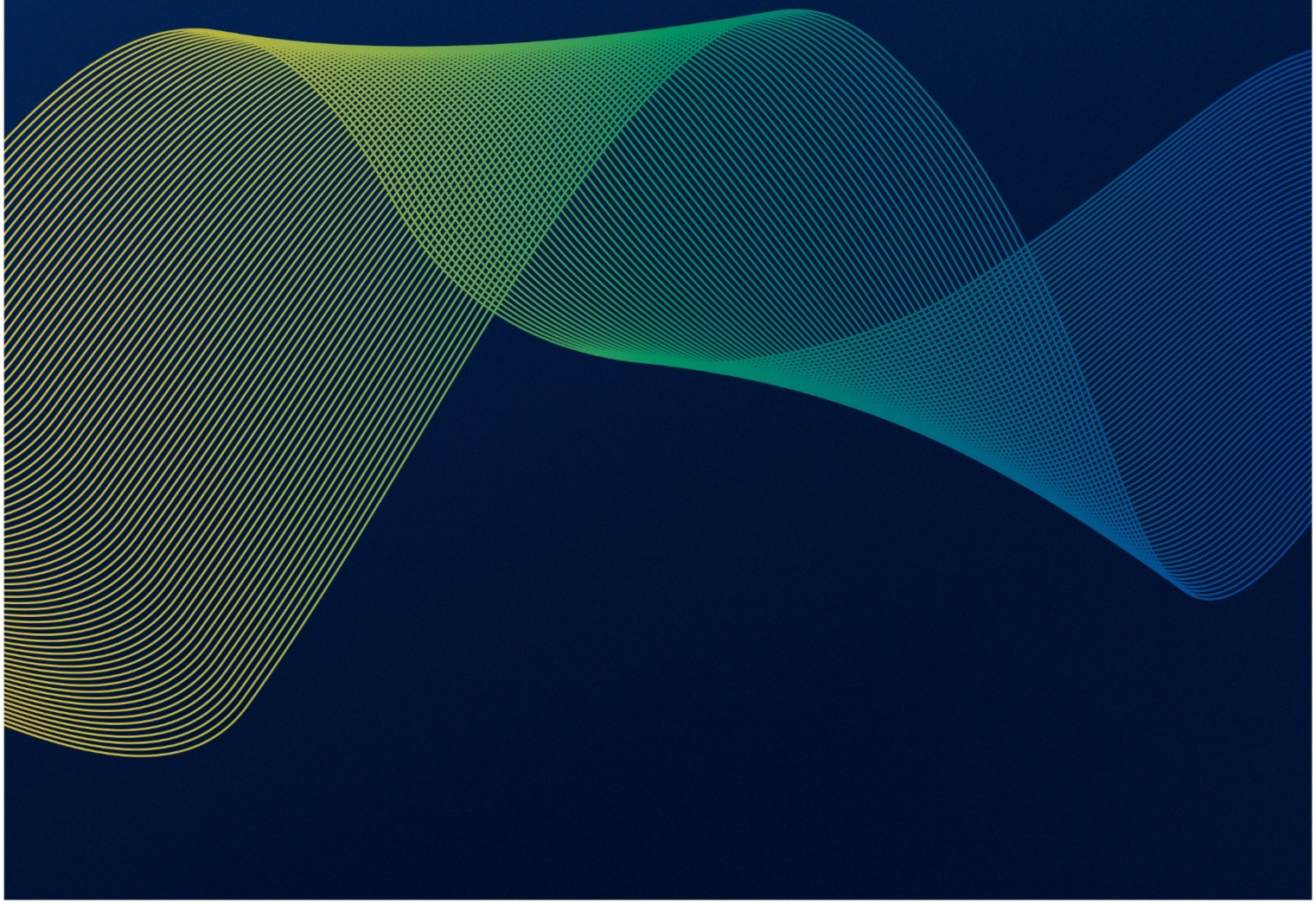
Australian Government

ATEC
Australian Tertiary
Education Commission

ACU
AUSTRALIAN CATHOLIC UNIVERSITY

2027 mission based compact between the ATEC and Australian Catholic University Limited



Preface

This mission based compact is established between the Australian Tertiary Education Commission (ATEC) and Australian Catholic University Limited (hereafter referred to as 'ACU') in accordance with the *Universities Accord (Australian Tertiary Education Commission) Act 2026* (ATEC Act). This mission based compact highlights the significant contributions ACU will make to the priorities outlined in the ATEC's interim Statement of Strategic Priorities (SSP) as well as how it will achieve its own strategic goals, advance its mission, and deliver outcomes for its students and local community.

Following good faith negotiation, the form and terms of this mission based compact have been determined by the ATEC with ACU. In determining these matters, the ATEC has considered the strategic priorities and outcomes set out in the interim SSP, the purpose of compacts as set out in section 28 of the ATEC Act, and ACU's goals, missions and strategic plan, geographic location and local community, as well as the effect (if any) the proposed terms may have on ACU's academic freedom.

The terms of this compact are set out in section 2 and 3 of this document, and include ACU's delivery of the commitments set out in that section.

The ATEC must assess ACU's outcomes against the terms of this compact at least once per calendar year. For the purposes of paragraph 29(4)(b) of the ATEC Act, the ATEC's assessment methodology for this compact will require ACU to demonstrate it has made **reasonable efforts** to progress the agreed terms of the compact. Assessment is proposed to occur during 2028.

Assessment will focus on the extent to which providers have actively progressed commitments, recognising that full attainment of all outcomes may not be achievable in all instances. In considering whether reasonable efforts have been made, the ATEC will take into account:

- the actions undertaken by ACU to progress its commitments, including relevant steps, initiatives, activities, or planning work aimed at achieving the intended outcomes; and
- any factors it is aware of that are reasonably outside ACU's control that may have affected its ability to deliver the commitments set out in the compact.

In making an assessment, the ATEC may require ACU to provide relevant information consistent with subsection 30(2) of the ATEC Act.

The ATEC may conduct annual check-in meetings with ACU as needed, to discuss ACU's progress towards meeting the terms of this compact. If ACU has any concerns about their ability to meet the agreed terms of this compact, including as a result of matters reasonably outside ACU's control, ACU agrees to inform the ATEC as soon as possible. Any amendments to the compact terms may be made with mutual agreement of the parties.

As set out in section 30-45 of the *Higher Education Support Act 2003* and section 46D(2) of the ATEC Act, assessment against the terms of this compact must be taken into account by the ATEC in making decisions on domestic and international student place allocations in 2028, helping to shape a high-performing, diverse higher education system.

In line with the ATEC Act, this mission based compact will be published on the ATEC's website within 28 days after the compact is entered into. It is the responsibility of the ATEC to ensure that the information in this compact is up to date.

This mission based compact is in effect from 1 January 2027 to 31 December 2027, unless varied or terminated earlier.

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Section 1: Context

Mission statement

Australian Catholic University (ACU) is a public university distinguished by its Catholic identity and mission, with a national footprint across seven campuses serving metropolitan, regional and culturally and linguistically diverse communities. ACU draws on a centuries-old intellectual tradition grounded in respect for human dignity and the education of the whole person. Guided by Catholic social teaching, ACU places human flourishing at the centre of its education, research, innovation and engagement, supporting individuals and communities across the full human lifecycle from birth through to healthy ageing.

ACU plays a critical role within Australia's tertiary education system through its contribution to national capability in priority areas, particularly in education, health and community services. With graduates serving regional, remote and diverse communities, ACU strengthens workforce capability in areas of persistent and emerging need, while cultivating aspiration, expanding access and opportunity for students from under-represented groups. Through a community-embedded approach, ACU partners with industry, government and communities to address structural barriers to participation and deliver locally responsive outcomes.

Guided by its ten-year strategy, Vision 2033, ACU will equip learners with the knowledge, skills and confidence to thrive in an interconnected, digitally enabled and rapidly changing world. This will be achieved through coordinated pathways across school, vocational education and training (VET) and higher education, supported by flexible learning pathways and delivery models, including ACU Online, that build aspiration, expand access and enable lifelong learning. Building on its established suite of access programs, including Uni Step Up, ACU will continue to scale tailored and flexible pathway offerings that address educational disadvantage and support equitable participation and success for all learners. Strengthened credit recognition and articulation pathways will enable more seamless movement across the tertiary system, while fostering students' intellectual growth, wellbeing and sense of purpose. This approach values and recognises life experiences, including those with caring responsibilities, mature-age learners and veterans, whose knowledge and skills bring valuable perspectives to the broader student cohort. Through ACU Online and other flexible delivery models, ACU broadens access and educational opportunity for these cohorts while strengthening workforce capability in regional, rural and remote communities.

ACU's commitment to equity, inclusivity, reconciliation and systemic change is reflected throughout its strategy and underpinning enabling plans, including the Widening Participation Plan 2023-2033, Towards 2033 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Plan, Education and Student Success Plan and a Disability Action Plan commencing in 2027, which collectively support expanded access, participation and improved student outcomes.

Through its focus on digital capability and multi-disciplinary innovation, ACU will prepare graduates for future workforce and societal needs in partnership with industry and community. The co-creation of innovative programs in emerging fields, alongside integrated roles connecting research, care delivery and innovation, will establish sustainable education-to-employment pipelines and strengthen capability in areas of national priority.

This integrated approach extends to ACU's research and enterprise, where human flourishing provides a unifying and shared framework for translating knowledge into practice and impact. Through place-based innovation, global partnerships and initiatives such as the Indonesia-Australia Human Flourishing Centre, ACU advances research impact across health and wellbeing, education, social justice and sustainability, supporting community resilience and regional development locally and globally.

Enrolment strategy and priorities

At ACU, enrolment planning is a core institutional capability that underpins its mission, impact and long-term ambitions. It operationalises Vision 2033, Widening Participation Plan, and Towards 2033 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Plan by aligning ACU's student profile and course offerings with national and jurisdictional priorities.

As Australia's largest provider of nurses, teachers and allied health professionals, ACU plays a significant role in addressing workforce shortages across priority sectors. In 2026, 86% of ACU students are enrolled in fields aligned to areas of national, jurisdictional and regional demand, including teacher education, nursing, rehabilitation therapies and human welfare and services. Reflecting this focus, 77% of employed ACU graduates work in industries experiencing persistent workforce shortages, including health, education, aged care and emergency services (2025 Graduate Outcomes Survey).

Through its seven campuses across Australia serving regional, metropolitan and CALD communities, ACU delivers this workforce contribution through place-based growth, responsive education, strong community partnerships and co-designed solutions. This approach is demonstrated through the Ballarat Campus, where regionally embedded nursing and midwifery programs contribute to workforce pipelines while improving participation and outcomes for students from under-represented groups.

To maintain this alignment with future workforce and learner needs, ACU's enrolment strategy balances its established strengths in health and education (stable core) with targeted diversification and innovation in emerging disciplines and delivery models (disruptive edge). This includes expanding STEMM disciplines with a human-centric focus, increasing online and hybrid delivery to improve flexibility, lifelong learning and access for under-represented cohorts and First Nations students, and investing in new models of partnership and engagement. Key initiatives include:

- Human and Digital Futures, our new incubator-to-accelerator model that brings together industry, employers, communities and strategic partners to co-design solutions to emerging workforce, technological and societal challenges.
- Accelerated and vertically integrated qualifications that strengthen education-to-employment pathways and support earlier workforce participation.
- The STEM Centre of Education Excellence at the Strathfield Campus (2028), supported by a $45 million investment from the NSW Government and an ACU co-contribution of up to $9 million, will strengthen capability in teacher education, health, artificial intelligence and STEM disciplines. Through partnerships with schools, industry and community organisations, the Centre will strengthen industry engagement and lifelong learning opportunities that support emerging skills priorities in Western Sydney and nationally.
- Continued expansion at the Blacktown Campus in response to community and industry demand, reflecting ACU's commitment to deliver 3% year-on-year enrolment growth. This year, enrolments have grown by 7.8% since 2025, with a further 3.4% growth planned for 2027, demonstrating sustained demand and ACU's growing contribution to workforce needs in Western Sydney.

Complementing these broader priorities, ACU's international enrolment strategy focuses on disciplined, mission-aligned growth across priority markets, expanded transnational education and pathway opportunities, and a continued focus on quality, student experience and community impact. These activities diversify ACU's enrolment profile, strengthen global partnerships and support growth in emerging disciplines, digital capability and multi-disciplinary innovation.

As ACU continues to expand its contribution to workforce capacity and capability, continued growth in Commonwealth Supported Places will be critical to meeting workforce demand, supporting regional and under-represented communities and ensuring access to higher education is not constrained.

Section 2: Performance domains

National, State/territory and regional priorities

A tertiary education system which meets Australia's current and future skills and knowledge needs

Vision

Grounded in its mission and unwavering commitment to human dignity, ACU will foster flourishing lives and thriving communities through excellence in education, research, innovation and engagement, addressing Australia's future needs.

As a leading university of service, ACU will shape and respond to national and community priorities in health, education and community services, generating knowledge, capacity and capability for a productive, ethical and sustainable future.

Guided by subsidiarity, ACU will drive place-based transformation with communities, industry and government. By advancing mission-led innovation in service of its mission, ACU will strengthen regional resilience and capability, broaden access and opportunity, and reduce educational and health inequities.

Action

ACU will contribute to the National Tertiary Education Objective by strengthening workforce capability in health, education and community services, while building digital capability and innovation across those fields. Our national physical footprint enables locally responsive action aligned with national and jurisdictional priorities, including workforce shortages, regional participation, innovation and stronger tertiary pathways.

ACU will implement targeted initiatives to improve retention, progression and transition into employment, with a particular focus on supporting students from under-represented backgrounds. In 2027, ACU will design a flexible entry-to-completion pathway for adults retraining in health professions, with part-time delivery and support for placement participation. Through the federal Regional, Rural and Remote Home Care Workforce Support Program, ACU is supporting Skills Hubs to deliver 1,774 additional home care workers over three years, strengthening aged care workforce supply in regional, rural and remote communities. ACU will also build workforce capability in health technology, medical research and technology-enabled care through the Aikenhead Centre for Medical Discovery and an industry co-designed medical technology qualification.

In education, ACU will strengthen teacher workforce supply through initiatives including All Points to Teaching and Teach Now Victoria, which accelerate entry into teaching in priority subjects and locations across New South Wales, Queensland and Victoria, while expanding opportunities for career changers and under-represented groups. In partnership with the ACT Government, ACU will provide ten scholarships annually between 2026-2029 for future teachers undertaking degrees in priority areas including languages, inclusive education and STEM.

Supported by NSW Government investment, ACU's STEM Centre of Education Excellence will foster strategic partnerships and community outreach while strengthening digital, AI and STEM education and research capability. It will also provide training to address critical skills shortages in STEM-related teaching disciplines, particularly in regional and workforce shortage areas across NSW and nationally.

Through expanded partnerships with government and industry, ACU will translate research into policy, practice and innovation, scaling evidence-based models and embedding research-informed practice in teaching. Research training pathways for early- and mid-career researchers will be enhanced through initiatives such as the Graduate Certificate in Education Research, which provides an effective pathway into doctoral study and supports growth in the domestic research pipeline, including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander student participation and progression to PhD.

Measure

Indicator	Data source	Provider baseline	Milestone for 2027	Expected outcome and timeframe
06 Health				
Total student enrolments	HESC – Verified 2025	11,638	2.5% growth	12,200+ enrolments by 2030
Success rate	HESC – Verified 2024	94.08%	94.4%	Maintain consistently at or above 94.7%
Retention rate	HESC – Verified 2024	80.41%	80.7%	At or above 81.1% by 2030
07 Education				
Total student enrolments	HESC – Verified 2025	6,902	2.5% growth	7,400+ enrolments by 2030
Success rate	HESC – Verified 2024	91.88%	92.3%	Maintain consistently at or above 92.5%
Retention rate	HESC – Verified 2024	81.81%	82.1%	At or above 82.4% by 2030
09 Society and Culture				
Total student enrolments	HESC – Verified 2025	3,856	2.5% growth	4,000+ enrolments by 2030
Success rate	HESC – Verified 2024	89.76%	90.0%	Maintain consistently at or above 90.4%
Retention rate	HESC – Verified 2024	75.51%	75.8%	At or above 76.1% by 2030

Indicators are for the domestic undergraduate student cohort. Success rate includes both commencing and continuing students.

First Nations

First Nations leadership, access, participation and success

Vision

ACU envisions a culturally safe, inclusive and transformative higher education environment where Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, knowledges, leadership and self-determination are embedded across all aspects of university life.

ACU is committed to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander self-determination by strengthening and embedding Indigenous voice, authority and decision-making in matters affecting our communities, staff and students. Indigenous-led research and education committees and national panels create connected pathways for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples to set priorities, shape policy and practice, and determine futures grounded in Country, community and culture. Together, these structures move ACU beyond consultation toward shared authority, accountability and Indigenous leadership.

Guided by the Towards 2033 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Plan and Education and Student Success Plan, ACU is committed to improving student success, strengthening cultural responsiveness and listening deeply, learning respectfully and partnering genuinely with community.

Action

Implement galuma-li – student model of care

Grounded in the principles of culture, community, country and connection, this model describes the experience First Nations students can expect at ACU through the support of their Indigenous Higher Education Units (IHEUs). The implementation of Galuma-li strengthens the role and impact of ACU's IHEUs as culturally grounded hubs of belonging, support and engagement that enable students to succeed at university.

Strengthen capability in Indigenisation of curriculum

The Indigenisation of curriculum is an important institutional priority, with implications for cultural responsiveness, graduate outcomes, regulatory expectations, and the university's mission. ACU is moving from unit-level activity towards a more coordinated, course-based approach. This shift is already evident in some professionally accredited programs and a broader, institution-wide approach will strengthen consistency, enhance access, and better support diverse student pathways.

Build workforce cultural capability and anti-racism practice

Cultural responsiveness development will be provided to academic and professional staff to support deeper understanding of Indigenous perspectives and culturally appropriate pedagogies that extend beyond compliance-based training. This will include practical, discipline-relevant guidance that academics can apply directly in their teaching, supporting the embedding of anti-racism approaches across ACU and fostering a culturally safe university environment for students and staff.

Strengthen Indigenous leadership and participation

Led by the Pro Vice-Chancellor (Indigenous), ACU will strengthen Indigenous leadership and participation across decision-making by embedding Indigenous representation in committees, leadership forums and institutional initiatives. This includes strengthening the inclusion of Indigenous perspectives into curriculum design, research priorities and student support models. These actions will support more inclusive and culturally responsive decision-making and improved outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, staff and communities.

Strengthen Indigenous leadership and governance

ACU will strengthen Indigenous research capability through the development of an Indigenous Research Plan and sustained investment in Higher Degree by Research (HDR) pathways. This includes expanding the Indigenous HDR network and improving retention by creating safe and well-supported research environments. ACU will work to embed and strengthen Indigenous voice across all levels of the institution, from governance and leadership through to teaching, research, student experience and community engagement.

Measure

Indicator	Data source	Provider baseline	Milestone for 2027	Expected outcome and timeframe
First Nations total enrolments	HESC – Verified 2025	486	490 enrolments in 2027	510+ enrolments by 2030.
First Nations success rate	HESC – Verified 2024	85.32%	86.0% or above	By 2030, ACU expects to achieve a First Nations student success rate of 88% or above, representing continued incremental improvement and embedding culturally responsive teaching and support practices that enable First Nations students to succeed in their studies.
First Nations retention rate	HESC – Verified 2024	71.60%	72.0% or above	By 2030, ACU expects to achieve a First Nations student retention rate of 74% or above, representing steady and sustained progress in First Nations student retention through targeted support, culturally responsive practices, and continued investment.

Indicators are for the domestic undergraduate student cohort. Success rate includes both commencing and continuing students.

Equity

Increasing access, participation and attainment of under-represented groups and priority cohorts

Vision

ACU is committed to advancing equitable access, participation and success for students from under-represented groups, including those with a disability, from a low socio-economic (SES) background, First Nations, and regional and remote communities. Guided by its mission and commitment to human dignity and the common good, ACU will foster flourishing lives and thriving communities through a student-centred, strengths-based environment supporting success across the lifelong learning journey. ACU's ambition for equity and disability inclusion is centred on ensuring that students from under-represented backgrounds and those with disability can participate in higher education on an equitable basis and achieve success comparable to other students.

Action

ACU's Widening Participation Plan 2023-2033 adopts a whole-of-institution approach to improving access, participation and success for students from under-represented backgrounds. Since 2023, ACU has established shared accountability through institutional equity targets, faculty-level implementation plans and ongoing monitoring and evaluation through the ACU Impact and Evaluation Framework. This approach embeds equity and inclusion as a core institutional responsibility and supports sustained cultural and systems change.

Early evidence indicates that these reforms are contributing to increased participation and improved equity outcomes across priority cohorts. Between 2023 and 2025, participation rates increased across all cohorts:

Student participation rates	2023	2025
Students with disability	9.1%	11.6%
Low SES students	10.0%	11.0%
First Nations students	1.9%	2.2%
Regional and remote students	10.3%	10.9%

Targeted pathway programs have supported these improvements by addressing barriers to participation and creating entry points into priority disciplines. ACU's Uni Step Up (USU) and Step Up into Teaching (SUIT) programs provide pathways for students from under-represented backgrounds and have experienced significant growth in recent years, with enrolments increasing by 203%, from 318 students in 2022 to 962 students in 2026 (preliminary headcount). Approximately 50% of USU students articulate into ACU undergraduate programs, predominantly in health and education, and achieve pass rates comparable with ACU's broader student population.

These initiatives are also tailored to local workforce needs. At the Ballarat Campus, USU is offered in nursing, midwifery, paramedicine and occupational therapy, strengthening regional access to health qualifications in areas of workforce demand. The SUIT program will be introduced at the Ballarat Campus from 2027, further strengthening pathways into teaching.

To support continued progress towards its 2033 targets, ACU is developing a Disability Education Inclusion Strategy for 2027–2030, which will provide a framework for improving access, participation and inclusion for students with disability.

ACU's national Access and Disability Service supports this work through individualised Education Inclusion Plans and adjustments across learning, assessment, examinations and professional experience.

Building on the institutional foundations established through the Widening Participation Plan, ACU will continue strengthening equity-informed approaches to admissions, curriculum, teaching and student support, with ongoing evaluation informing continuous improvement and the scaling of effective interventions that improve student access, participation and success.

Measure

Indicator	Cohort	Data source	Provider baseline	Milestone for 2027	Expected outcome and timeframe
Total enrolments	Students with disability	HESC – Verified 2025	2,675	2,700	2,800+ enrolments by 2030
Total enrolments	Students from low SES backgrounds	HESC – Verified 2025	2,337	2,453	3,500+ enrolments by 2030
Total enrolments	Regional	HESC – Verified 2025	2,184	2,296	2,500+ enrolments by 2030
Total enrolments	Remote	HESC – Verified 2025	42	45	52 enrolments by 2030
Success	Students with disability	HESC – Verified 2024	89.28%	89.6%	Maintain at or above 90.0%
Success	Students from low SES backgrounds	HESC – Verified 2024	88.46%	88.8%	Maintain at or above 90.0%
Success	Regional	HESC – Verified 2024	92.43%	92.7%	Maintain at or above 93.0%
Success	Remote	HESC – Verified 2024	85.16%	85.5%	Maintain at or above 86.0%
Retention	Students with disability	HESC – Verified 2024	84.12%	84.4%	Maintain at or above 84.7%
Retention	Students from low SES backgrounds	HESC – Verified 2024	77.46%	77.7%	Maintain at or above 78.1%
Retention	Regional	HESC – Verified 2024	80.65%	80.9%	Maintain at or above 81.3%
Retention	Remote	HESC – Verified 2024	76.92%	77.3%	Maintain at or above 78.6%

Indicators are for the domestic undergraduate student cohort. Success rate includes both commencing and continuing students.

Quality teaching

Raising the quality and recognition of higher education teaching

Vision

ACU envisions quality teaching as central to its mission and the Education and Student Success Plan, which positions student success, belonging, wellbeing, equity and future-ready learning at the heart of the university experience. In line with its mission, ACU promotes a human-centred, student-focused approach grounded in dignity, inclusion, academic excellence and real-world learning. Through evidence-informed, digitally enabled and relational teaching practices, ACU seeks to enhance student engagement, graduate readiness and lifelong learning. ACU aspires to be recognised as a leader in teaching excellence and student-centred learning, and to develop graduates with the ethical, professional and transferable capabilities needed in a rapidly changing world.

Action

ACU has a strong commitment to the quality of teaching as a key factor in contributing to student learning outcomes and the student experience. While learning and teaching includes complex factors for consideration across the multiple modes of delivery (physical campuses, online and hybrid), the importance on the capability in our academic teaching workforce to navigate this complexity is a focus in our Teaching Criteria and Standards Framework (TCSF). A review of the TCSF will be undertaken in line with the recent report on Enhancing Professional Practice in Australian Higher Education (Johnson, 2026). ACU will also engage in sector wide best practice communities, including the Artificial Intelligence (AI) in Higher Education Community of Practice, led by Curtin University, where models of professional learning and teaching excellence are shared through evidence-based approaches.

Through the **Higher Education Learning and Teaching Academy**, ACU will build capability in evidence-informed teaching, educational leadership and the scholarship of learning and teaching. Through a new mandatory Teacher Induction Professional Learning Program and the review of the **Graduate Certificate in Higher Education**, ACU will strengthen foundational and contemporary teaching capability across academic and sessional staff. The revised program will include targeted professional learning in inclusive pedagogy, authentic assessment, AI-resilient assessment design and ethical AI use in teaching practice, developed through a series of microcredentials.

ACU will expand institutionally supported **AI-enabled teaching and learning initiatives** that assist academics to design contextualised learning, assessment, feedback and student support.

ACU's **Two-Lane Approach to Assessment** provides a clear framework for assuring credible and defensible evidence of student learning in response to Generative AI and evolving TEQSA expectations. It differentiates secure, supervised tasks that verify core learning outcomes from open tasks that enable authentic learning, including appropriate use of AI. This model will be reinforced through course-level assessment mapping, targeted reform initiatives and a dashboard demonstrating assurance of learning across unit and course levels. ACU will continue to innovate and redevelop its curriculum, including increasing the provision of modular education options that pathway into further study. This will improve access, support lifelong learning and enable more responsive alignment with workforce and industry needs.

Measure

Indicator	Data source	Provider baseline	Milestone for 2027	Expected outcome and timeframe
Overall educational experience	QILT SES – Verified 2025	80.4%	81% or above by 2027	By 2030, ACU expects to achieve an Overall educational experience satisfaction rate at or above 82%, reflecting a holistic and sustained improvement across the student experience, underpinned by ACU's mission and commitment to care for the whole person.
Teaching quality and engagement	QILT SES – Verified 2025	81.4%	82% or above by 2027	By 2030, ACU expects to achieve a Teaching quality and engagement satisfaction rate at or above 83%, driven by sustained investment in academic development, teaching excellence recognition, and student-centred engagement practices.
Learning resources	QILT SES – Verified 2025	85.7%	86% or above by 2027	By 2030, ACU expects to sustain a Learning resources satisfaction rate at or above 87%, reflecting consistent investment in the quality and accessibility of learning materials and resources across all delivery modes.

Note: 2027 and 2030 milestones and outcomes have been informed by ACU's 2025 results, historical performance trends and the anticipated contribution of current and planned initiatives to enhance the overall student experience. These should be considered in the context of the inherent variability associated with survey-based measures as well as the significant lag that can occur between the implementation of institutional initiatives and their observable impact on reported outcomes.

Joined-up tertiary system

Strengthening collaboration and coordination between vocational education and training (VET) and higher education

Vision

ACU envisions a coordinated, student-centred tertiary system that enables seamless movement between school, vocational education and higher education, supporting the development of the whole person and enabling flourishing lives and thriving communities. Through flexible, stackable microcredentials and recognition of prior learning, ACU will improve access, participation and success across the student lifecycle. Guided by its mission, ACU will co-design responsive, future-focused learning with VET providers, industry and community partners. This approach will expand equitable access, strengthen workforce capability and support a more connected and harmonised tertiary system, delivering improved outcomes for students, communities and national productivity.

Action

ACU currently has 52 active articulation agreements with 30 VET providers and is committed to strengthening integration between school, vocational education and higher education. ACU aims to create seamless learner pathways that reduce duplication of learning, strengthen and systemise recognition of prior learning and support learner mobility across the tertiary system.

From 2027, ACU will transition from episodic partnerships to sustainable, evidence-based pathway models that establish robust pipelines and improve participation, student success and workforce supply, aligned with the interim SSP, National Skills Plan and ACU Vision 2033. A pilot to systematise credit pathways for nursing programs will be developed through the NSW Department of Education Credit Working Group in partnership with TAFE NSW.

Key initiatives in 2027 will accelerate qualification pathways and improve access, participation and success for under-represented cohorts, including First Nations, low SES, regional and remote, mature-age learners and veterans, supporting lifelong learning and seamless mobility across the tertiary system.

Robust, scalable pathways aligned to workforce priorities

ACU will expand VET to university pathways in health through a national partnership between VET providers, ACU and health services. A co-designed model will be piloted, incorporating integrated pathways, recognition of prior learning, flexible delivery and work-integrated learning. This approach will strengthen progression into priority health professions, support workforce development and improve student outcomes, while enabling coordinated student mobility across the tertiary system.

ACU will also extend pathways to business and education, supporting broader tertiary integration. Leveraging the Blacktown Campus, ACU will partner with VET providers in Greater Western Sydney to co-design pathways aligned to local workforce needs, including transparent credit arrangements, streamlined progression and guaranteed entry into second-year undergraduate study.

Strengthened credit-recognition and system alignment

ACU will undertake a credit-mapping project with NSW TAFE in business and information technology to establish consistent and scalable recognition of prior learning. This will improve pathway transparency, support participation and enable timely, evidence-based credit decisions.

ACU will also expand pathways for veterans through recognition of prior learning and skills from Australian Defence Force service, supported by a Department of Veterans' Affairs grant. Tailored transition support and enhanced recognition will strengthen participation and progression into priority workforce areas.

Measure

Indicator	Data source	Provider baseline	Milestone for 2027	Expected outcome and timeframe
Domestic commencing students admitted to a bachelor course on the basis of VET	ACU Student System – Preliminary 2025	503 unique headcount in 2025	New and expanded pathways are rolled-out in 2027	700+ students by 2030

Research

Sustaining national capability and supporting innovation through research and research training

Vision

ACU advances people-centred capability and innovation in service of a flourishing humanity. Our research and research training support the full flourishing of the human person: physical, social, cultural, moral and spiritual. ACU combines foundational and translational research across its core disciplines to empower and sustain Australia's future workforce, develop technology for the common good, enhance evidence-based policy and deliver scalable people-centred solutions to pressing socioeconomic challenges locally, nationally and in our region. This includes investing in new pathways and new partnerships to attract non-traditional Higher Degree by Research cohorts that will grow Australia's research and development (R&D) capability.

Action

Our Research and Enterprise vision positions ACU as a distinctive partner to help people flourish both in Australia and the Global South. Leveraging our excellence in foundational research, including being ranked first in Australia for Research Quality, ACU combines research excellence with real-world impact, delivering practical benefits to Australian communities and strengthening national capability.

ACU's research addresses areas of national need, including workforce capacity in education and the care economy, improving health outcomes, supporting thriving communities, enhancing family safety and promoting childhood wellbeing. Through partnerships with government, industry and community organisations, ACU translates research into evidence-based policies, practices and services that improve outcomes for individuals, families and communities.

ACU is developing human-centred frameworks for responsible AI and advancing data-informed practice. This work underpins the co-funded STEM Centre of Education Excellence, which will enhance teacher capability, engage students and communities, and build STEM participation across schools. ACU is also a founding partner in the Aikenhead Centre for Medical Discovery, connecting universities, health services and industry to strengthen ACU's graduate research and workforce pipeline to meet the demands of a rapidly growing and evolving care sector.

In research training, ACU will build on its strong connections to community and industry partners to help develop a domestic Higher Degree by Research (HDR) pipeline; ACU has among the highest proportion of HDR students in the sector engaged with end-users. A particular area of strength is the engagement of ACU's HDR cohorts with cultural, local government and educational institutions in regional Victoria. ACU will continue to build on this engagement so that our students contribute to solving problems of national significance during their degree and graduate with the skills needed to contribute to Australia's R&D needs.

To help address declining domestic HDR enrolments nationally, ACU will build new pathways into PhD study in areas of national need and where traditional entry points are less established, including education, allied health, and nursing. New accelerated pathways will encourage graduates working in education and health to commence or return to ACU to complete a PhD. In addition, current programs will be enhanced to provide a stronger pipeline for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander graduates. The Graduate Certificate in Educational Research has provided such a pathway, resulting in new opportunities for education graduates and a significant increase in Indigenous HDR students studying at ACU.

Measure

Indicator	Data source	Provider baseline	Milestone for 2027	Expected outcome and timeframe
HDR enrolments	HESC – Verified 2025	269 domestic enrolments in 2025 (cumulative)	287 domestic enrolments in 2027 (cumulative)	318 domestic enrolments in 2030 (cumulative)
Category 2 and 3 income	HERDC – Verified 2024	$6.3 million in 2024. ACU's research income is currently dominated by competitive grants.	$7.3 million target for Category 2 and 3, which represents ACU's strategic focus on growing co-funded research with government, industry and international partners.	$9.2 million target for Category 2-4 by 2030, which represents ACU's strategic focus on growing co-funded research with government, industry and international partners.

Section 3: Course and campus changes

Course closures

Before closing any undergraduate or postgraduate course of study in which Commonwealth supported students have been enrolled for more than two years without its immediate replacement by a course of study that leads to the same occupation or provides a similar specialised skill (including any suspension of intake of students for more than one consecutive academic year), the provider must notify the ATEC of its plans in writing.

Notification of actual or potential closures must occur as soon as reasonably possible before final decisions to close courses are made, or before any information on the potential course closure is made public (whichever comes first). Notification must occur via email to studentprofiles@atec.gov.au as information on proposed course closures becomes available.

Providers must provide a list of all courses proposed for closure and a short justification (e.g. low student demand).

Where a proposed course closure falls within one or more of the areas of Commonwealth concern, providers must identify the relevant courses and provide additional information. Areas of Commonwealth concern include whether the course:

- prepares students for an occupation experiencing a skills shortage
- is in a field where closure may create a skills shortage, including where the provider is the sole or dominant national provider
- is a specialised course linked to a regional economy
- is in a field identified as an ATEC priority in the interim SSP:
  - health, aged care and disability support
  - education, including early childhood education and care
  - sovereign capability and food security, including advanced manufacturing and critical minerals
  - digital and technology
  - housing and construction
  - climate change and Net Zero transformation
- is funded under a specific Commonwealth initiative such as Nuclear-Powered Submarine places.

Where a closure relates to one or more Commonwealth concerns as listed above, the provider must provide information on:

- the expected high-level impacts on staff and students arising from the closures, including numbers of students and staff affected and how these impacts are being mitigated including alternative options available for students
- the consultation undertaken with staff, students, community and other stakeholders
- how the provider is meeting relevant requirements under the Higher Education Standards Framework (Threshold Standards) 2021, including the proposed teach out provisions to ensure existing students can complete their chosen course of study
- potential options to retain the course, including through cooperation with another provider or the movement of Commonwealth supported places to another provider (where applicable).

If the ATEC has any concerns about the potential course closure based on the information provided, the provider must engage with any discussions that the ATEC may seek to have, to reach a mutually agreeable arrangement with the provider regarding the course closure.

Where a provider determines that a closure does not relate to any identified Commonwealth concerns, they are only required to notify ATEC of the name of the course being closed via email to studentprofiles@atec.gov.au and classify it as a routine/low concern closure.

Campus changes

Providers must notify the ATEC if the provider proposes to enrol Commonwealth supported students in a course of study at a new campus or educational facility, or if the provider proposes to close a campus where Commonwealth supported students are enrolled.