



## 2025-2026 Mission-Based Compact Between the Commonwealth of Australia and The University of Newcastle, Australia

### 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

Please note, the University is currently developing a new five-year strategic plan, which will be finalised and released in 2026. The below information makes reference to the core strategies in our current strategic plan, and we would be pleased to update this information as our strategic plan evolves.

The [University of Newcastle's Strategic Plan 'Looking Ahead' 2025-2025](#) makes three over-arching commitments:

### 1. Be a leading advocate and driving force for excellence and equity in higher education;

**Achieved:** Strengthen our existing sector-leading equity programs, including FEE-FREE Uni Ready Placements and undergraduate pathways, and grow our whole-of-institution Indigenous education through the Wollotuka Institute, including Cultural Capability Training for staff. Working with local government, community and industry partners to be an education and research partner in the energy transition.

**Measured:** Increase our ability to widen participation in regions, and work with partners to support communities with education through the energy transition. Maintain our position as a top University in the country for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander student enrolment, retention and success. Maintain our position as a top University in the country for first in-family, Low-SES, disability, regional enrolments, retention, and success.

### 2. Deliver an outstanding student experience, ensure our students develop life and career skills to be competitive in the workforce, and are strongly supported in their physical and mental wellbeing;

**Achieved:** Career Ready Placements are now a core component of all degrees. Graduate Attributes are woven throughout curricula and extra-curricular elements of the student journey. Students are provided with a broad range of supports, including for mental and physical wellbeing

**Measured:** To be within a percentile point of the top 5 Australian universities for Satisfaction with Overall Experience in the Student Experience Survey for 2025.

### 3. To bring the world to our regions, and take our regions to the world through relevant research solutions to local, national and global problems;

**Achieved:** Four Engagement Priorities reflect issues and opportunities relevant to the future of our regions and our world, and the mission-driven issues we have the capacity, expertise and civic responsibility to address.

**Measured:** We will continuously increase the proportion of partner-led research relevant to our communities to deliver real world outcomes, and maintain our high level of community outreach and engagement activities to increase access to higher education in our regions.

## Workforce and skill needs

The University is delivering universal Career-ready Placements, industry networks and a [portal](#) to facilitate placements. Work with industry and Government ensures alignment with employer,

workforce and accreditation needs. The Careers and Employability Team support strategies to benefit students, graduates and employers.

#### Student and Staff Safety

The University has developed the [Action Plan](#) for Prevention of Sexual Harm providing [a range of information, materials, and services](#) to students to support a safe and respectful University community. The University's Sexual Harm Prevention and Response [Policy](#) and Procedure has been re-designed to support this and highlight the University's positive duty. The University is working towards full compliance with the National Higher Education Code to Prevent and Respond to Gender-based Violence. The University has developed the [Gender Justice Hub](#), and has spearheaded a state-wide Doctoral Training Centre in gender based violence.

#### Countering foreign interference

The University has developed [a range of resources, guidelines and mandatory training](#) for all staff to promote awareness of and compliance with foreign interference requirements. The University Foreign Interference Taskforce is the peak governance body overseeing implementation and compliance.

#### Academic Freedom and Freedom of Speech

The University has implemented a [Code for the Protection of Freedom of Speech and Academic Freedom](#) that reflects the model code in full. The University has a number of other statutory and non-statutory rules, policies and guidelines which include reference to principles of:

- Academic and intellectual freedom
- [Academic and research integrity](#)
- [Conduct of students, staff and research](#)
- [Information Security](#)

#### Cyber and data security

Cyber security governance and teams protect staff, students, systems and data from cyber threats. The cyber program has been enhanced to align to the NIST Cyber Security Framework and the ACSC Essential Eight Strategies to Mitigate Cyber Security Incidents. The NIST framework defines both reactive and proactive controls to Govern; Identify; Protect; Detect; Respond; and Recover. The University continuously measures and matures progress against these frameworks.

## Strategies for Improving Equality of Opportunity in Higher Education

The University of Newcastle (UON) has a long-standing reputation as a national and international leader in equity and widening participation in higher education. Our commitment is embedded institution-wide and guided by the Engagement and Equity Division, which brings together leadership, policy, research, and practice to drive systemic change. This work is strengthened through the Centre of Excellence for Equity in Higher Education (CEEHE), which undertakes globally recognised, field-leading equity research and supports the translation of this evidence into practice across the institution.

### 1) Composing equity structures to coordinate collaboration across institution;

#### Achieved:

- Establishment of the Engagement and Equity Division and the Deputy Vice-Chancellor Engagement and Equity, creating a whole-of-institution focus on access, participation, retention, and success.
- Excellence in equity across all core dimensions of education through the highest quality equity programs, practice, evaluation and research
- Active engagement with policy formation, driven by research in equity, to redefine success and how we work with students.
- Delivered Disability Inclusion Action Plan 2024-2025, co-designed with staff and students with a disability and reflecting that the University of Newcastle enrolls one of the highest number students with a declared disability (5000+ in 2025)
- Restructure the Pathways Centre to provide explicit and supported pathways into higher education.
- Institutional leadership in policy development through CEEHE, with research-driven contributions redefining measures of student success.

#### Measured:

- Investment in roles/units to develop and sustain fit-for-purpose and research informed equity initiatives.
- Investment in roles/units to support and facilitate the collaboration of all University equity initiatives stakeholders.
- Development of specialised, equity-aligned evaluation that is participatory to ensure representation of groups impacted and that build institutionalised capacity to embed student equity.
- Demonstrated improvements in institutional capability to embed student equity principles across teaching, research, and policy.

### 2) Embedding equity expertise across the University through the University's Cultural Capability Framework and through building capacity in equity research, pedagogy and practice;

#### Achieved:

- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander knowledges embedded across teaching, learning, and research.
- Over 90% of staff completing Cultural Capability training, with ongoing development tied to UON's Cultural Capability Framework.
- Field-leading equity research influencing change by challenging intersectional inequalities.
- Building capacity in equity research, pedagogy, and practice, with findings shaping institutional policy and national frameworks.

#### Measured:

- Development of initiatives/approaches that demonstrate Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander knowledge, relationships, cultural and community work.
- Growth in equity-focused research publications, practice innovation, and successful grant activity.
- Increased staff capability to apply equity principles in curriculum design, pedagogy, and student support.

3) Responding to diverse communities in line with our Student Equity Framework;

**Achieved:**

- Co-designed programs and research with under-represented students and communities, informed by lived experience, to dismantle intersecting barriers to participation.
- Ongoing feedback loops between students, practitioners, and researchers to refine pathways and support models.
- Research led by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Chief Investigators, in partnership with communities and representative organisations.

**Measured:**

- Field-leading equity research by CEEHE and UON scholars that directly informs practice and policy.
- Sustained investment in pathways with evaluation provided via students and experts, comprised of practitioners and researchers.
- Strengthened and sustained Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community partnerships with policies and practices that embed culturally responsive ways of working.

## Strategies for Improving Teaching and Learning

The University is committed to equipping students with the skills, experiences, and support needed to thrive in a rapidly changing world. Through a strategic focus on career readiness and holistic student success, initiatives such as Career-Ready Placements and the Student Success Strategy are designed to ensure every student graduates with practical experience, personal resilience, and a clear pathway to employment and community contribution. These programs reflect a forward-thinking approach to education—one that integrates academic excellence with real-world relevance, inclusivity, and empowerment.

### 1) Career-Ready Placements (CRP):

The University's inclusive, sector-leading CRP initiative ensures every student graduates with a portfolio of meaningful experiences that demonstrate essential workplace capabilities. These experiences are designed to complement academic learning by embedding practical, real-world skills that enhance employability and career readiness. Through the 'Life Ready Graduates' strategy—anchored by a new suite of Graduate Attributes and the Career Connect program—undergraduate students are supported to engage in work-based learning that connects their education with future career pathways.

#### Achieved:

Implementation of the Life Ready Graduates strategy ensures every undergraduate student completes a work-integrated learning experience and understands how their academic journey aligns with career opportunities.

#### Measured:

Success is tracked through increased student participation in CRP activities and improved graduate outcomes.

### 2) Student Success Strategy:

The Student Success Strategy provides a comprehensive framework to deliver an exceptional student experience, preparing graduates for life in a dynamic, interconnected world. It prioritises inclusivity, wellbeing, and career readiness, and is deeply integrated with the University's broader strategic plans. The strategy recognises the diversity of the student body and promotes flexible, personalised support systems. It leverages data analytics to inform decision-making and drive continuous improvement, fostering a connected, empowered student community.

#### Achieved:

The strategy has been operationalised through the Student Retention Plan, which outlines targeted initiatives to support academic and personal development, ensuring students are industry-ready and community-oriented.

#### Key Enablers:

- **Flexibility in Learning Options:** Expanded online offerings and support for diverse learning styles provide adaptable pathways for student success.
- **Leadership and Representation:** Programs such as iLead and engagement with UNSA cultivate leadership skills and active participation in university life.
- **Empowering Students:** Tools like program planners and flexible study modes enable students to take ownership of their educational journey.

**Measured:**

Delivery is guided by three core principles:

- **Flexibility** – to meet the varied needs of student cohorts.
- **Efficiency** – in implementing initiatives and processes.
- **Agility** – to respond to evolving external conditions and policy changes.

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

### Research and Research Training

The University is committed to fostering a culture of impactful research, research training, and innovation excellence, supporting people and capability development, and nurturing future leaders to address regional, national, and global challenges. We focus our research and innovation on issues that matter most to our regions by refining priorities, aligning investments, strengthening regional engagement, and scaling strategic partnerships. By moving to a collaborative research model, streamlining processes, embracing enabling technologies, and developing key infrastructure, we enhance our ability to deliver impactful outcomes. We are dedicated to creating a culture that drives, recognises, and rewards research impact, supports talent development, and encourages interdisciplinary teams, all while lifting our rankings, reputation, and global alliances.

#### Achieved:

- Supporting the growth of our people (including research students, academics, and professional staff) through targeted professional development and training programs which have been revised considering equity, diversity and inclusion principles and present-day challenges (e.g., AI developments, HDR supervision, cyber security, foreign interference, research data management and AUKUS).
- Established inter-institutional Doctoral Training Centres around key strategic multi-disciplinary, industry-focused research areas, including gendered violence, affordable housing, resources, food & agriculture, and energy.
- Developing strategic recruitment and succession plans that enhance capabilities by attracting talent to key research centres and programs aligned to national priorities.
- Promote the University's research reputation to external stakeholders to improve institutional rankings and communication of impactful outcomes.
- Implementing new programs and career capability pathways for HDR students to support their career development from start of candidature.
- Promoting industry engagement activities for HDR including the National Industry PhD scheme, engagement in the Australian Technology Network (ATN) Frontiers training program, the Industry Engaged PhD pathway which includes a supported internship opportunity and funded schemes to support engagement in research that has regional and global impact.
- Implemented a new streamlined HDR program suite which enables admission to higher degree research programs centred on real world problem solving and industry engagement, with multidisciplinary supervision teams
- Commitment to openness in animal research via the [ANZCCART Openness Agreement 2023](#).
- Established a Director, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Research Strategy and Leadership role to lead, elevate, and embed Indigenous research excellence, alongside the creation of a Community-Representative Panel (Wukul Yabang) to ensure Aboriginal leadership, relevance, and community benefit in research initiatives.

#### Measured:

- Delivered new/updated professional development and training programs including mandatory research integrity, ethics and supervisor training.
- Indigenous-led advice and endorsement of the responsible conduct of research.
- Improved numbers of HDR students engaged in skills development and career enhancement activities.
- Provision of data-driven performance analysis to leaders for key decision making.



- Increased media engagement on stories of research impact.
- Improved selected University rankings.
- Improved numbers of HDR students engaged with industry.
- Reduced animal usage and/or improved methods in groups with funded 3Rs projects.
- Increased HERDC funding

### **Innovation and Research Commercialisation**

The University is committed to research translation, including commercialisation, to deliver economic and social impact in our region and beyond.

A new research commercialisation strategy was developed in 2023 in consultation with our Colleges. In 2023, as part of this strategy, we reviewed and refreshed relevant policies including IP policy and procedures, outside work, and conflict of interest. Furthermore, a new spinout framework was developed, aiming to bring a transparent, consistent, equitable and streamlined approach to the University and inventor/founders taking equity in new spinouts to commercialise University owned IP. Four spinouts commercialising University owned IP have been established in the last 12 months with more in the pipeline. In 2023, the University joined Uniseed, Australia's longest running early-stage tech investor. In 2025, the University's first research commercialisation proof of concept fund was established to support new technologies straddle the research to early seed investment phase. We are also looking to partner with an investment management fund in the creation of a new Hunter region focussed early-stage technology innovation fund to ensure spinouts can thrive and stay local. We will continue to look for opportunities to adjust our culture and environment to maximise commercialisation outcomes.

Measures of assessment:

- New invention disclosures.
- Commercialisation revenue.
- New spinouts commercialising University owned IP including social enterprises.
- Early-stage investment secured.
- New jobs created by spinouts and startups.
- Academic participation in commercialisation and related training.

## Strategies for Engaging with Industry

University has a long history of deep industry engagement with the Hunter and Central Coast regions. As the largest university in our region, we embrace our responsibility to innovate with industry in R&D and education/critical skills delivery. We are the national leader in generating research income from industry as a percentage of total research income. Critical elements of the industry engagement strategy include:

**I2N** - The University of Newcastle's Integrated Innovation Network (I2N) is making the Hunter Region Australia's best ecosystem for startups. By harnessing our region's unique resources and network of innovation hubs, they empower the most promising innovators and entrepreneurs to transform their ideas into high-impact, sustainable global businesses. Through their enterprise skill-building programs and dedicated spaces, I2N is creating the foundation for startups to thrive and drive economic diversity across the region. Since establishment, more than 144 teams have been accelerated and incubated, \$60 million in funding raised and more than 260 jobs created through a network of nearly 5000 entrepreneurs.

**The University of Newcastle Research Associates:** TUNRA is a wholly owned subsidiary of the University that connects external partners with researchers for consulting and contract research projects. TUNRA conducts >150 projects annually, ranging in size from \$10K to >\$2M. TUNRA's unique capabilities, solutions and services in bulk materials handling, transportation, and storage utilising ISO certified facilities are highly relevant to regional industry.

**Newcastle Institute for Energy and Resources (NIER):** this best practice university-industry engagement has created a community of expertise delivering solutions for global challenges and accelerating successful commercialisation in nationally significant sectors – energy, resources, food and water. NIER offers industrial research collaboration and education including three doctoral training centres (energy, food and agribusiness, resources). NIER has 195 active industry partners with current contracts valued at over \$200M, 19 research centres and groups, 217 Higher Degree Research (HDR) students and hosts our ARC Centre of Excellence in Minerals Beneficiation and the Trailblazer for Recycling and Clean Energy. NIER is in the process of creating the Next Generation Resources Park onsite, which will include the Modern Manufacturing Facility (includes a range of advanced manufacturing equipment), the New Energy Skills Hub (training, certification, testing and piloting), the Future Industries Facility (enabling SMEs to upscale) and the Advanced Prototyping Facility (a facility accessible to undergraduate students for prototyping). When combined with CSIRO Energy, this will be the largest concentration of industrial energy and resources research in the nation.

**The Institute for Regional Futures (IRF):** IRF backs regional communities across Australia through hands-on research and collaboration. Working with First Nations peoples, local communities and industry partners, they tackle regional challenges across economic transitions, community resilience and social infrastructure. In 2024, they engaged with 148 industry, government and community partners, offering services such as tender writing, methodology development, project management, and policy-focused research. Their mission combines rigorous academic research with practical community engagement to help regional areas not just survive but actively shape their futures.

**Hunter Medical Research Institute (HMRI):** HMRI is the largest in regional Australia and was jointly founded by the University, the Hunter New England Local Health District (LHD) and the

Hunter community. HMRI's research translates quickly and effectively into better healthcare and health outcomes in environmental health and disasters, resilient health and wellbeing, and innovations in health care. 1700 health and medical researchers are affiliated with HMRI. HMRI also partners with industry, including pharmaceutical and medical technology companies, to deliver clinical trial solutions and push drug discovery, development, and clinical trials programs to greater heights.

**John Hunter Innovation Living Lab:** JHILL is a joint venture between the University, LHD and HMRI. It is a purpose-built 500sqm facility at the hospital, and adjacent to the University clinical school. enables clinician-led innovation, provide co-location and collaboration space for health and MedTech industry partners and activate student entrepreneurship onsite.

**ResTech:** ResTech is a joint venture between the University and Australia's largest privately owned electrical engineering company, Ampcontrol. Located on campus in a purpose-built facility, ResTech provides a test bed for new product development, providing innovative solutions to industry problems. In 2024, Restech submitted 43 placement and final year project proposals, supervised 12 students through those programs, and employed a further 8 undergraduates either casually or full time.

**Central Coast Health and Wellbeing Living lab (CCHWLL):** Funded under the Central Coast Strategy for Economic Growth, the Living Lab is delivered in partnership with Central Coast Local Area Health District and the University. The Living Lab places community at the heart of innovation and connects healthcare professionals, researchers and businesses to design innovative integrated care approaches and technology to support happy and healthy ageing well at home while maintaining community connection.

**Circular Economy Living Lab (CELL):**

A partnership with Lake Macquarie City Council and DANTIA to pilot circular economy innovations that generate new employment and industry opportunities within Lake Macquarie, diverting and harnessing the under-used regional waste-stream.

**The Moata'a Living Lab:** The university is collaborating with partners in Samoa to conserve and regenerate the local mangrove environment, which is critical to the region's culture and economy.

The Moata'a Living Lab is a community-led environmental education and eco-tourism demonstration site aimed at building the resilience of the Moata'a community and improving the ecosystem and socio-economic wellbeing of villagers.

**Defence Engagement:** The University has recently established two new roles to focus on strengthening our Defence and Defence industry engagement centred on the Williamstown Defence Precinct and RAAF Base. This includes R&D collaboration as well as co-designed education pathways to train and upskill Defence personnel and build the next generation of defence industry workforce.

**Industry PhDs:** A multi-disciplinary approach enabling students to tailor their PhD to achieve industry career aspirations. With flexible learning opportunities, career mentorship, >3-month industry internships students develop competencies and networks throughout their candidature.

Measures of assessment:

- Total industry income, and as a percentage of total research income.
- Number of Industry PhDs.
- New and repeat industry partners.
- Major bids focussed on industry engagement including CRC/P, ARC ITRP, NHMRC CRE, MRFF.
- Industry partners co located on campus.

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  
The University of Newcastle, Australia  
By

**Alex Zelinsky AO**

Full name (please print)

**Vice-Chancellor and President**

Position

**Alex Zelinsky AO reviewed and approved  
signature of this document on 11/11/2025**

Signature

In the presence of:

**Rachel Searl**

Witness (please print)

**Executive Officer**

Position or profession of witness (please print)

Signature

In the presence of:

**Fiona Bastian**

Witness (please print)

**Head of Government Relations**

Position or profession of witness (please print)

**Fiona Bastian witnessed approval and  
signature 11/11/2025**

Signature