2025-2026 Mission-Based Compact Between the Commonwealth of Australia and Australian Catholic University (ACU)

Purpose

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

Mission and Strategic Planning

ACU is committed to the pursuit of knowledge, respect for the dignity of every person, and service to the common good. As a leading, publicly funded Catholic university that is open to all, ACU's strategic plan Vision 2033 draws on the long standing Catholic intellectual tradition to enable flourishing lives, foster thriving communities, and forge an ethical future. ACU's student and community focused priorities are to:

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

ACU's institutional enabling plans support the implementation of our strategic priorities and are underpinned by a suite of strategic and operational key performance indicators. Our new Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Plan, Research Excellence and Engaged Impact Roadmap, and the Education and Student Success Plan articulate how ACU will make practical contributions towards addressing the social challenges facing Australia and our broader region. As the largest provider of teachers and health professionals in Australia, this will include developing workforce capacity and capability solutions in areas of critical need as well as translating research into applied and practical impact, and partnering with government and industry to find solutions to pressing national issues.

Through accountable leadership, safe environments, and responsive support services, ACU fosters a culture of respect and care where everyone can learn and work free from harm. ACU is committed to promoting and modelling gender equality and preventing gender-based violence and, in line with the *National Higher Education Code to Prevent and Respond to Gender-based Violence,* our whole-of-organisation plan is being developed to embed prevention, response, accountability, and support systems across our institution. ACU's Safeguarding and Student Safety Action Plan continues to uphold the Universities Australia Charter on Sexual Harm, and responds to the Australian Human Rights Commission's Change the Course report.

ACU recognises the importance of open and honest exchange of diverse views, which is central to our mission and embedded within the Catholic intellectual tradition. ACU upholds the rights of our university community to enjoy and exercise their freedom of speech, intellectual freedom and academic freedom as enshrined in ACU's Statutes (Statute 13) and current Staff Enterprise Agreement 2022-25.

ACU is committed to safeguarding its community and research by actively addressing the risks of foreign interference (FI) through strong protective measures, due diligence, a culture of transparency, and our ethical partnership approach, which includes FI Declaration Form, Declaration of Interest Policy and

Procedure, and a new training module for staff in line with our **National Security Compliance**. ACU's FI and Transparency Committee is tasked with managing specific FI matters, and the University Foreign Interference Taskforce Guidelines have been adopted to strengthen institutional protections against FI, ensuring compliance with government regulations and best practice.

ACU ensures robust data and cyber security through a multi-layered approach, which includes strong network architecture and system access controls, multi-factor authentication, and real-time threat monitoring via AARNET's Security Operations Centre. ACU is continuously striving to reduce risk levels and has developed a comprehensive suite of policies, procedures, and frameworks that govern the management, storage, and protection of such assets in line with relevant legislation, regulations, and industry standards, including the **Information Security Policy** and **Data and Information Governance Policy**.

Measures – Mission awareness, student retention, experience and satisfaction, equity participation, staff engagement, research quality and impact, financial performance, student enrolments, and research income.

Strategies for Improving Equality of Opportunity in Higher Education

Educational equity is central to our mission and is underpinned by Catholic social teaching. ACU plays an important role in working for the common good and upholding the dignity of the human person by providing equitable access to higher education. This commitment is embedded within ACU's *Vision 2033* and enacted through our **Widening Participation** Plan (WP) and the new Impact Evaluation Framework. By 2033, ACU aims to significantly increase participation rates to 3% for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, 20% for students from low socio-economic backgrounds, and 14% for students from regional and remote areas.

The **WP Plan** aims to create an inclusive, strengths-based and student-centred environment that enables Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students and students from under-represented groups to equitably access, participate, and succeed in their academic, social, and personal lives at ACU. Our new Education and Student Success Plan was approved in September 2025, and will be supported by an operational plan to ensure our goal of becoming truly student-centred in all facets is embedded across the institution. One of our key ambitions is to close the gap in retention, progression and completion between students from under-represented backgrounds and the overall student body. This will be achieved by partnering with our students to ensure their voices have a tangible impact on their education and experience, delivering teaching that is engaging, evidence-informed and inclusive, and creating learning environments where students feel included, connected, and able to meaningfully collaborate.

ACU has a coordinated and holistic approach to widening access, strengthening participation, and supporting student success:

- *Pathways and Preparation*
  - Expanding our enabling and pathway programs, including Foundation Studies, Diploma programs, and Tertiary Preparation Program, which are delivered in flexible modes to increase access for students from under-represented backgrounds.
  - Supporting the ongoing growth in offerings via **Away from Base** (AFB), a national program for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students that provides a practical option, combining online learning with intensive residential blocks.
- *Outreach and Equity Access Programs*: Expanding our outreach and access initiatives, including **Uni Step Up**, which enables students to complete two undergraduate units during Years 11 and Year 12 and gain direct entry into a cognate degree.
- *Student Success and Support*
  - Embedding targeted academic, transition, and mentoring **support** across the student lifecycle, alongside enhanced financial assistance, including our Academic Skills Advisors, Peer Assisted Study Session program (**PASS**), and **Connect2Uni**.
  - Ongoing provision of culturally safe, dedicated spaces on all ACU campuses, with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff available to support students via our **Indigenous Higher Education Units**.
  - ACU is currently in the process of updating its Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander student reporting and data management system to enhance student support by providing proactive case management, personalised intervention plans, and improved reporting capabilities.

- *Scholarships:* ACU has a comprehensive [suite of scholarships](#) to support domestic students from under-represented backgrounds, ensuring that financial costs are not a barrier to students' participation in higher education.

ACU is committed to being an Employer of Choice for [Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples](#). Our [Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples Employment Plan 2023-26](#) and new Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander ten-year plan articulate our enduring commitment to advancing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples' employment, establishing our strategic priorities and outcomes for the coming years.

Measures – Access and participation rates, success and retention rates, scholarships and bursaries, student and graduate satisfaction, graduate employment and outcomes, staff and student sense of cultural safety and belonging, and evidence of co-designed programs and curricula.

Strategies for Improving Teaching and Learning

The *Education and Student Success Plan* provides a whole-of-university approach to enhance teaching and learning through six transformation domains: Students; People; Scholarship of Teaching and Learning; Learning Experience; Infrastructure; Data and Insights. By 2033, ACU will deliver:
- A unified, values-driven and AI-personalised student experience, supporting wellbeing, formation, and lifelong success. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples' cultures and knowledges will be defined in service provision, embedded and celebrated.
- An education-research culture informed by the Catholic intellectual tradition, where scholarship is active, current, collaborative and connected to teaching, learning and professional practice.
- Modular, values-led, future-focused and AI-enhanced curriculum pathways with strong industry-relevance and an entrepreneurial mindset at its core. Digital-first, inclusive, and AI-integrated learning resources that are accessible to all learners.

Curriculum Architecture
As part of our new Education and Student Success Plan 2033 (ESSP), ACU will commence the redesign of its current curriculum architecture in 2025 to enable ACU to position itself as an institution that drives sector innovation and change, allow for the application of learning formats into the future, and cater to the diverse needs of our student cohorts.

Student Journey Mapping
The ESSP has identified a need to refresh ACU's student journey map to achieve a contemporary understanding of the ACU student journey and to determine what an ideal journey could look like in 2033, from prospective student engagement through to graduation and alumni connection. This work will provide ACU with a holistic understanding of the experiences, needs, and expectations of our diverse student cohorts. Informed by both qualitative and quantitative data, as well as research in the future of higher education and work, the mapping will be co-designed with students to identify critical touchpoints, barriers, and opportunities for improvement. The outcomes of the journey map will drive:
- Enhancement of the student experience through targeted improvements at key journey stages, aligning with the needs of the current and future learners
- Enhancement of student-centred services and support mechanisms
- Consistent and evidence-based decision making across the university
- identification of and transition towards contemporary, flexible and scalable digital and physical environments to enable students to flourish and to be recognised as a whole person.

Key strategies, interventions and student support initiatives
- [ACU Thrive](#) – Student Success Framework – provides a comprehensive, first-year learning and teaching model that enhances student transition, belonging, and progression. Using analytics, case management, and personalised interventions, Thrive identifies and supports at-risk students early, integrating wellbeing, academic skills, and peer mentoring to improve first-year retention.
- The '*Your Voice Matters'* initiative ensures the student voice directly informs curriculum design, assessment, moderation and feedback practices. Standardised feedback approaches, enhanced Canvas design, and improved communication channels support teaching consistency and student engagement.

- International Student Advisers deliver pre-departure, orientation, and first-year transition programs. These are integrated with course-level support, connecting students to coordinators, Academic Skills, and counselling services, ensuring both academic and wellbeing needs are met.

Our recent results in the QILT survey are a reflection of our focus on mission and impact, and the dedication of our academic and professional staff. ACU has ranked first in Australia for employer satisfaction and in the top 5 for student experience in the latest Employer Satisfaction Survey and Student Experience Survey.

Performance will be tracked through the QILT data, ACU's Student Evaluation of Learning and Teaching evaluations, and retention and completion rates. Governance rests with the University Learning and Teaching Committee and Academic Board, with feedback loops embedded through ACU Thrive and *Your Voice Matters* to ensure continuous improvement.

Strategies for Improving Research, Research Training, and Innovation

Consistent with our mission as a Catholic university and aligned with our *vision* for flourishing lives, thriving communities, and ethical futures, ACU's research strategy focuses on high-quality seminal/foundational and needs-based/applied research that specifically supports the socioeconomic fabric of Australia, including all aspects of our education and allied health systems. ACU has renewed its structures to ensure our research has tangible impact, providing innovative solutions to issues impacting human dignity and the common good, and advancing human flourishing in our communities, across the nation, and in our region.

Research
- ACU strives to uphold world-class research in all broad fields of education in which the university operates (as indicated by exceptional citation performance), while increasing the volume of high-quality publications by enfranchising our whole academic community, promoting interdisciplinarity, and leveraging our world-class research into teaching and learning, including training a new and larger generation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander researchers, Early Career Researchers (ECRs), and higher degree by research (HDR) students.
- Co-design with key Catholic and non-Catholic, community, government, industry and international partners in solving human flourishing challenges, with a regional focus on the Indo-Pacific to influence future United Nations Development Goals and create flourishing communities across the Global South.
- Beyond co-design, ACU will also deliver human-centred research solutions collaboratively by leveraging our partnerships across the full lifecycle of research from basic research through to commercialisation and policy impact.

Research training
Through our high-performing Graduate Research School with a growing PhD cohort, ACU remains committed to high-quality research training and integrated skill development, equipping graduates to address global challenges, create new knowledge, and contribute to society within and beyond academia. ACU will also:
- Integrate and embed Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander knowledges across HDR admissions, research and research training, and community-industry engagement.
- Partner with industry and internationally with PhD candidates acting as the connective tissue, leading to long-lasting mutually beneficial relationships within which candidates develop the skills Australia needs to be a leader in the knowledge and innovation economy.
- Expand supervision capacity to deliver expert supervision, industry engagement, global mobility, and tailored professional development that accelerates graduate and ECR success.
- Grow graduate research by strengthening partner networks, advancing our Industry PhD programs, and diversifying our PhD cohort.
- Embed a Researcher Development Framework to build research-related knowledges and capabilities across HDR and academic cohorts to enhance research culture, output, and excellence across ACU.

Innovation
ACU develops innovative solutions to issues impacting human dignity and the common good, and will:

- Invest in infrastructure critical to growing Australia's research capabilities in human factors and the care economy, for example, through the first metabolic chamber in the southern hemisphere on ACU's Melbourne Campus.
- Activate government and industry partnerships through place-based innovation, addressing issues of national and commercial significance tailored to local needs, for example, leveraging the Aikenhead Centre for Medical Discovery, and the Blacktown Exercise and Sport Technology (BEST) Hub.
- Diversify revenue beyond public funding and competitive grants through a commercialisation framework, transforming ACU by expanding our program of research through all Technology Readiness Levels.

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

Strategies for Engaging with Industry

As an enterprising university, ACU engages with industry through mission-aligned, collaborative, sustainable and mutually beneficial partnerships that are distinguished by co-developed human-focused solutions that affirm human dignity and the common good.

Engaging with industry through our Graduate Research School
- ACU is one of the sector leaders for engaging end-users in HDR, with 1 in 5 HDR students having an end-user supervisor in 2024-25, and 1 in 10 HDR students being industry-engaged.
- ACU has established sector-leading Industry PhD programs, internships and scholarships, including our flagship Vice-Chancellor's Research Training Industry Partnership Program, which co-fund PhD cohorts with mission-aligned partners to provide industry training for supervisors and students, and activate co-designed cohorts with industry, community, Catholic and non-Catholic, government partners, and across our region.

Engaging with industry through ACU Enterprise
- With our mission, vision and values at the centre, ACU works with a broad network of external partners across government, industry and community in scholarships, placements, tenders, consultancy, industry-sponsored research and intellectual property (IP) commercialisation.
- ACU has a specialised enterprise team, *ACU Enterprise*, that fosters industry collaboration, drives innovation, and supports business development, knowledge transfer and commercialisation. ACU's Enterprise Clinic supports social-enterprise and business-case development, IP/ commercial pathways, and leverage national acceleration programs (such as the CSIRO ON program).
- In 2025, ACU secured an Australia's Economic Accelerator (AEA) grant with Microsoft and BaptistCare to develop Jessie Technology for AI-supported data capture to improve aged care. This inaugural AEA grant signals our active engagement with industry partners to develop solutions to pressing national issues.
- This year, ACU also signed a landmark co-investment partnership with Breakthrough Victoria, which will translate research into life-changing products and services. The partnership will ensure that ACU's pioneering research in healthcare, sports science, aged care and education will help to transform lives and create real-world impact, with a focus on the care economy.
- ACU's Co-Lab complements this by nurturing founders and startups, providing space, training and pathways into ACU Enterprise for translation and investment readiness. The Co-Lab continues to drive real impact improving graduate outcomes and fostering skills development across the broader ACU community as well as deliver real economic impact for our local and national economies.
- ACU's Stakeholder Engaged Scholarship Unit supports community-engaged projects with not-for-profits and government, funding practical research and evaluation that deliver social impact. Our projects have impact through empathy by undertaking research that is designed to enrich lives and achieve positive outcomes for communities experiencing disadvantage and marginalisation.

Engaging with industry through our innovation precincts

- ACU's innovation precincts act as hubs for collaboration between Catholic and non-Catholic partners, local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, government, community, and industry stakeholders.
- Our innovation precincts are designed to foster interdisciplinary collaboration, accelerate the translation of research into real-world solutions, and create vibrant ecosystems that attract talent, investment, and new opportunities for local and national growth.
- Precincts also provide focal points for ACU's research and teaching nexus, ensuring students are trained in collaborative research as part of their curriculum, and benefit from solution-focused research relevant to their local and global communities.

SIGNED for and on behalf of

THE COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

by

In the presence of:

Jessica Mohr	**Rachel Searl**
Full name (please print)	**Witness (please print)**
First Assistant Secretary	**Executive Officer**
Position	**Position or profession of witness (please print)**
of the Department of Education	

Signature   **Signature**

01/12/2025

Date

SIGNED for and on behalf of

AUSTRALIAN CATHOLIC UNIVERSITY

by

In the presence of:

Professor Zlatko Skrbis	**Professor Julie Cogin**
Full name (please print)	**Witness (please print)**
Vice-Chancellor and President	**Provost and Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Academic)**
Position	**Position or profession of witness (please print)**

Signature   **Signature**

Date 11.11.2025