



2024 Mission-Based Compact Between the Commonwealth of Australia and the University of Southern Queensland

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 University of Southern Queensland (UniSQ) vision is to be renowned for innovation and excellence in education, student experience, research, and engagement ([UniSQ Strategic Plan 2021-2025](#)). Our mission is to build on our strengths as Australia's leading regional university, and realise our vision by creating and sharing knowledge, transforming lives, and solving problems that matter to our world.

In the Compact period, the University will continue to focus on six key performance areas as outlined in the UniSQ Strategic Plan 2021-2025 and reported in the University's latest [Annual Report](#):

1. Growing our student population and broadening participation in higher education.
2. Being the University of choice across our regions (for staff and students).
3. Delivering an outstanding student experience and outcomes.
4. Growing the quality and quantity of research outcomes.
5. Contributing to the sustainable development of our communities.
6. Maintaining our capacity for investment into our future.

In relation to each of these areas, the University measures its performance against Key Result Indicators (KRIs). Critical quantitative measures include student population growth and participation, student experience and employment outcomes (QILT surveys), student progression, retention, and completion rates, research quality standards, research income and outputs, international rankings, and a range of diversity and sustainability metrics.

The University has implemented policy, procedures, and processes across the organisation to ensure an appropriate response to national and sector priorities, and will focus in 2024 on continuing to address the following important areas:

- *Addressing workforce and skill needs*

The University is addressing this priority area through the development of flexible learning and industry-relevant programs. Select initiatives in 2024 include the major roll-out of the

University's flexible academic calendar and embedding Work Integrated Learning (WIL) across our programs.

- *Ensuring student and staff safety*

The University's *Safer Communities Action Plan* for students provides a map for implementing the University's 'Safer Communities' approach over the next three years (2023 – 2025). Over the course of 2024, there will be a focus on educational and awareness training, as well as systemic changes.

- *Countering foreign interference*

Implementation of the University's approach to National Security, inclusive of due diligence processes, staff education and communication activities.

- *Cyber and data security*

In accordance with the University's [Cyber Security Strategy 2021-2025](#) plan, there will be continued investment in mitigating cyber security threats and vulnerability and maturing our cyber security posture. This will involve continued expansion and use of external threat intelligence services to implement real-world informed, protective and preventative controls before they are experienced in our environment.

- *Upholding freedom of speech and academic freedom*

The University's Academic Board led the development of the [Academic Freedom and Freedom of Speech Policy](#), approved by the University Council in December 2020. The University remains committed to the principles outlined in policy and to continued integration across university business.

Strategies for Improving Equality of Opportunity in Higher Education

UniSQ has a strong history of nurturing aspiration for university study and creating pathways for students from under-represented and educationally disadvantaged backgrounds, in partnership with the communities of Southern Queensland. Our cohort demographic and outcomes data demonstrate UniSQ's track record of contributing to improving access and participation in Higher Education and the 2024 Higher Education Continuity Guarantee Equity Plan outlines major enabling initiatives that continue this work in partnership with community.

Guided by the Equity Plan, UniSQ will expand existing initiatives that focus on strengthening access and participation of underrepresented (equity) students including: extending financial supports for students from low-SES backgrounds; enhancing career education outreach to inner and outer regional schools and communities; supporting students as they transition into university; increasing support for current students' health and wellbeing; undertaking significant curriculum redevelopment and transformation of the academic calendar to reflect universal design for learning; improving transport and other facilities to assist regional students and those from low-SES backgrounds.

Targets

To further enhance equality of opportunity, UniSQ's Strategic Plan (2020-2025) includes the following targets:

- Increase access and participation rates to 4.5% First Nations students and 46% students from a regional or remote background. These opportunity targets are complemented by outcomes targets:
 - improve the nine-year cohort completion rate for undergraduate students to 60%; and
 - improve student retention to 85% and progression rates to 88%. The University's [Education Plan \(2023-2025\)](#) has three key and three enabling strategies that support achievement of these targets.

How they will be achieved:

- Promoting and supporting a wide range of equity scholarships and bursaries to increase access for students from low-SES backgrounds, and rural and remote students.
- Extending partnerships with primary and secondary schools in the region to build skills and nurture aspirations of students from under-represented backgrounds, including regional, rural and remote and First Nations Australians.
- Implementing career education focussed programs for local primary and secondary school students, parents and carers, educators and community members from underrepresented backgrounds.
- Dedicated senior executive responsible for developing and nurturing relationships with school principals and their executive teams. Regular engagement between school principals and members of UniSQ's Vice Chancellor's Executive team.
- Provision of accessible, inclusive, and holistic support during the decision-making process, transition into and throughout university, including health and wellbeing support, academic skills development, career education and peer programs to support a range of student needs.
- Offering flexible learning options underpinned by the new academic calendar, including in pathways programs, to accommodate the needs of students with disabilities, caring responsibilities, and from low-SES backgrounds.
- Ensuring oversight, coordination and monitoring with other providers through collaboration with the Queensland Widening Participation Consortium and, within UniSQ, through the UniSQ Student Success and Retention Committee and new Future Students Working Party

How they will be measured:

UniSQ is implementing the [Student Equity in Higher Education Evaluation Framework](#) to measure representation and participation of First Nations students, students from a low socio-economic background, regional and remote students and students who have a disability and/or are first in family.

Strategies for Improving Teaching and Learning

Three of the strategies in the [University's Education Plan \(2022-2025\)](#) focus on improving teaching and learning, embedded support and enhancing the student experience:

- Provision of positive and flexible student experiences, including diverse curricular and co-curricular opportunities, and extended learning and professional development opportunities for all students.

Achieved by:

Proactive, timely and personalised student support services; university-wide approach to proactive student success advising including timely application to enrolment conversion support; embedding support for learning in discipline content; and creation of culturally inclusive experiences for First Nations students and other underrepresented cohorts.

Measured by:

Improved performance outcomes by cohort.

- Maximise learning opportunities and support for students through innovative learning and teaching practices.

Achieved by:

Strengthening assessment design and feedback; establishing a robust virtual learning environment with relevant pedagogies to support accessibility and learning opportunities

for all learners; extending existing Recognition of Prior Learning approaches; strengthening the first year experience through curricular and co-curricular activities and embedding employability, international student mobility and work-integrated learning across all programs; embedded advising within courses to enable early and personalised intervention for students who may benefit from additional support

Measured by:

Analyses of cohort performance; impact of revised first year initiatives, cohort access to new and improved employability and WIL opportunities.

- *Improved* first year student experience and retention:

Achieved by:

Clearer pathways and improved credit options for commencing students (admissions transparency); continuation of first year curriculum reform in all undergraduate courses and proactive student success advising (from application to successful enrolment in second year via a data-driven, timely, personalised series of contacts with students to offer information; advice, support, and mentoring including referral to specialist advice such as counselling and student welfare); proactive intervention with students who show early signs of disengagement by monitoring data from integrated systems and provision of tailored support plans; monitored student progression following the release of results, to provide support and enhance success

Measured by:

Results in internal learning and teaching and QILT surveys; and improvement in student progression, retention and completion rates.

- *Improved* graduate employability:

Achieved by:

Increasing the focus on employability through enhanced industry engagement; a greater focus on employability skills and work-integrated learning opportunities in subjects; partnering with industry to create micro-credential offerings; expanding international student mobility programs; and extending the system of recognition of prior learning; proactive planning and referral for students who may need additional support for WIL.

Measured by:

Increased WIL in subjects; quantity of RPL; and improved student employability learning outcomes via the UniSQ employability cluster of questions in the QILT Student Experience Survey.

- *Improved* student engagement, progression and success:

Achieved by:

Maturing the [Students as Partners Strategy](#) which is establishing a philosophy and culture based on engaging students as partners; [creating safer communities](#); strengthening [UniSQ frontline services](#); and proactive, data-driven, personalised [student advising](#) across the lifecycle, from ensuring readiness to commence study, supporting transition in, monitored progression through and support into further employment or study pathways.

Measured by:

Increase in progression rates and subject completions; and decrease in course-level attrition.

Strategies for Improving Research, Research Training, and Innovation

The University of Southern Queensland's [Research Plan 2021-2025](#) identifies three key priorities for research, research training, innovation and industry engagement:

- Broadening our research base and increasing capacity for quality Higher Degree by Research (HDR) supervision.
- Achieving national and international recognition in our flagship areas, namely space and defence, agriculture, health and regional development.
- Strengthening and developing research partnerships to create and deliver high-quality, large-scale research projects of benefit to our communities.

UniSQ's aspirations to achieve national and international recognition in our flagship areas; to grow our HDR and Cotutelle PhD student population, international research collaborations and research capacity enabled through the implementation of a research investment plan, which provides resourcing support to implement our Research Plan.

The University has built mutually beneficial partnerships with international organisations such as the World Meteorological Organization, the German Aerospace Centre (DLR) and John Deere. Our Cotutelle Program further expands our collaborations with international universities. The research investment plan provides an avenue for targeted investment in researchers and facilities to further develop and strengthen our partnerships, ensuring national and international leadership in our flagships and other emerging areas, for example, Artificial Intelligence, and First Nations research. A First Nations Research Strategy has been developed for consultation and implementation in 2024.

The plan also supports initiatives associated with career development and capacity building, including the delivery of a specialised program for Early Career Researchers and internal Capacity Building Grants program, which form part of a suite of professional development offerings (online modules, resources, as well as face-to-face workshops) focused on career development for researchers at UniSQ.

HDR students are supported through the Researcher Development Framework, which focuses on the development of skills for research, management of research, career planning, and researcher self-care. This sits alongside a suite of professional development [webinars](#) and online [research masterclasses](#) conducted by external discipline experts.

The University's research commercialisation strategy is focussed on removing barriers to commercialisation and facilitating efforts to identify commercialisation pathways for university intellectual property. Recently, the University undertook a comprehensive re-set of its Intellectual Property (IP) Policy. The updated policy ensures alignment with current practice including substantial changes to incentivise staff engagement with industry and involvement in IP protection, and commercialisation. The policy will support a focus on the establishment and growth of an IP commercialisation pipeline and an increase in the placement of HDR students into industry. In 2024 our focus will be on developing the procedures and processes supporting the IP policy; selecting a new digital IP management tool as well as to continue to provide IP and commercialisation training to students, academic and professional staff.

These activities will be measured through program participation; proportion of research active academics; quality research outputs per academic; growth in research income; HDR enrolments and completions; HDR industry placements; number of strategic industry partnerships initiated or established; an increased number of IP disclosures, as well as an increased number of IP protection procedures and the establishment of a commercialisation pipeline.

Strategies for Engaging with Industry

Our ambition at UniSQ is to deeply understand our community and partners, identify opportunities to strengthen our connections and create sustainable value and impact. As outlined in the [UniSQ Engagement Plan 2021-2025](#), progress is not possible by remaining on the same path - our partnerships forge new directions and illuminate new ideas. We are recognised for our unique approach, by which open-minded collaboration and adaptation set us apart.

Although the communities we serve are diverse, our partnerships are focussed and underpinned by our strong expertise across our flagships. These flagships set us apart from other institutions and clearly define and shape our areas of strength: agriculture and environment; space and defence; health; and regional development. Our multifaceted approach to industry engagement includes proactive engagement with businesses and industries relevant to these strengths.

We are at the forefront of promoting flexible learning pathways and lifelong learning that cater to the diverse needs of our industries, communities, and students, including working professionals seeking to upskill or reskill. Our engagement with industry is vital, as we jointly develop and deliver programs that recognise the value of prior learning and experience, to support our industry partners in strategically developing and growing their workforce pipeline.

Motivated by the University's success in the Trailblazer Universities Program, UniSQ has embarked on a larger scale Culture Change Project, working across the University to identify and remove barriers to industry engagement and commercialisation of research. In this context, the University has undertaken surveys of industry partners and academics to uncover barriers and is reviewing its academic performance framework and workload models. The focus in 2024 will be on evaluating and implementing recommendations that have emerged from these reviews.

Some examples of successful industry engagement initiatives include:

- UniSQ's lead in the Trailblazer Universities [iLAUNCH program](#), a collaboration of three universities and more than 20 industry partners. With \$180 million to invest in industry research, commercialisation and manufacturing, the program is addressing critical gaps in Australia's sovereign space capability and accelerating development of a manufacturing sector.
- In response to the severe skill shortage in the spatial and surveying sector, UniSQ collaborated with the Queensland Spatial and Surveying Association and the Queensland Surveyors Board to co-design [industry-specific stackable microcredentials](#). These microcredentials also offer pathways for further study, ensuring that professionals in the sector have opportunities for ongoing development.
- The [UniSQ Thought Leadership Series](#) positions the University as a trusted thought leader and engages with industry, community and future students. In 2024, the series will explore topics including the impact and potential of Artificial Intelligence, advancing health in the regions and navigating the climate emergency.
- Our [collaboration](#) with the Toowoomba Chamber of Commerce has created some 50 digital transformation industry projects for students with regional businesses. Established as part of the National Priorities and Industry Linkage Fund, the partnership enables our students to engage directly with local businesses, applying their knowledge and skills to real-world digital transformation challenges and helping contribute to the digital capability of our regional business communities.
- The Bachelor of Nursing Charleville program was established in 2021, a partnership between UniSQ, South West Hospital and Health Service, and Southern Queensland Rural Health to enable students to learn and stay in the regions, thus embedding knowledge and skills in rural communities. Delivered at the Charleville Clinical Training Facility, the program follows the same curriculum delivered to students enrolled in the Bachelor of Nursing at the Ipswich and Toowoomba campuses. Six students graduated from the inaugural 2022 cohort and 15 students are enrolled in the 2024 cohort.

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
UNIVERSITY OF SOUTHERN QUEENSLAND

by

PROFESSOR KAREN NELSON

Full name (please print)

ACTING VICE-CHANCELLOR

Position



Signature

In the presence of:

DUANE ROTH

Witness (please print)

CHIEF OF STAFF TO THE VICE-CHANCELLOR

Position or profession of witness (please print)



Signature