



2025-2026 Mission-Based Compact Between the Commonwealth of Australia and James Cook 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

James Cook University's strategic intent is to create a brighter future for life in the tropics and beyond through education and research that make a difference locally, and globally. Our [Corporate Strategy](#) expresses how we will deliver value in learning and teaching, research and engagement locally, nationally, and globally.

JCU is the only research-intensive university in Northern Australia, with impact across the global tropics. We specialise in a comprehensive portfolio of courses and deliver strong outcomes for students across northern Queensland. Our footprint extends from the Torres Strait south to Mackay and west to Mount Isa, and our graduates are employed in diverse workforce sectors across the north. JCU, with our Singapore campus, is a strong partner for Australian interests in the Indo-Pacific.

Key objectives for 2025-2026:

1. Institutional Sustainability. The top priority for JCU is working with Government on sectoral funding settings that allow for people to access high-quality higher education in northern Queensland.

JCU already delivers outstanding student equity outcomes. We are committed to raising educational attainment rates further through growing the numbers of both school and post-school leavers with the capability to engage in tertiary education (whether VET or Higher Education). This will need a long-term focus working with educational partners (schools and TAFE) in northern Queensland under a Regional Learning System approach. This is essential if northern Queensland is to reach the Accord's educational targets and if we are to Close the Gap in Indigenous outcomes. It will need place-based agreement-making and clear accountability; this Compact as an important element of facilitating inter-governmental alignment.

JCU needs to invest in pre-tertiary capability building and simultaneously maintain current access to comprehensive, high-quality, higher education opportunities. Current Commonwealth funding arrangements favour large student numbers for financial sustainability; and this places at risk the excellent results achieved by JCU as a smaller, regional institution. JCU has inherently higher costs when delivering a predominantly face-to-face curriculum for science, engineering and health programs. The infrastructure challenges when serving a geographically dispersed, thin population base with lower levels of academic preparedness further add to these costs.

2. Graduates with the knowledge, skills and attributes to meet the needs of tropical communities and succeed globally. JCU aims to provide high-quality, personalised support, authentic learning experiences, opportunity for Work-Integrated Learning (WIL) (including in the Asia Pacific through the New Colombo Plan), innovation and entrepreneurship, and expertise in navigating and using AI. Success is demonstrated through maintaining and increasing student satisfaction and excellent Graduate Outcomes Surveys.

3. Place-based Research excellence on priorities for Northern Australia. JCU's regional research workforce must be sustained with robust management of equity issues, research education, staff training and development, recruitment and succession and an enduring focus on Indigenous priorities. Place-based research, both fundamental and translational, that has relevance in and to northern communities is essential and can be measured through contract and partnership agreements, HERDC research and partnered research income and quality of research outputs.

4. Community/industry engagement. As a civic university, JCU continues to engage the community and regional development priorities of the communities we serve, collaborating regularly with elected representatives, Elders, industry, economic development bodies and schools to support a wide range of shared initiatives including work-integrated learning (WIL), internships, business development, innovation and social and commercial capabilities in the region.

5. Governance. JCU has a focus on student and staff equity, safety and wellbeing including bullying, discrimination, harassment, racism, mental health, gender-based violence and gender equity, Indigenous priorities, integrity matters, countering foreign interference, cyber and data security, freedom of speech and academic freedom. We prioritise integrating policy and practice across staff and student domains to ensure consistency, coherency and integrity in policy intent and outcomes.

Strategies for Improving Equality of Opportunity in Higher Education

JCU's Higher Education Continuity Guarantee funding supports regional workforce viability by maintaining otherwise loss-making courses with low student enrolment that are critical to the regional workforce, as well as providing the JCU Preparatory Program as an enabling program without student contribution fees.

Pre-Access Outreach

JCU is committed to increasing higher education participation through a place-based, equity-driven outreach framework. Recognising the persistent educational disparities in regional, rural, and remote communities, JCU's outreach is co-designed with local stakeholders and guided by five interrelated pillars: **Co-design, Community and Connection, Confidence, Clarity, and Capacity**. The university delivers sustained, educative, and relational programs that build aspiration, academic skills, and a sense of belonging among priority learners. Through partnerships with schools, communities, and education providers, and supported to date by HEPPP funding, JCU's outreach initiatives aim to dismantle structural barriers and foster inclusive, locally relevant pathways to tertiary education.

Participation- Student Supports

JCU takes a proactive and holistic approach to identifying and supporting students from underrepresented backgrounds. Designated roles within the university use predictive analytics and real-time engagement data to identify students at risk of disengagement or attrition. These insights inform timely, tailored interventions grounded in the principles of appreciative advising - focusing on students' strengths, aspirations, and potential.

JCU provides dedicated support services including counselling, careers guidance, and accessibility services to ensure students receive the help they need to thrive. The university is investment in key areas such as therapeutic interventions, peer support programs, and the development of inclusive resource hubs and sensory-friendly spaces, particularly to support neurodiverse learners. This integrated model ensures that all students—regardless of background—are empowered to succeed in their academic journey.

Strategies for Improving Teaching and Learning

JCU is committed to every student having access to education that is mission-aligned, future-focused, and globally impactful. We will ensure every graduate is not only job-ready but future-ready: able to apply disciplinary expertise to the real challenges of the Tropics with the defining capability of their generation, GenAI. Highlights include WIL in every undergraduate program and a range of flexible study options, with GenAI embedded within the curriculum.

JCU has implemented strategies to address regulatory requirements and industry expectations regarding assurance of learning in the era of GenAI. Assessment reform activated by expert working groups to design and implement satisfactory/unsatisfactory results in foundational years, reduce total assessment load, and prioritise authentic assessment that reduces reliance on written examinations are keystones to JCU's approach to learning assurance and continued program relevance for our communities.

JCU has achieved a 0.1- 2.1 percentage point improvement across 2024 QILT overall satisfaction results, against an overall sector decline. The post-COVID completion of Comprehensive Course Reviews complimented by annual reports with detailed actions, implemented with oversight of the Academic Governance Committees that includes students as members, ensures that JCU prioritises course improvement for student success.

Subject satisfaction improved in 2025 (75.6% against 74.8% in 2024), and JCU has responded to declining student participation in subject and teaching evaluations by facilitating discipline-led student feedback forums to promote collaborative, person-centred approaches to improving the student experience. From 2026, through our proactive self-check subject quality review processes, academic staff will proactively drive review and improvement, with the innovative Teaching Improvement Program enacted for targeted support to improve the quality of teaching and subject delivery in identified areas of low satisfaction; this complements existing external calibration and accreditation activity.

Staff participate in learning and teaching professional development and recognition opportunities through regular internally facilitated online workshops, promotion of external webinars, support to present/attend sector-relevant conferences and professional networks, access to resource-rich staff SharePoint sites, learning and teaching grants, and excellence awards. JCU hosts an annual [Celebrating Excellence week](#) to showcase and promote shifts in practice in response to emerging opportunities. The focus in 2025 was assessment reform, enhancing feedback practices, and GenAI adoption in curriculum.

JCU's comprehensive portfolio of academic and general student support services is critical to meet the diverse needs of our regional students. JCU had a [published](#) retention rate (for commencing Bachelor Students) of 78.02% in 2023/2024. Our internal system COGNOS © shows an improving trend for 2024/2025 of 85.0% (unpublished). For Indigenous students this rate was 71.4% in 2023/24 and 76.1% in 24/25. The 2024 [Indigenous Student Success Performance Report](#) provides additional comprehensive detail.

In 2024, JCU launched [JCU Prep](#), a fee-free enabling pathway to bachelors' programs. Through study across academic, digital, cultural, and scientific literacies and numeracy, delivered flexibly, JCU now supports 940 students through enabling places (up from 730 in 2024, and 60 in 2023).

All JCU students have access to [The Learning Centre](#) academic support, including Learning Advisors, Peer Assisted Study Sessions, Student Academic Integrity Ambassadors with associated online and on-campus events for students. Support for students that may be at risk of attrition, is enabled through pre-census assessment and engagement activity feedback, and regular academic progression monitoring, with personalised interventions coordinated by Student Success Officers.

Strategies for Improving Research, Research Training, and Innovation

Research

JCU prioritises research that is nationally and internationally recognised for its excellence and that addresses the current and emerging challenges facing our region and the Tropics.

JCU's goal is to deliver globally relevant solutions and impact to the benefit of our local communities and end-users. In 2025, we aligned our research around 5 themes – the 'JCU Research Directions' - that tightly align to the National Science and Research Priorities: *Advancing health and well-being in the Tropics, Thriving tropical marine and terrestrial ecosystems and environments, Sustainable and resilient regional and tropical economies, Enriching people, communities and societies of the Tropics, and Elevating and supporting Indigenous Futures.*

We will continue to grow our research portfolio and impact through completing our realignment to a challenge-led approach (JCU Research Directions), addressing challenges that are co-designed with partners and end-users. We will underpin this with investment through the JCU Horizons Program of strategic recruitment, e.g. in disaster resilience. JCU will continue to deliver on research excellence at scale through our Research Institutes and Centres, including externally funded Centres including hosting the [ARC Centre for Excellence in Indigenous and Environmental Histories and Futures](#) (CIEHF) and leading a node in the [Care Economy CRC](#).

We will develop our research workforce through a refreshed professional development framework and continue to expand opportunities for Indigenous internships.

Our research success will be measured by increased HERDC research income, partnered research income, quality of research outputs, and availability of open access research.

Research Training

JCU will continue to offer world-class research education through higher degrees by research (HDR). We will build our newly developed [PhD@Work](#) program, which embeds PhD students inside industry, measured by the number of new enrolments. We will revise our diversified skills-related training to HDRs, including responding to emerging technologies and ensuring readiness for non-academic career outcomes. Central to our commitment to excellence in research training is the ongoing professional development in research supervision. JCU will enhance our advisor development program to encompass training in contemporary supervision practice and cultural competency to support our increasingly diverse HDR cohort. The success of our HDR training will be measured through the number and timeliness of student completions and engagement with industry HDR scholarships.

Innovation and Commercialisation

JCU will continue to build its innovation culture through the [JCU Ideas Lab](#), including hosting founders from the university and region. We will continue to offer the [Impact 10X Simulator](#), a program to build and validate start-ups and ventures to students and the wider community. JCU will support its spin-out [Macrobiome Therapeutics](#) based on JCU-originated IP. Our commercialisation partner, [JourneyTech](#), will continue to attract industry interest and transfer of JCU IP. Success will be measured by innovation disclosures, patents and delivery of training in entrepreneurial skills.

Strategies for Engaging with Industry

JCU is committed to engaging with industry and government as a key partner to meet place-based needs and regional, national and global priorities. We support and grow industry engagement through our Centres and Institutes, and the research programs they lead. We will continue to invest in research partnership support, and work to simplify engagement and impact, including:

- resources sector through our [Economic Geology Research Unit](#) and as a partner in the [Resources Technology and Critical Minerals Trailblazer](#);
- agricultural sector through our [Centre for Tropical Biosecurity](#), the [Tropical North Queensland Drought Hub](#) and as a partner in the [ARC Industrial Transformation Training Centre for Plant Biosecurity](#);
- health sector through the [Australian Institute of Tropical Health and Medicine](#) and as a partner of the [Tropical Australian Academic Health Centre](#) focused on health translation to hospital and health services;
- engineering sector through the [Cyclone Testing Station](#);
- environment sector through the solutions-focused JCU [TropWater](#) and hosting the [ARC Research Hub for Supercharging Tropical Aquaculture through Genetic Solutions](#); and
- international partnerships/ regional engagement exemplified by our renewed coordination of the [PacMOSSI consortium](#) in Pacific Island mosquito surveillance strengthening.

JCU's PhD@Work program is a transformative approach to university-industry engagement that bridges the traditional divide between academic research and commercial application. The program has been expanded from the medical cohort to all sectors and embeds candidates within industry settings and ensures research outputs that directly address real-world challenges creating tangible value for industry partners while advancing academic knowledge. We will continue to secure and deliver joint research projects with industry, measured by increased Category 2-4 HERDC research income and increased research outcomes co-authored with industry or other partners.

The university is also redefining the way it partners with industry, government, and the broader community across all locations through innovative shared spaces, co-location and precinct-based initiatives, valuing embedded industry engagement for skills development and regional growth. With established and growing precincts—such as the Far North Queensland Health and Innovation Precinct (FNQHIP), TropiQ, Defence Industry Precinct, and North Queensland Simulation Park (NQSPARK), JCU can foster collaboration between academia, industry, public and private health, local government and councils, schools, and defence. These precincts not only enhance research and education, but create direct channels for knowledge sharing, workforce development, and innovation.

NQ SPARK is a flagship example of cross-sector innovation, established in partnership with Townsville City Council and a focus on defence, health, and high-performance simulation industries fosters raining, research, and resilience at regional, national, and international levels.

Expansion of the Cairns Tropical Enterprise Centre (CTEC) and the growth of FNQHIP supports multi-sector engagement in delivering new health workforce pipelines in partnership with public and private hospitals, the regional council, and community organisations.

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

James Cook University

by

Professor Simon Biggs

Full name (please print)

Vice Chancellor and President

Position

I approve this Compact on behalf of James Cook University

Signature

In the presence of:

Rachel Searl

Witness (please print)

Executive Officer

Position or profession of witness (please print)

Signature

In the presence of:

Mrs Tianna Graham

Witness (please print)

Executive Officer

Position or profession of witness (please print)

Signature