



2025-2026 Mission-Based Compact Between the Commonwealth of Australia and Charles Darwin 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

Charles Darwin University (CDU) is the Northern Territory's only university and one of few dual-sector institutions nationally, delivering both higher education and vocational training. Our mission is to serve the NT and northern Australia while connecting nationally and globally through campuses in Darwin, Palmerston, Alice Springs, Katherine, Nhulunbuy, Sydney, Brisbane and London, alongside expanding Indo-Pacific engagement, particularly with Timor-Leste and Indonesia.

Guided by the values of equity, excellence and impact, CDU provides transformative opportunities for students from regional, remote and First Nations backgrounds, producing job-ready and globally capable graduates. Our dual-sector model integrates vocational and higher education pathways to support flexible, lifelong learning.

Since the 2024 Compact, CDU has strengthened this mission through:

- **Danala | Education and Community Precinct:** a flagship Darwin CBD campus uniting students, industry and community.
- **School of Medicine Accreditation:** the NT's first medical school, welcoming its inaugural cohort in 2026.
- **Nhulunbuy Campus Reopening:** restoring a higher education and VET presence in East Arnhem.
- **International Growth:** consolidation of CDU London and deepened Indo-Pacific partnerships.

The [CDU Strategic Plan 2021–2026](#) defines seven goals and ten KPIs aligned with Commonwealth priorities—expanding access, strengthening First Nations leadership, enhancing teaching and research quality, and deepening industry and community partnerships. Progress is reported annually through CDU's Annual Report and government reporting frameworks.

CDU aligns with national policy priorities, including [academic freedom](#) (Walker Review), [foreign interference safeguards](#) (DFAT), [cyber security](#), and student and staff safety through its Student Safety Action Plan and gender-based violence prevention initiatives.

CDU remains responsive to community and workforce needs, delivering education “on Country” across remote regions, often as the sole provider. Partnerships with Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations ensure programs are culturally safe and locally relevant.

Looking ahead, CDU will expand its contribution to health, renewable energy, defence, advanced manufacturing and agriculture in northern Australia, while strengthening global mobility, research collaboration and transnational education through its Indo-Pacific engagement strategy.

Targets 2025–26

- Grow total enrolments toward 30,000 by 2030.
- Reach 10,000 international students by 2030.
- Increase First Nations participation to 20% by 2030.
- Expand global mobility by 25% by 2028.
- Maintain annual KPI reporting and compliance with national standards for integrity, security and safety.

Strategies for Improving Equality of Opportunity in Higher Education

CDU has one of the highest participation rates of underrepresented students nationally, including First Nations Australians, regional and remote learners, students from low socio-economic backgrounds and those with disability. Equity and access are central to CDU’s mission as Australia’s most connected university, guiding strategies that remove barriers from outreach through to graduation.

First Nations Participation and Success

First Nations students make up 7% of CDU’s higher education and 26% of VET enrolments — the highest proportion of any Australian university. CDU’s First Nations Leadership Core Plan provides a whole-of-university framework to build culturally safe campuses, increase First Nations employment, and embed reconciliation across teaching and research. The First Nations Education Hub, launched in 2024, creates dedicated pathways in law, health, business, STEM and humanities, offering tailored academic and pastoral support both on campus and on Country. Co-designed with communities, it strengthens participation, retention and leadership outcomes.

Regional and Remote Participation

CDU’s extensive Northern Territory footprint ensures strong access for regional and remote students. The reopening of Mathaman | Nhulunbuy Campus restored higher education opportunities in East Arnhem, while new investments in Alice Springs and the Katherine Rural Campus expanded training in health, trades and agriculture. Digital learning hubs and on-Country delivery models enable students to study close to home, supported by travel assistance, accommodation subsidies and regional learning advisors that reduce barriers and improve completion rates.

Inclusion, Disability and Low SES Support

CDU advances inclusion through systemic and personalised support. The [Accessibility Action Plan \(2023–2026\)](#) removes barriers across policy, facilities and teaching, while the [Thriving Together Mental Health Strategy \(2022–2026\)](#) enhances wellbeing and resilience. Initiatives such as Accessible Study Hubs, Multi-Sensory Spaces, an online Neurodiversity Hub, and free assistive technology create equitable learning experiences. Financial aid, scholarships and embedded Language and Learning Support further support students from low-SES and first-in-family backgrounds.

The Transition to CDU program provides extended orientation, academic preparation and mentoring to build confidence and belonging for students new to higher education.

Targets 2025–26

- Increase First Nations participation toward 20% of higher education enrolments by 2030.
- Expand regional and remote delivery in East Arnhem, Katherine and Central Australia.
- Improve retention and success for low-SES, disability and first-in-family students, monitored through the CDU Performance Hub.

Strategies for Improving Teaching and Learning

Student Success and Retention – measured through unit success rates and attrition

CDU's Student Transition and Retention Success (STARS) Plan provides a whole-of-university framework to lift retention and success, integrating admissions transparency, enhanced onboarding, and targeted early intervention in high-risk courses. A dedicated First-Year Student Success team delivers proactive support from six weeks before semester, embeds assistance in 'at-risk' first-year units, and partners with academics to apply best-practice transition pedagogy. Using the CDU Performance Hub, attrition and unit success are tracked in real time, with action taken to address identified failure rates. "First assessment" checkpoints trigger early referrals, and the five-week Transition to CDU induction is scaling to strengthen first-year retention.

First Nations Student Success – measured through improved unit completion and retention rates

The First Nations Student Success Plan applies a four-quadrant model (entry readiness; early engagement; learning and teaching; unit completion), embedding culturally responsive pedagogy and targeted academic support. CDU remains a national leader in First Nations participation (currently 7% of higher-education students) and is focused on improving retention and completion.

Teaching Capability and Quality – measured through staff professional development and student satisfaction

CDU's approach is built on four elements: clear strategic context, coordinated professional learning, targeted capability development, and systematic monitoring. Professional development aligns to the Teaching Capability Framework (2023) and the Quality Charter (2024), covering curriculum and assessment design, inclusive and accessible practice, academic integrity, digital innovation, and the responsible use of generative AI to adapt learning and assessment while upholding standards. Delivery spans intensives, extended mentoring, and just-in-time support. Participation is captured and programmes are evaluated to drive continuous improvement. Success will be reflected in improved QILT teaching satisfaction and course evaluations.

Curriculum Excellence – measured through systematic course reviews and graduate outcomes

Curriculum excellence is assured via the Curriculum Management System (CMS). Annual Course Reviews provide an interim check within the seven-year accreditation cycle. Using dashboards, benchmarks, student outcomes, and stakeholder feedback, faculties identify strengths, risks, and improvements. Course analyses are recorded in the CMS and progress through Discipline Peer Review Groups and Faculty Learning and Teaching Committees, which formulate Faculty Quality Improvement Plans for academic governance. Graduate outcomes (employment, further study, satisfaction via the Graduate Outcomes Survey) inform curriculum renewal.

International and VET Excellence – measured through international student support outcomes and ASQA accreditation

Targeted wellbeing, visa and careers supports are being expanded for international students to strengthen transition, retention and employability, alongside clear pathways into CDU programmes. In 2025, CDU's VET delivery received seven-year ASQA reaccreditation with no

conditions, underscoring dual-sector strength. Success will be tracked through continued compliance, pathway enrolments and international student retention.

Measuring Impact

The Performance Hub integrates student outcomes, satisfaction (including QILT) and compliance indicators to track progress across cohorts and assure accountability.

Targets 2025–26

- Improve overall higher-education unit success rate by 3% by 2026.
- Increase First Nations student retention and completion year-on-year, reducing the success-rate gap.
- Achieve 90% staff uptake of the Teaching Capability Framework.
- Maintain seven-year ASQA reaccreditation status and high compliance standards.
- Lift undergraduate teaching satisfaction (QILT) by at least five percentage points by 2026.

Strategies for Improving Research, Research Training, and Innovation

Research Impact and Excellence

CDU's research agenda is driven by the need to deliver real-world impact in northern Australia and the Asia-Pacific. In 2024, CDU achieved \$89.5 million in research income (a 6.1% increase on 2023), \$42 million in Category 1 funding, and a 16% rise in PhD completions. These results underscore our capacity to deliver high-quality research with national significance and global reach.

Our Institutes and Centres are central to this impact:

- The Menzies School of Health Research continues to shape Indigenous and tropical health policy and practice.
- The Molly Wardaguga Institute for First Nations Birth Rights has pioneered Birthing on Country models that reduced pre-term births by one-third.
- The Research Institute for the Environment and Livelihoods (RIEL) delivers globally recognised research in biodiversity, water and fire management, including cross-country partnerships in Timor-Leste, Indonesia and Botswana.
- The Research Institute for Northern Agriculture (RINA) leads innovation in tropical and arid lands aquaculture, drought resilience and biosecurity, directly supporting northern producers.
- The Northern Institute brings an authoritative voice to social and policy change, through research focus on the social, cultural, economic issues in regional and remote populations including First Nations Communities

Excellence will continue to be measured by growth in external competitive and strategic funding, Q1 publications, international rankings, and recognition of CDU academics among the world's top researchers.

Innovation and Commercialisation

CDU is a catalyst for industry transformation in northern Australia. Our North Australia Centre for Autonomous Systems (NACAS) and Advanced Manufacturing Alliance with SPEE3D have positioned Darwin at the frontier of drone technology and world-first 3D metal printing. New platforms such as the Industry 4.0 TestLab, Advanced Nanofiber Manufacturing Facility, and the Renewable Energy Microgrid Hub for Applied Research and Training (REMHART) demonstrate how research translates into commercialisation and sovereign capability — from biomedical applications and aerospace to hydrogen production in remote NT communities.

First Nations Research

First Nations research is embedded as a core strength. The University has established a First Nations sub-committee of the Human Ethics Research Committee. CDU is advancing FoR45 Indigenous Studies and consolidating leadership through the transition of the Molly Wardaguga Centre into a Research Institute, ensuring enduring focus on culturally responsive health, education, and knowledge systems. Established growth in First Nations HDR enrolments and leadership will remain a priority, aligning CDU's research strategy with national Indigenous research agendas and strengthening knowledge sovereignty.

Research Training

CDU's HDR training environment is built on excellence, equity, and impact. In 2024, HDR enrolments grew to 323 EFTSL, with completions increasing to 53 students. Our 2030 target is 500 HDR EFTSL, underpinned by:

- Reducing PhD completion times from an average of five to below four years.
- Expanding pathways through PhD by Prior Publication and Digital PhDs for remote and international candidates.
- Scaling HDR internships and placements with industry, embedding students in multidisciplinary teams with real-world projects.

Future Directions

Looking forward, CDU will:

- Increase HERDC income by 10% annually
- Increase research commercialisation and industry partnerships across health, agriculture, defence, and renewable energy.
- Leverage proximity to Southeast Asia and the Pacific for collaborative solutions to climate change, food security, and health systems.
- Build sovereign research capability in northern Australia to underpin national security, energy independence, and economic diversification.

Strategies for Engaging with Industry

Industry engagement is not peripheral at CDU — it is at the heart of our mission to develop the north and contribute to Australia's national priorities. CDU is uniquely positioned to deliver the skills, research, and innovation that industry demands, linking VET, higher education and applied research into seamless pipelines that produce work-ready graduates and solutions to real-world challenges.

Driving Workforce Readiness

CDU is the Territory's partner of choice in workforce development. Our programs are co-designed with government and employers to address critical shortages across health, education, construction, defence, digital, renewables and agriculture. In 2024 alone:

- \$1.7 million in tailored training with NT Corrections created pathways from prison to employment.
- The \$2.5 million Katherine Rural Campus Trades Training Centre will lead engineering and construction training in the Big Rivers region.
- Health programs were strengthened through clinical placement partnerships with NT Health, Aboriginal Medical Services and national regulators, ensuring locally trained nurses, allied health professionals and doctors.

Building Sovereign Capability

Through innovation-led partnerships, CDU is anchoring northern Australia's role in national security and economic transformation:

- The Renewable Energy Microgrid Hub (REMHART) is producing hydrogen in the NT for the first time, supporting remote energy independence and clean energy transition.
- The North Australia Centre for Autonomous Systems (NACAS) is establishing a globally significant UAV testing and certification facility, positioning Australia as a leader in drone technology.
- The Advanced Manufacturing Alliance with SPEE3D has made Darwin a global hub for 3D metal printing, diversifying the economy and advancing sovereign defence capability.

Transforming Regional and Remote Industries

CDU's Katherine Rural Campus is a centrepiece of agricultural training and research, delivering to over 1,500 students annually on its working cattle station and Brahman stud herd. In partnership with the Research Institute for Northern Agriculture (RINA), CDU is driving innovation in aquaculture, cropping, biosecurity and land management, directly aligned with the NT Government's agribusiness growth agenda. Programs such as the NTI360 partnership with Indonesia extend this expertise across the Indo-Pacific.

Embedding Industry Across Education

Industry is embedded in every aspect of the student journey. Advisory boards shape curricula, employers mentor students, and placements are scaled across disciplines. Flagship programs such as the Remote Aboriginal Teacher Education (RATE) initiative grow pipelines of First Nations teachers for remote schools, while apprenticeships, cadetships and work placements ensure graduates are job-ready and industry connected.

Targets 2025–2030

- Increase in proportion of graduates who have completed a structured work-integrated learning or placement experience.
- Growth towards 40% increase in industry co-funded research and training projects by 2028.
- Five new strategic industry partnerships across health, energy, defence, agriculture and digital sectors by 2027.
- Deliver accredited training to an additional 2,000 students annually in regional and remote areas by 2030.
- 25% growth in Indo-Pacific workforce initiatives by 2030, cementing CDU's role as Australia's northern gateway.

SIGNED for and on behalf of
THE COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA
by

Jessica Mohr

Full name (please print)

First Assistant Secretary

Position
of the Department of Education

Signature

01/12/2025

Date

SIGNED for and on behalf of
Charles Darwin University
by

Professor Scott Bowman AO

Full name (please print)

Vice-Chancellor and President

Position

Signature

In the presence of:

Rachel Searl

Witness (please print)

Executive Officer

Position or profession of witness (please print)

Signature

In the presence of:

Melanie Paine

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