



## 2025-2026 Mission-Based Compact Between the Commonwealth of Australia and Southern Cross 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

Southern Cross University's purpose — "Changing lives through revolutionary learning and research with real impact" — continues to guide our strategic direction. Our [Strategy 2030](#) responds to evolving sector dynamics including technological disruption, regulatory reform, and shifting societal expectations.

#### **Strategic Planning and Key Outcomes**

Our strategy is structured around three core pillars: Teaching & Learning, Research & Impact, and Community & Enterprise Enablers.

#### **Teaching & Learning**

We aim to uplift student satisfaction and success through the Southern Cross Model (SCM), which delivers focused, active learning in six-week blocks. We are launching SCU Academy to drive teaching excellence, enhance peer engagement, and simplify course structures. Flagship programs in Veterinary Medicine and Physiotherapy address regional workforce needs, while offerings like the Master of Teaching and Master of Nursing support national skills priorities. Key metrics include retention, success rates, and student experience scores.

#### **Equity and Inclusion**

We continue to support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, with representation double the national average within our student cohort. Under the SCM, success and retention have improved across low SES, first-in-family, regional, and disability cohorts.

Further uplift remains a priority.

### ***Research & Impact***

We are investing in high-impact, interdisciplinary research aligned with our teaching portfolio. Initiatives include EmpoweredRD, strategic industry partnerships, and enhanced researcher capability through AI and e-research tools. Programs like the SISTA suite in Indigenous Women's Health reflect our commitment to community-driven, nationally relevant research. Metrics include research revenue, impact (FWCI), HDR completions, and global rankings.

### ***Community & Enterprise***

We are enhancing digital experiences, revitalising campus culture, expanding student accommodation, and deepening alumni engagement. Key projects include new facilities at Coffs Harbour and Lismore, improved stakeholder NPS, and measured growth in philanthropic support.

### ***Student Safety***

We are committed to a safe and inclusive environment. Our safety leadership program and critical risk framework are being deployed across campuses. The Momentum performance system supports a culture of accountability and wellbeing, and has been deployed across the University.

### ***Cyber Security***

We are migrating core systems to private cloud infrastructure, enhancing network monitoring, deploying multi-factor authentication (MFA), and rolling out a cyber awareness program. Our Cyber Strategy aligns with the NIST Framework and ASD Essential 8, and is actively monitored by our Risk Committee.

### ***Countering Foreign Interference***

SCU is committed to safeguarding institutional integrity. We are implementing enhanced risk protocols, vetting international partnerships, and aligning with national guidelines to protect research, data, and academic independence. Staff training and governance oversight ensure vigilance and compliance.

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

We uphold freedom of speech and academic freedom as core to our identity. Our policies align with the Model Code, ensuring staff and students can engage in robust debate and inquiry without fear or censorship. These principles are embedded in governance, curriculum design, and research practice.

### ***Measurement and Accountability***

Progress is reported to University Council five times annually, with metrics, delivery status, and qualitative insights across all pillars. Executive objectives are reviewed by the People & Culture Committee to ensure transparency, alignment, and strategic accountability.

## Strategies for Improving Equality of Opportunity in Higher Education

Southern Cross University (SCU) is a regional institution serving proportionately higher numbers of students from targeted equity groups. The University is focused on enhancing equity outcomes whilst driving a culture of academic excellence.

### **Equity scholarships expansion**

In 2025 and 2026, SCU is expanding its equity scholarship program to support future and current undergraduate students experiencing disadvantage. These scholarships assist with higher education costs and cover a broad range of circumstances including low socio-economic status, financial hardship, long-term medical conditions or disability, sole-parent or carer responsibilities, Indigenous background, effects of abuse, and English language difficulties.

### **Indigenous scholarship support**

SCU offers a diverse suite of scholarships tailored for Indigenous students, easing financial pressures related to study and accommodation. New categories introduced in 2025 and 2026 include scholarships for resilience and Indigenous excellence, and provide a stronger basis for supporting retention and completion than previous schemes.

### **Indigenous Australian Student Support**

The Indigenous Australian Student Services unit offers culturally appropriate support, advice, and resources for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students. SCU has one of the highest indigenous participation rates in the sector, with 4.88% compared to the national average of 2.3%.

### **Zero textbook cost**

Southern Cross University is committed to removing or reducing the costs associated with purchasing textbooks. Librarians work closely with academics in all faculties and colleges to provide relevant, current, and accessible learning resources aligned with Unit Learning Outcomes, without the need for students to purchase expensive commercial textbooks. Since 2022 the number of units requiring the purchase of a textbook has moved from over 600 to 254, with further reductions in the pipeline.

### **Regional Student Outreach**

SCU runs several outreach initiatives for regional and remote students:

- *School Engagement Program*: For Years 9–12, this program raises awareness of SCU courses through interactive sessions.
- *Scholars Program*: Offered online and on campus for Year 11 and 12 students, this fee-free unit guarantees entry and credit towards SCU courses. Queensland students also earn 2 QCE points.
- *UniStart for Schools*: Delivered during school hours by teachers and facilitated by SCU, this free Year 12 program guarantees university entry upon completion.

### Degree Pathways

SCU provides enabling and pathway programs for students who don't meet direct entry requirements or are returning to study:

- *Preparing for Success*: A flexible, fee-free course that builds essential academic skills.
- *Transition to Uni*: A fee-free, intensive course for recent school leavers and ATAR-eligible Year 12 students, focusing on academic literacies and assessment preparation.
- *Diplomas*: SCU offers eight AQF Level 5 diplomas across various disciplines, providing a one-year pathway into degree programs.

Over the past five years, SCU has seen particularly strong growth in enrolments and completions for diplomas, with a 256.8% increase in enrolments to 708, and a success rate increase of 13.2% to 77.5%.

### Disability Learning Adjustments

SCU is committed to an inclusive learning environment for students with disability. Reasonable adjustments—such as modified assessments, curriculum delivery, or assistive technology—are made to ensure equitable participation, provided academic standards and safety are maintained.

## Strategies for Improving Teaching and Learning

SCU's strategic priorities for teaching and learning are to deliver outstanding teaching and learning couched in an inspired student experience.

### Southern Cross Model

Southern Cross University now delivers all courses through the [Southern Cross Model](#) (SCM), a transformative approach to tertiary education built around six-week teaching blocks. This model promotes focused, active, and engaged learning, with authentic assessments that better reflect real-world applications. The SCM is designed to enhance student success by reducing cognitive overload and increasing flexibility, allowing learners to concentrate on fewer subjects at a time while maintaining full-time study loads.

Since its implementation, the SCM has significantly improved student outcomes compared to the traditional semester model baseline of 2019 (2025 YTD except where indicated):

- Success rate has increased 15.4% to 91.1%
- Mean GP has increased 16.3% to 4.7%
- Absent fail rate has decreased by 2% to 2.4%
- Early withdrawal rate has decreased by 6% to 7.3%
- Overall attrition rate has decreased by 7.9% to a forecast 19.1% for our 2024 commencing cohort.

Importantly, the SCM has delivered measurable benefits for students from equity groups as well, with success rates as follows:

- For low SES students increased by 12.7% to 85.8%
- For Indigenous students increased by 13.9% to 78.6%
- For students registered with a disability increased by 13% to 84.6%
- For students in regional / remote areas increased by 9.9% to 88.2%
- For students who are first-in-family to attend university increased by 6.8% to 85.8%
- For students from non-English speaking backgrounds increased by 11.1% to 92.2%.

The University has adopted a continuous improvement cycle built on the foundation of the SCM to drive further enhancements to retention, completion and satisfaction in future.

### **Scholarship of Learning and Teaching**

The University's [Scholarship of Learning and Teaching \(SoLT\) Framework](#) is developed from the principle that its teaching academics will work to strengthen the quality and impact of their teaching activities and be supported to innovate in their practice as they progress through their career. In addition, the SCM is evaluated through numerous projects which examine outcomes for students and explore the approaches taken during implementation, including those reviewed in the SSRN [Southern Cross University Scholarship of Learning and Teaching Paper Series](#). The University is actively driving wider participation in SOLT activities across all units to support ongoing quality enhancements.

### **Targeted Student Support Strategies**

The [First Year Advising](#) (FYA) program offers proactive, personalised support to new undergraduate and postgraduate students, using data analytics to guide follow-ups and reviews. In 2025, FYA students included 18% low SES, 6% Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander, 16% with disability, and 33% first-in-family. The [Peer Assisted Learning Support](#) (PALS) program provides academic help from high-achieving student mentors in challenging units, fostering peer-to-peer learning and success.

### **Admissions Transparency**

Southern Cross University offers multiple transparent entry pathways, including direct entry to degree programs and fee-free uni ready programs, ensuring equitable entry routes beyond ATAR.

### **Inclusive Pedagogy**

All Southern Cross University programs have been redesigned around focused, guided, and active learning, complemented by scaffolded assessments and removal of high-stakes exams.

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

Southern Cross University is delivering research with measurable impact, aligned with its Strategy 2030 and national priorities. Our efforts focus on areas of strength including sustainable food systems, health and wellbeing, Indigenous knowledge, climate resilience, and educational transformation. These themes are advanced through Research Impact Clusters and faculty-led groups, fostering interdisciplinary collaboration and global engagement.

### Research Excellence and Impact

SCU has achieved its highest-ever research income and entered the Top 500 in the [2026 Times Higher Education World University Rankings](#). This milestone affirms the quality and momentum of our research programs. However, reputational indicators—particularly international academic and employer perception—remain a challenge. Our ranking trajectory highlights the need to convert high research quality into global visibility.

We are now delivering the second phase of our Research Strategy, shifting focus from foundational reform to strategic positioning. This phase builds research intensity in targeted areas, enhances institutional reputation, and embeds a high-performance culture. A key element is establishing a clear narrative that articulates SCU's distinctive research contribution and guides future investment, collaboration, and profile-building.

We are developing integrated tools for real-time performance insights and scenario planning. Enhancing researcher profiles and impact communication is also a priority, ensuring external stakeholders can easily access and understand our strengths.

We are strengthening global research linkages by consolidating our international engagement strategy and focusing on partnerships that align with institutional priorities. Support for high-impact publication and dissemination is intensifying, including mentoring programs for early and mid-career researchers and targeted media engagement to boost visibility and citation performance.

### Research Training

SCU has strengthened the integrity of its [Higher Degree by Research](#) (HDR) pipeline through improved admissions, rigorous milestones, and enhanced supervision. On-time completions reflect these efforts, though enrolments remain below optimal scale. We aim to continue to attract strong cohorts of quality HDR candidates in 2026 and beyond while maintaining quality and strategic alignment. This includes expanding industry-linked PhDs, scaling internships and postdoctoral pathways, advancing Indigenous research leadership, and consolidating new HDR training modules in AI, resilience, impact planning, and cultural competency.

### Innovation and Commercialisation

SCU's innovation ecosystem is expanding to accelerate research translation and deepen industry collaboration. Infrastructure is being renewed through LIEF grants and internal co-investment, especially in agriculture, natural products, and therapeutic applications.

Business development capacity has grown, supporting major bids and strategic partnerships. Industry-aligned postdoctoral researchers are embedded in [Research Impact Clusters](#)—such as Harvest to Health and ZeroWaste—which now drive investment, enterprise collaboration, and commercialisation. SCU also contributes to the ARC Industrial Transformation Training Centre for Cultural Heritage and Mining, reinforcing our leadership in applied research.

### **Artificial Intelligence in Research**

AI is a strategic cross-cutting capability at SCU. In 2025, we introduced institutional guidelines for ethical and impactful AI use and formed a cross-disciplinary oversight committee. We are leading the rollout of SCU's [Generative AI in Research](#) Policy, positioning the University as a national voice in responsible AI-driven research.

## **Strategies for Engaging with Industry**

Southern Cross University's orientation to industry is foundational to our student experience and research impact. Strategic connectivity, collaboration and alignment with industry remain central to the realisation of [Strategy 2030](#). Industry is positioned as a critical partner in co-creating value through intentional engagement in research, education, innovation and translation—advancing the [University's purpose](#) and commitment to real impact and community transformation.

Our approach to industry engagement is place-based, nationally attuned and globally connected. We continue to establish platforms that act as focal points to build coherence and critical mass, while responding to place-specific factors such as scale, viability and geographic dispersal.

[Research Impact Clusters](#) are being strengthened as primary platforms for connecting University research with sector-based opportunities, aligned with National Industry Priorities. These Clusters are [formed](#) by working back from societal challenges to enable multidisciplinary collaboration in domains of direct relevance to industry: [Zero Waste](#), [Harvest to Health](#), [Reefs and Oceans](#), and [Catchments, Coasts and Communities](#). A new Cluster focused on Resilient Children and Families will be launched in 2016.

Greater industry connectivity will be achieved through the creation of 'industry ecosystems'—networks of organisations with shared challenges and purpose. This strategy responds to industry feedback for multilateral engagement, moving beyond traditional bilateral silos to generate broader value. Industry is positioned as co-creators and empowered partners, shaping and strengthening collaborative work within each Cluster.

This ecosystem model mirrors progress in education. Ecosystems in Business, Information Technology and Early Childhood have already been established. The full acquisition of The

Hotel School Australia has expanded its [award-winning industry program and partner network](#), driving innovation and growth in the hospitality sector. SCU will extend partnerships with industry-funded Research and Development Corporations (RDCs) to develop new research programs that address sector needs and enhance productivity, resilience and innovation. Initial funding partnerships with RDCs such as [AgriFutures](#) and [Meat and Livestock Australia](#) enable direct engagement with industry to apply research for impact. Focus areas include [industrial hemp](#), [sub-tropical coffee](#), [bees](#), fisheries management, [dry-land rice](#), [circular economy](#) and [sustainable agriculture](#).

As part of the NSW Government's Industry Experience project, SCU will launch new [Industry Graduate Certificates](#) which have been developed in response to workforce priorities around the following postgraduate course themes: [neurodiversity](#), [circular economy](#), [small business management](#) and [early childhood leadership](#). The Co-Design Framework will be adopted University-wide to strengthen the relevance of education and research to industry needs. Course co-design is a priority area under the National Priority Industry Linkage Fund.



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  
SOUTHERN CROSS UNIVERSITY  
by

**Professor Tyrone Carlin**  
Vice-Chancellor and President

Signature

In the presence of:

**Rachel Searl**

Witness (please print)

**Executive Officer**

Position or profession of witness (please print)

Signature

In the presence of:

**PAOLA BOLZICCO**

Witness (please print)

**EXECUTIVE ASSISTANT TO VICE-CHANCELLOR**

Position or profession of witness (please print)

Signature