVERSITY OF NOTRE DAME AUSTRALIA

### 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

The [Objects of The University of Notre Dame Australia](#) are:

- provision of university education, within a context of Catholic faith and values
- provision of an excellent standard of:
  - teaching, scholarship, and research
  - training for the professions
  - pastoral care for its students.

Following the completion of our strategic planning process, our new Strategic Plan 2022-2026 continues to be implemented with solid progress made. Our five pillars - Universality, Education for the Common Good, Transformative Research, Integrating Practice and Knowledge, and Integral Human Development - will ensure Notre Dame continues its journey of uniqueness, impact, and excellence. Our goals are bold and achieving them requires discipline and vigour. Our ambition is to serve society through educating and forming our students so they can in turn serve the communities in which they live and work.

With campuses in Fremantle, Sydney and Broome, Notre Dame provides both national reach and operates in distinctive local contexts, which attract and serve diverse students and communities. The University's Strategic Plan 2022-2026 sets out an exciting agenda to consolidate its role as a leading Catholic University, which forms students as whole people who are ready to act and have a positive impact in the world. As an academic community, we encourage rigorous enquiry, debate, and discussion. We believe in seeking truth; best achieved when, as Newman's motto states - the "heart speaks unto heart".

For 2024, our priorities continue to be student-focused as their needs (pastoral, support, and learning practices) continue to evolve and change. Our collective desire is to maintain an outstanding quality of education and build the reputation of Notre Dame's graduates as ethical leaders, critical thinkers, and problem solvers, and continue to be recognised by employers and the wider community. We take great pride in educating the whole person – the academic, social, physical, and spiritual dimensions – and are deeply committed to supporting our students to be the best version of themselves.

With the sector undergoing review and renewal, several of the University's current strategic initiatives, guided by our Strategic Plan 2022-2026, align with the broad direction of the Federal Government's priorities and will be useful in shaping the University's response to the Australian Universities Accord Final Report. We will continue to refine and focus our educational offering to where impact can be delivered whilst leveraging our strengths in nursing, teaching and allied health.

As a Catholic University, Notre Dame brings a unique lens to the Australian research landscape as we face the challenges of today's world and work towards developing a better future. Our bold research vision looks to investigate the causes and cures, the problems and solutions, the issues and truths of the world in which we live. We continue to focus on a transformative research agenda, so that our output of research is inspiring and impactful, and internal organisation and controls are supportive and enabling. We will continue to introduce new undergraduate and postgraduate programmes of work for an ever-changing market demand.

### **Protecting Academic Freedom and Freedom of Speech**

Academic and intellectual freedom lies at the heart of our understanding and definition of what it means to be a university, taking inspiration from centuries of tradition and practices, and also enunciated so clearly in the *Idea of a University* by John Henry Newman in 1852 when he outlined his vision of a Catholic university of Ireland.

The founders of The University of Note Dame Australia took their inspiration from the works of Newman. That commitment to intellectual inquiry remains at the heart of our educational philosophy today. Those underpinning academic and intellectual freedoms are a vital element of any university community seeking to foster learning, discovery, meaning and the common pursuit of truth. For the University of Notre Dame

Australia, those freedoms relate directly to our heritage, tradition and identity and help us to maintain a healthy and reflective intellectual environment within the academy of learning.

The University's *Statement: Academic Freedom and Policy: Protecting Academic Freedom and Freedom of Speech*, published widely, are reviewed cyclically by the Board of Directors. Most recently, the University's Board Governance Review (conducted by Peter Forster of The Consultancy Bureau in 2023) includes findings regarding the University's compliance with Standard 6.1.4 of the *Higher Education Standards Framework (Threshold Standards) 2021* which provides that "the governing body takes steps to develop and maintain an institutional environment in which freedom of intellectual inquiry is upheld and protected ...".

An extract from *The Consultancy Bureau Board Governance Report – University of Notre Dame Australia, February 2024*, (pages 5 and 6) follows:

*The Annual HESF Compliance Statement contains comprehensive evidence to confirm that this standard is achieved. University policy in this area is appropriate and is reflected in many UNDA procedures and codes of conduct. This review offers some additional confirming comments to build on the evidence provided.*

*The University does have a comprehensive policy to protect academic freedom and freedom of speech reflected in the Academic Freedom Statement. The foundation ethos of this Catholic University (in the context of the Catholic intellectual tradition) is the search for truth and to uphold freedom of intellectual inquiry. The protection of freedom of intellectual enquiry is prominent in UNDA's values and reflected in the Board's actions.*

*There are two out of many examples, where the governing Board of Directors takes a lead in maintaining an institutional environment where there is a genuine commitment to freedom of intellectual inquiry being upheld and protected and these include:*

- *This University's decision, as one "that welcomes people of all faiths or none", to provide a forum in the recent "Voice Referendum" for any and all interested parties to utilise the University's facilities to promote and enhance understanding of their particular viewpoints. To the great credit of this University, unlike many, who would purport to adhere to this standard, UNDA chose a deliberate strategy of providing an educative forum for all stakeholders to present and explore their viewpoints in a genuine reflection of an institutional environment which encourages freedom of intellectual inquiry and expression and a search for truth.*
- *Another concrete example of an initiative by the Board of Directors, supported by the Trustees annually, is the commitment to "Abraham Day", where leaders of Jewish, Muslim and Roman Catholic faiths can present their viewpoints around a particular theme selected each year in a genuine spirit of freedom of intellectual inquiry and the tolerance and professionalism to seek to understand those with different viewpoints."*

### **Foreign Interference Risks**

While the University's current exposure to foreign interference risks is considered low (noting for example our research areas of focus and international engagement activities do not cover high risk areas such as defence/technology research, nor high risk countries such as Iran), the University has embedded foreign interference risks into institutional policies and practices, including those relating to due diligence. A dedicated group with broad representation coordinates the identification, review, reporting and assessment of foreign interference risks across the University. 2024 reporting of progress toward implementation of the *Guidelines to Counter Foreign Interference in the Australian University Sector* was submitted to the Department through a requested "pulse survey" on 2 May 2024. Annual reporting of progress in implementing the Guidelines is provided to Audit and Risk Committee. Further, the University notifies arrangements and prospective arrangements with foreign entities through the Foreign Arrangements Scheme (FAS).

## Strategies for Improving Equality of Opportunity in Higher Education

Widening participation is an essential tenet of Notre Dame's mission. The commitment to improving the equality of opportunity to higher education aligns with our strategic commitment to Universality, Education for the Common Good and Integral Human Development. Given Notre Dame's recent receipt of HEPPP, and the focus of the Australian Universities' Accord on significantly increasing equity participation in higher education, our focus is to invest in transformative, large-scale approaches that have a lasting impact on our students' experiences.

In the University's [Strategic Plan 2022-2026](#), Notre Dame has committed to:

- Annual increases in the enrolment of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students (15% p.a.), students from low socioeconomic backgrounds (5% p.a.), and students from regional and remote areas (1% p.a.).
- Enhancing the education pathways for students from rural and remote areas, students from low socioeconomic backgrounds, and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students.
- Holistically enriching our core business focus of student retention to further enhance student success and experience within our cohorts.
- Annual increases in the number of graduating students from underrepresented cohorts.
- Engaging marginalised communities through relationships, partnerships, and scholarship opportunities.

The University's Student Equity Framework 2022-2024 and annual HEPPP Activity Plan provide mechanisms to ensure that equity initiatives are aligned to targets, with outcomes tracked, monitored, and measured. To further support effective and coordinated student equity work, future Student Equity Frameworks will consider all identified cohorts and funding sources (including HEPPP, ISSP, DSP and HECG). Governance oversight is provided by the Student Equity Advisory Committee. Notre Dame is finalising the development of its Equity Evaluation Framework aligned with the Student Equity in Higher Education Evaluation Framework. As such, the University is well placed to effectively evaluate and report upon grant-funded equity initiatives.

Notre Dame intends to use funding from its \$6.3M 2024 Higher Education Continuity Grant (HECG) to invest in additional initiatives that aim to effectively address barriers to access, participation, retention, and success for students from under-represented and educationally disadvantaged backgrounds through the development of an Equity Plan. For example:

- Additional enabling courses and pathways, including for First Nations students.
- Enhanced belonging and engagement services and support.
- Establishment of equity employment/work-based degree models, where university learning is integrated within the work environment. This provides students with financial support during their study and enables them to access a network of professional support and mentors.
- Expansion of the Rural and Remote delivery model, where learning is delivered through a combination of online learning and intensive 'on campus' blocks at remote and regional campuses and/or clinical school.
- Transition pedagogy and investment in programs that attract students from under-represented cohorts.

### **Student Safety**

- Notre Dame has developed and implemented specific policies and procedures to guide the University's response to disclosures of sexual harm.
- Specially trained Respect Officers have been appointed across all Notre Dame Campuses to provide trauma-informed case management for students who have been impacted by sexual harm, or family and domestic violence.
- Training for staff and students has been implemented across all campuses, including preventative training to address the social and cultural drivers of sexual harm. Workshops are delivered both online and in person to engage diverse student cohorts.

## Strategies for Improving Teaching and Learning

Excellence in learning and teaching is foundational to what we do at Notre Dame. Our Learning and Teaching Strategy 2023-2026 is underpinned by the five pillars that are the foundation of the University's broader strategy and commits us to making a positive difference by forming our students as:

- Whole people with the capability to make valuable contributions in the workforce; and
- Good citizens, exercising sound ethical judgment and harnessing the commitment, courage, and confidence to serve.

The objectives of this strategy include:

- Fostering inclusive & collaborative learning:
  - Achieve top 5 rankings in student satisfaction indicators for overall quality of educational experience, skills development, and student support.
  - Increased flexibility in curriculum architecture in which all programs have pathways and further study options.
- Delivering scholarly & interdisciplinary teaching:
  - Achieve top 5 rankings in student satisfaction indicators for teaching quality, learner engagement and student support.
  - A greater number of students will have broadened their learning experiences by pursuing interdisciplinary and nested awards.
- Enhancing universality & actively engaged practice:
  - Achieve top 5 ranking for graduate employment indicators: increased employer satisfaction with our graduates and graduates pursuing postgraduate study.
  - Providing international experiences and opportunities to students across all programs.
- Nurturing caring climates & enabling conditions:
  - Increased student satisfaction with learning resources.

Our Student Retention and Success Framework recognises the diversity of our students and the complexity of their lives. Our person-centred approach is facilitated by a whole-of-student lifecycle focus:

- Preparation & Admission
  - Our people in admissions, recruitment, and administration provide accessible, consistent, and accurate advice and information, and simple, clear, and streamlined processes that set students up for success.
- Orientation & Transition
  - Our orientation, transition activities, first-year experience and curriculum foster student aspirations, and their sense of support and belonging to facilitates engagement, retention, and future learning success.
- Enrolment & Progression
  - Our processes are clear for new and continuing students to enrol in courses. Students have access to the information that they need to make good decisions about their program structure, which supports their future aspiration, and what action to take, and when to enrol in courses.
- Engagement
  - Our culture, people, processes, curriculum, and systems proactively support, monitor, and encourage engagement and participation in both academic and co-curricular activities. This includes new learning environments, access to learning resources, use of technology and interaction with peers and academics.
- Capability & Employability.
  - An early focus on employability can motivate students to stay committed in their higher education learning journey and stay enrolled. Our focus improves student motivation, commitment and resilience helping students overcome barriers, develop capability, and complete their studies with lifelong aspirations.

This work will further be supported by Student Success and Retention Action Plans, Reconciliation Action Plan, and a Research and Evaluation Plan – and underpinned by our recently endorsed new [Student Support Policy](#).

Notre Dame seeks to improve the recognition, reward, and celebration of excellent teachers through initiatives such as clarification of criteria for promotion to highest levels; supporting communities of practice and progressively increasing numbers of academics aligned to excellence frameworks like the Professional Standards Framework.

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

The University's Strategic Plan 2022-2026 places a strong emphasis on transformative research. The plan commits us to making a positive difference by undertaking research that addresses real world challenges, improves the lives of people in our communities and impacts society for the common good. Describing the institutional evolution that must take place, the Strategic Plan 2023-2026 signals that our University must "breathe with two lungs" referring to the important dual functions of teaching and learning and research.

Over the next four years, we will focus on enhancing the University's research profile: pursuing research excellence, partnering for impact, increasing research investment, and developing the research training we offer our Higher Degree by Research students. Our [Research Plan](#) also develops three cross-disciplinary research themes that build on our current and emerging areas of strength. Our transformative research themes not only align with our Mission and Objects, but they are also distinctive in the Australian context:

- Strong Communities - Research with communities that impacts society for the common good.
- Good Lives - Research that helps people lead flourishing and integrated human lives.
- Exceptional Care - Research that advances care for all, especially for vulnerable groups.

By 2026, we intend to achieve the following outcomes:

- Excellence
  - Achieving World Standard performance in our target Fields of Research. The quality of our research is nationally and internationally recognised.
- Impact
  - Increased research engagement and impact outcomes. Significant increase in the size and scale of our partnerships and documented evidence of research impact.
- Investment
  - Increased external research income. Significant growth in philanthropic and industry partner research income.
- Training (HDR)
  - Increased high quality HDR enrolments that are supported by industry and timely completions.

To achieve our ambitious vision for Transformative Research and the outcomes we are seeking by 2026, Notre Dame will pursue four strategic priorities in research over the next four years:

- Investing in our people
  - We will invest in our researchers, enhance our culture, and grow the capability we need to achieve our vision.
- Building on our strengths
  - We will focus on a targeted set of strategically aligned fields of research and champion our Transformative Research Themes.
- Partnering for impact
  - We will forge ambitious research partnerships, nationally and internationally, to expand our transformative impact.
- Enhancing our research environment
  - We will build a dynamic research environment across the University that drives performance.

Over the next four years we will closely monitor our performance across a range of lead indicators to help us track our progress. We will assess our performance using a range of best practice indicators for research quality, engagement and impact, external investment, and research training (HDR).

## Strategies for Engaging with Industry

Since our inception, Notre Dame has prided itself on providing professional experiences in authentic environments, to ensure that graduates are work-ready and equipped with the necessary skills to excel. Partnerships are especially critical to the University as the provision of an excellent standard of training for the professions, forms part of the Objects of the University.

Alongside the Objects, underpinning significant parts of the Strategic Plan 2022-2026 is the capability to develop and extract value from a range of business and industry partnerships. External partnerships will become increasingly important as the University, and the sector more broadly, adapts to the changing nature of education and the needs of its local communities. These are already issues identified in the Universities Accord Review.

Further, developing a range of relationships and structured activities with health and other industry partners is critical for the placement, research, and other associated expectations of both undergraduate and post graduate students. We believe that complementing university learning and theoretical knowledge with the opportunity to apply knowledge through practical, real-world experience delivers better personal and professional formation.

Our ambition is to be recognised as a University to partner with, that combines global industry connections and experience with world-class research and commercialisation potential to drive innovation and enrich individual goals through the connections and experiences they offer.

In our new Strategic Plan 2022-2026, we have committed to grow our industry partnerships and develop opportunities that benefit our partners as well as our students. We have developed an industry engagement strategy to strengthen our employer partnerships in all fields of study across a wide range of partners. Our Catholic partners will remain an important focus of engagement activities.

Alumni and employers will play an important role to support access across industry, all levels of Government, not-for-profit and community sectors. We are growing the number of engaged and connected alumni to the University, and to implementing a whole-of-University alumni mentoring program for our students to support them with career opportunities, networking, and career advice. A new alumni engagement strategy has been developed which includes expanded mentoring and volunteering opportunities, alumni chapters, events and activities and improved communication.

Our industry engagement activities are also guided and informed by several national Advisory Boards. Operating across disciplines such as medicine, nursing and midwifery, and law, they serve as a conduit between the University, industry, employers, and professions.

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



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Signature

29/05/2024

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Date

SIGNED for and on behalf of  
The University of Notre Dame Australia  
by

In the presence of:

**Prof. Francis Campbell**

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**Embrence Jarman**

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Full name (please print)

Witness (please print)

**Vice Chancellor**

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**Executive Assistant to the Vice Chancellor**

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Position

Position or profession of witness (please print)



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Signature

Signature