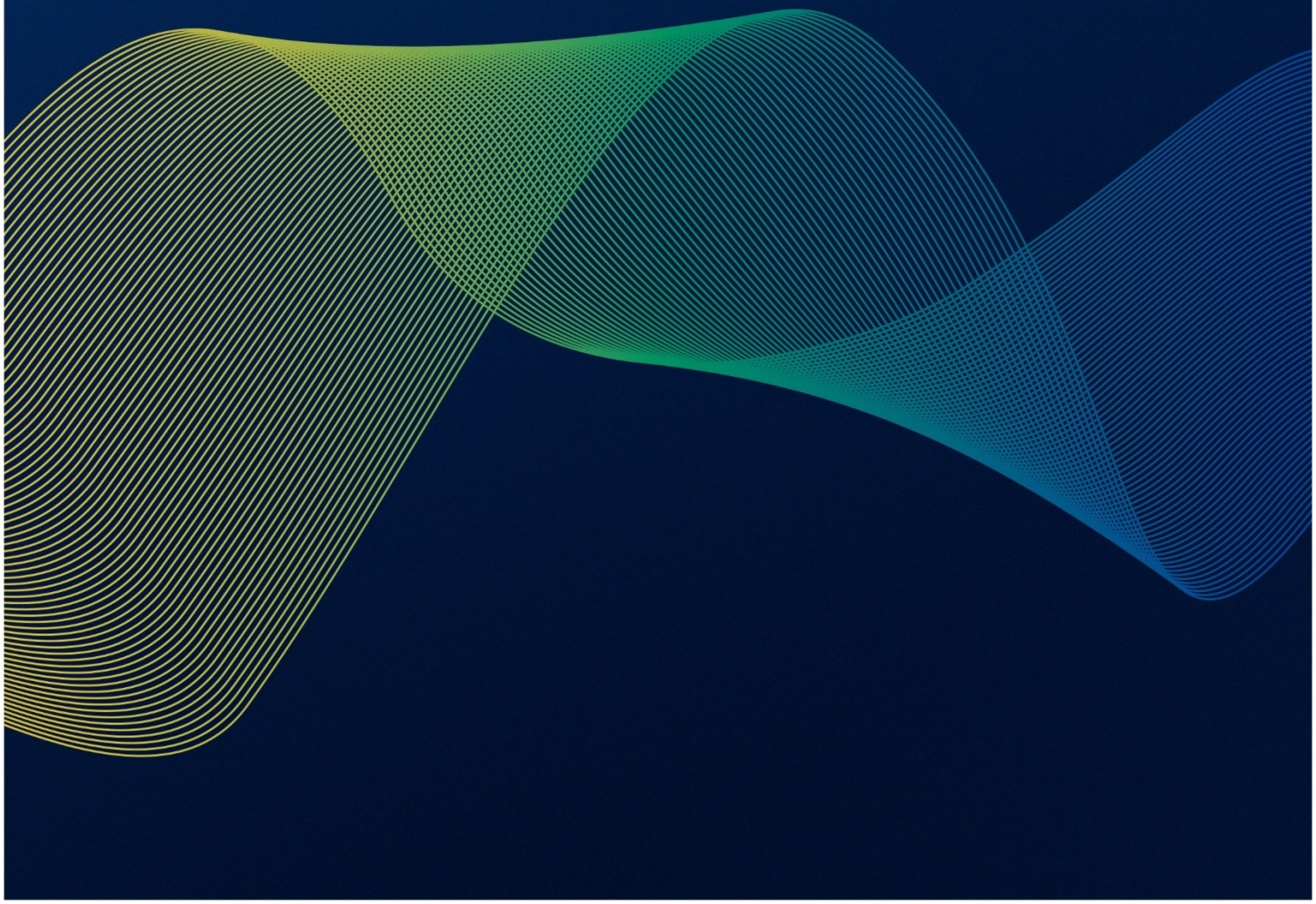
Australian Government

ATEC
Australian Tertiary Education Commission

CHARLES DARWIN UNIVERSITY AUSTRALIA

2027 mission based compact between the ATEC and Charles Darwin University



Preface

This mission based compact is established between the Australian Tertiary Education Commission (ATEC) and Charles Darwin University in accordance with the *Universities Accord (Australian Tertiary Education Commission) Act 2026* (ATEC Act). This mission based compact highlights the significant contributions Charles Darwin University 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 Charles Darwin University. 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 Charles Darwin University's goals, missions and strategic plan, geographic location and local community, as well as the effect (if any) the proposed terms may have on Charles Darwin University's academic freedom.

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

The ATEC must assess Charles Darwin University'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 Charles Darwin University 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 Charles Darwin University 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 Charles Darwin University'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 Charles Darwin University to provide relevant information consistent with subsection 30(2) of the ATEC Act.

The ATEC may conduct annual check-in meetings with Charles Darwin University as needed, to discuss Charles Darwin University's progress towards meeting the terms of this compact. If Charles Darwin University has any concerns about their ability to meet the agreed terms of this compact, including as a result of matters reasonably outside Charles Darwin University's control, Charles Darwin University 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

Charles Darwin University (CDU) is the Northern Territory's public university and a leading provider of tertiary education, research and workforce development for Northern Australia.

Serving communities across more than 1.4 million square kilometres, CDU delivers education, training and research that responds directly to the unique opportunities and challenges of the Northern Territory. The University plays a critical role in building and retaining the Territory's workforce, supporting economic and social development, advancing First Nations leadership and knowledge systems, and improving educational attainment across regional, remote and very remote Australia.

The Northern Territory occupies a unique place within Australia's social, economic and strategic landscape. It has Australia's youngest population, the highest proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, significant workforce shortages across key industries and a growing role in Australia's engagement with the Indo-Pacific region. The Territory is central to national priorities including health, education, defence, infrastructure, energy transition and regional development. CDU's mission is to ensure that people, regardless of where they live, can access high-quality tertiary education and training that creates opportunity for individuals, strengthens communities and contributes to national prosperity.

As the only university headquartered in and serving the Northern Territory, CDU provides access to tertiary education for communities that would otherwise face significant barriers to participation. Through a network of campuses, regional centres and online delivery, the University enables students to study close to home, remain connected to their communities and contribute to local workforce needs. This role is particularly important for students from remote and very remote communities, many of whom are the first in their family to participate in tertiary education.

CDU is distinguished by its strong commitment to equity and inclusion. The University serves a student cohort that includes significant proportions of First Nations students, regional and remote learners, students from low socio-economic backgrounds and mature-age students. Through flexible delivery, place-based education and community partnerships, CDU seeks to remove barriers to participation and improve student success and completion outcomes. In doing so, CDU contributes directly to the objectives of the Australian Universities Accord and the national goal of increasing tertiary attainment.

As one of Australia's dual-sector universities, CDU provides integrated pathways between vocational education and training, higher education and research. This enables learners to move through the tertiary system in ways that support lifelong learning, workforce participation and career progression, while helping address critical workforce shortages across the Territory.

CDU's research agenda is focused on delivering impact for Northern Australia and contributing solutions to national and global challenges. The University's strengths in health, education, environmental sustainability, tropical and desert knowledge systems, First Nations knowledges, regional development, agriculture, defence and energy transition support evidence-based policy, innovation and economic growth.

The commitments outlined in this compact reflect CDU's mission and strategic direction. Through workforce-focused growth, strengthened First Nations participation and leadership, improved outcomes for equity cohorts, high-quality teaching and learning, integrated tertiary pathways and impactful research, CDU will contribute to the priorities of the Australian Tertiary Education Commission while supporting the long-term prosperity of the Northern Territory and Northern Australia. Additional Commonwealth supported places will enable CDU to expand participation in workforce priority disciplines, strengthen educational opportunity for the communities it serves and support the long-term workforce and population needs of the Northern Territory.

Enrolment strategy and priorities

CDU’s enrolment strategy is centred on increasing participation in tertiary education, improving educational attainment and developing the skilled workforce required to meet the current and future needs of the Northern Territory.

The University serves a diverse student population across undergraduate, postgraduate, vocational and enabling education programs. CDU's student profile reflects the unique demographic characteristics of the Northern Territory, with strong representation from First Nations students, regional and remote learners, mature-age students, students from low socio-economic backgrounds and students with disability. Supporting increased participation and success amongst these cohorts remains a core enrolment priority.

CDU’s course profile is aligned to workforce priorities identified by the Australian Government, Northern Territory Government, industry and community stakeholders. The University continues to prioritise growth in disciplines that support critical workforce needs and future economic opportunities, including health, allied health, medicine, education, engineering and community services. The commencement of the CDU Menzies Medical Program in 2026 represents a significant expansion of the University’s contribution to addressing long-term health workforce needs across the Territory and Northern Australia.

The University delivers education through campuses and learning locations across Darwin, Alice Springs, Katherine and Nhulunbuy, supported by extensive online, blended and multi-modal delivery. This flexible model enables students from regional, remote and very remote communities to participate in tertiary education without relocating and supports workforce development within local communities. CDU will continue to invest in flexible delivery approaches that increase access and participation across the Territory.

As a dual-sector institution, CDU continues to strengthen pathways between vocational education and training and higher education. The University is committed to improving articulation arrangements, credit recognition processes and pathway programs that enable students to transition successfully between qualifications and levels of study. These pathways support lifelong learning, create opportunities for students to progress through the tertiary system in ways that reflect their individual aspirations and circumstances, and strengthen the Territory’s pipeline of skilled workers across vocational and professional occupations.

CDU anticipates continued demand for tertiary education from First Nations students, regional and remote learners, mature-age students and those seeking flexible study options. Growth is expected in workforce priority disciplines, particularly health, education, engineering and community services. Additional Commonwealth supported places would support this growth, improve alignment between funded places and demonstrated student demand, expand participation amongst cohorts that have traditionally been underrepresented in higher education and strengthen CDU’s capacity to meet the Territory’s workforce needs in priority disciplines. Additional places would increase access to tertiary education for students from regional, remote and very remote communities who may otherwise be unable to participate, supporting both educational attainment and workforce development outcomes across the Northern Territory.

International education remains an important component of CDU’s enrolment profile and contributes to the University's role as a gateway between Australia and the Indo-Pacific region. CDU continues to diversify international student recruitment, with a particular focus on Southeast Asia and neighbouring regional markets, reducing reliance on any single source country and aligning with Australian Government priorities. The University is committed to ensuring international student growth is sustainable, supports educational quality and enhances the student experience. Unlike many jurisdictions experiencing accommodation constraints, CDU has invested significantly in student accommodation infrastructure, including the recently announced 350 bed facility currently under development. This provides capacity to support future growth while ensuring accommodation is not a barrier to student participation. Through investment in student support, accommodation and community integration initiatives, CDU seeks to attract and retain international students who contribute to the economic, social and cultural development of the Northern Territory. CDU’s international engagement also strengthens regional partnerships, supports Australia’s broader strategic interests in the Indo-Pacific and enriches learning opportunities for both domestic and international students.

Through this enrolment strategy, CDU will contribute to increased tertiary attainment, stronger workforce participation and the economic and social development of the Northern Territory, while supporting national priorities for skills development, equity and regional growth.

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

CDU will build the workforce and capability the Northern Territory needs while contributing to Australia's national priorities. As the Territory's public university, our impact is intersectional: increasing tertiary participation and attainment also strengthens the workforce, supports regional development, improves First Nations outcomes and builds capability in Australia's strategically important north. CDU will focus growth where demonstrated student demand, Territory workforce need and national priority intersect, including health, education, engineering, housing and construction, digital and technology, and sovereign capability. Through improved access, success, retention and completion, CDU will translate national tertiary ambition into tangible outcomes for the Territory and Australia.

Action

In 2027, CDU will prioritise growth and improved student outcomes in disciplines aligned with Australian Government priorities, Northern Territory Government priorities and regional workforce needs. This builds on an existing profile in which 86% of CDU's Commonwealth Grant Scheme (CGS) Equivalent Full-time Student Load (EFTSL) is aligned to national or Territory workforce priorities and 67% comes from an equity cohort.

CDU's ambition is not simply to increase access, but to ensure students succeed, complete their qualifications, progress to further study and build meaningful careers. As CDU grows in priority disciplines, targeted support, flexible delivery and earlier intervention will strengthen progression, retention and completion, particularly for students and cohorts where outcomes remain challenging.

Health, allied health and medicine will remain major areas of growth, including through the CDU Menzies Medical Program. Training more health professionals in the Territory, with strong clinical and community connections, will contribute directly to addressing persistent workforce shortages and strengthening local workforce retention. Teacher education will remain a priority, particularly in regional and remote communities where workforce shortages continue to have significant impact.

Engineering, digital technology and cyber security will support major infrastructure, resources, energy and defence activity and strengthen Australia's sovereign capability in the north. CDU will deepen pathways and partnerships with Defence, industry and government to ensure education and training responds to emerging workforce requirements.

CDU's dual-sector capability provides a further opportunity to respond to critical workforce needs. The University will strengthen housing and construction capability through higher education programs, including the Bachelor of Construction Management, alongside VET pathways into construction and related trades. Education and research across engineering, energy and environmental disciplines will also contribute to national climate change and Net Zero priorities.

Across these areas, CDU will work with the Northern Territory Government, industry, Defence, employers and communities to align education with current and emerging workforce demand and expand work-integrated learning and pathways into employment. Flexible, place-based and multi-modal delivery will remain central to this approach, enabling Territorians to access education while remaining connected to their communities and local workforce.

Measure

Indicator	Data source	Provider baseline	Milestone for 2027	Expected outcome and timeframe
06 Health				
Total student enrolments	HESC – Verified 2025	2,727	3,000	3,750 by 2030
Success rate	HESC – Verified 2024	88.40%	89%	89% by 2027
Retention rate	HESC – Verified 2024	72.30%	75%	82% by 2030
0701 Teacher Education				
Total student enrolments	HESC – Verified 2025	1,068	1,170	1,500 by 2030
Success rate	HESC – Verified 2024	82.70%	84%	84% by 2027
Retention rate	HESC – Verified 2024	73.80%	75%	82% by 2030
03 Engineering				
Total student enrolments	HESC – Verified 2025	411	430	500 by 2030
Success rate	HESC – Verified 2024	76.00%	77%	83% by 2030
Retention rate	HESC – Verified 2024	56.30%	59%	82% 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

CDU will advance First Nations self-determination by strengthening First Nations leadership, decision-making and control across education, research, governance and resources. As the university of the Northern Territory, CDU's ambition extends beyond participation: First Nations students should succeed, complete, progress to postgraduate study, lead and create knowledge that benefits their communities. Working with First Nations communities and organisations, including Batchelor Institute, CDU will strengthen culturally responsive pathways from enabling and sub-degree education through undergraduate and postgraduate study. Success will be measured not only by who enters tertiary education, but by who succeeds, leads and shapes its future.

Action

In 2027, CDU will strengthen First Nations self-determination by moving beyond consultation towards greater First Nations leadership, decision-making and control over priorities, resources and outcomes. This includes progressing the CDU First Nations Funding Charter and strengthening First Nations governance of Indigenous Student Success Program and other dedicated funding, increasing transparency, accountability and community influence over how resources are directed and outcomes measured.

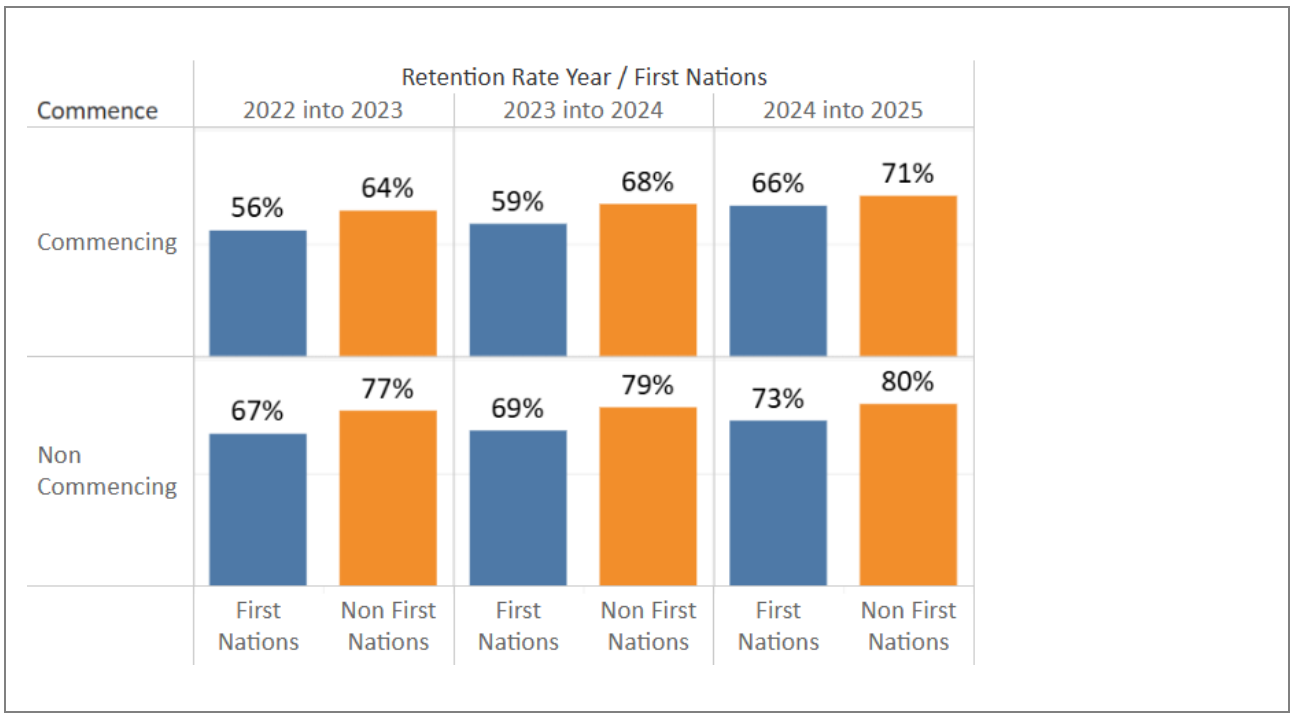
CDU will strengthen pathways across enabling and sub-degree programs, undergraduate education, postgraduate coursework and higher degrees by research. The ambition is not simply participation, but success, completion, progression, leadership and knowledge creation. This requires approaches that recognise the different starting points, aspirations and circumstances of First Nations students and enable communities to have a meaningful role in shaping how education is designed and delivered.

CDU's Practice-Based PhD demonstrates this approach. Developed through consultation and action, it recognises First Nations leadership, cultural knowledge, professional practice and existing expertise within a rigorous doctoral pathway. First Nations candidates and communities shape the research question, methodology and cultural governance, including how knowledge is interpreted, protected, shared and used. Tailored wraparound support helps candidates sustain participation and progress towards completion.

The benefits extend beyond an individual qualification. CDU works from strength, recognising the cultural knowledge, professional expertise, lived experience and community authority candidates bring. The Practice-Based PhD enables candidates to gain recognition and authority within First Nations and university knowledge systems and contribute as lecturers, researchers, supervisors, examiners and experts. This strengthens the pipeline of First Nations academic and research leadership and builds institutional and community capability for future generations.

CDU will build on improving First Nations student outcomes through culturally responsive support, earlier intervention and stronger connection to community, with particular focus on first-year retention, continuation and completion. First Nations commencing undergraduate retention has improved 10% in 2 years, while the gap with non-First Nations domestic students has narrowed from 8 to 5 percentage points.

Working with First Nations communities and organisations, including Batchelor Institute, CDU will strengthen connected tertiary pathways and locally determined approaches that support First Nations students from entry through to postgraduate study, research and leadership.



Measure

Indicator	Data source	Provider baseline	Milestone for 2027	Expected outcome and timeframe
First Nations total enrolments	HESC – Verified 2025	492	510	700 by 2030
First Nations success rate	HESC – Verified 2024	67.80%	68.0%	75% by 2030
First Nations retention rate	HESC – Verified 2024	59.60%	63%	70% by 2030

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

CDU will increase participation, success and attainment for students traditionally underrepresented in tertiary education, particularly regional and remote students, students from low socio-economic backgrounds, students with disability and other priority cohorts. Equity is core to CDU's role: 67% of our CGS EFTSL is from an equity cohort. Our ambition extends beyond providing access. CDU will strengthen the pathways, teaching, support and flexible delivery that enable students to remain engaged, succeed and complete their studies. In doing so, CDU will increase educational attainment, strengthen regional workforce participation and contribute to the social and economic development of the Northern Territory.

Action

In 2027, CDU will strengthen its focus on success, retention and completion for equity cohorts while continuing to expand access to tertiary education. Recent data shows improving outcomes across key cohorts, including students with disability, low-SES students and regional and remote students, with regional student retention also strengthening. CDU will build on this progress with a stronger focus on closing remaining gaps in success and completion.

CDU will provide targeted, evidence-informed support across the student lifecycle, from outreach and aspiration building through to completion and transition into employment or further study. This includes enabling and foundation pathways, flexible and multi-modal delivery, transition support, early identification of disengagement risk, accessible learning environments and targeted academic and student support.

Attention will be given to the barriers experienced by students studying regionally and remotely and those balancing study with work, family and community responsibilities. In the Northern Territory, distance, limited local access to services and the realities of studying from small and remote communities can compound barriers to participation and persistence. Flexible and place-based delivery is therefore not simply a mode of study, but an important equity mechanism.

The CDU Neurodiversity Hub, launched in 2025, demonstrates this approach. Through a scalable, digitally embedded platform, the Hub reduces barriers to participation and provides accessible, student-centred support for neurodivergent learners, including those without a formal diagnosis or disability registration. It provides tailored resources, access to assistive technologies and guidance while building understanding and capability across the University community.

CDU will use data more systematically to identify where students are at greatest risk of disengagement, evaluate the effectiveness of interventions and direct support where it can have greatest impact. Success will be measured through progression, retention, completion and transition to further study or employment, not participation alone.

CDU will also strengthen partnerships with schools, communities, employers and government to create clearer pathways into tertiary education and employment, particularly in workforce-priority disciplines.

CDU will seek to expand opportunity for equity cohorts while investing in the support required to convert access into attainment, skilled employment and stronger outcomes for communities across the Northern Territory.

Measure

Indicator	Cohort	Data source	Provider baseline	Milestone for 2027	Expected outcome and timeframe
Total enrolments	Students with disability	HESC – Verified 2025	947	1,000	1,200 by 2030
Total enrolments	Students from low SES backgrounds	HESC – Verified 2025	1,330	1,400	1,650 by 2030
Total enrolments	Regional	HESC – Verified 2025	2,981	3,100	3,500 by 2030
Total enrolments	Remote	HESC – Verified 2025	519	530	750 by 2030
Success	Students with disability	HESC – Verified 2024	74.90%	76%	83% by 2030
Success	Students from low SES backgrounds	HESC – Verified 2024	81.00%	82%	83% by 2030
Success	Regional	HESC – Verified 2024	82.80%	83%	83% by 2030
Success	Remote	HESC – Verified 2024	80.10%	81%	83% by 2030
Retention	Students with disability	HESC – Verified 2024	63.10%	65%	70% by 2030
Retention	Students from low SES backgrounds	HESC – Verified 2024	65.60%	68%	72% by 2030
Retention	Regional	HESC –Verified 2024	67.50%	68%	72% by 2030
Retention	Remote	HESC – Verified 2024	66.20%	67%	72% by 2030

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

CDU's vision is to advance the quality and recognition of teaching in higher education across the University. Educators will be supported to design curriculum and assessment, use evidence about student learning and outcomes, and share practice across disciplines and modes of study. Excellence in teaching will be developed and recognised through professional learning, peer review, teaching awards, leadership opportunities and Fellowship. Building on CDU's strengths in online, regional and culturally responsive education, and the leadership of First Nations staff and communities, this approach will strengthen educator capability and improve student experience, retention and success, regardless of location or mode of study.

Action

In 2027, CDU will build on its strengths in teaching quality through closer alignment of educator development, curriculum and assessment enhancement, annual course review and student evidence. EdUplift, CDU's major 3-year initiative to improve online learning, is enhancing online course design, assessment and student experience, underpinned by professional development for educators. MyView feedback, QILT Student Experience Survey results and student engagement, retention, progression and success data will inform annual course review and identify priorities for curriculum, assessment and teaching enhancement. This includes authentic and inclusive assessment aligned with course learning outcomes and high-quality feedback. Impact will be considered through student feedback, course review and student outcomes.

CDU will strengthen the development and recognition of teaching excellence through an educator capability pathway, extending from induction and development to educational leadership and professional recognition. The pathway brings together the Graduate Certificate in Teaching and Learning, curriculum and assessment design programs, teaching-practice workshops, peer review, communities of practice, teaching awards and Advance HE Fellowship. CDU's Development and Career Plan process will connect professional learning with teaching responsibilities, course priorities and needs. EdFest and recognition workshops will promote teaching, support educators to evidence their impact and increase participation in institutional awards and Fellowship pathways.

Culturally responsive teaching is integral to quality at CDU. First Nations-led teams deliver a tiered Culturally Responsive Leadership professional development program, curriculum and teaching-practice reform, and tailored academic and wellbeing support. First Nations leaders and communities identify priorities, shape curriculum and teaching, guide cultural governance and determine how First Nations knowledge is interpreted, protected, shared and used. Teaching in Yolŋu Matha and First Nations Sovereignty and Diplomacy places First Nations languages, knowledge systems, cultural authority and community priorities at the centre of curriculum. This approach recognises the knowledge, lived experience and community authority First Nations students bring and supports students to participate, persist and succeed. Sustainable resourcing is essential to maintaining this capability.

Progress will be assessed using institutional evidence, including MyView, alongside agreed QILT measures for overall educational experience and student support and services. Metrics will remain unchanged for 2027, with consideration through development of the 4-year compact.

Measure

Indicator	Data source	Provider baseline	Milestone for 2027	Expected outcome and timeframe
Overall educational experience	QILT SES – Verified 2025	74.1%	74.5%	76.5% by 2030
Student support and services	QILT SES – Verified 2025	74.5%	74.8%	75% by 2028

Joined-up tertiary system

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

Vision

CDU will be a national leader in demonstrating what a genuinely joined-up tertiary system can achieve. As one of Australia's dual-sector universities, we will move beyond traditional linear pathways between VET and higher education towards a lifelong learning model with multiple entry, transition and exit points. Students will be able to enter through school, community, enabling education, VET or work and life experience; move between education and employment; and return as their aspirations and workforce needs change. CDU will design the system around the learner, connecting education, support, community and employment to create opportunity throughout life.

Action

In 2027, CDU will accelerate development of a genuinely connected tertiary system across enabling education, VET, higher education, regional delivery and employment.

CDU's ambition extends beyond increasing VET-to-degree transitions. For the students and communities we serve, tertiary education is rarely linear. Learners may enter through school, community, enabling education, VET, employment or prior experience; move between education and work; pause and return; and progress through qualifications as their aspirations and circumstances change.

CDU will strengthen articulation, credit recognition and recognition of prior learning, connect curriculum and student support, and remove institutional barriers that require learners to navigate VET and higher education as separate systems.

CDU's First Nations Training and Teacher Education Hub demonstrates this approach. Aboriginal Assistant Teachers, Language and Culture Educators and other school-based staff can move from employment through an intensive enabling program into an Undergraduate Certificate, an On-Country pathway, Associate Degree and ultimately a Bachelor of Education. Portfolio-based assessment recognises classroom practice, cultural expertise and community leadership, reducing duplication while participants remain employed. A planned specialist registration pathway would enable Associate Degree graduates to teach Language and Culture programs and earn a teacher salary while progressing towards full teacher registration.

The First Nations Health Education Hub similarly provides supported entry for First Nations students, including existing health and community-services workers and those who may not meet standard university entry requirements. Its Health Pathway Program combines enabling education with health-specific learning and progression into nursing, midwifery, medicine and allied health. CDU will progressively map relevant VET qualifications, workplace training and demonstrated professional capability to admission, credit and Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL), subject to accreditation requirements, reducing duplication and strengthening the locally based First Nations health workforce.

CDU's partnership with Batchelor Institute provides further opportunity to extend this model through regional delivery, workforce development and community priorities while retaining each institution's strengths and identity.

CDU will use its dual-sector structure to demonstrate nationally how VET and higher education can operate as one connected tertiary ecosystem: meeting learners where they are, recognising what they already know, and enabling movement through education, employment and lifelong learning.

Measure

Indicator	Data source	Provider baseline	Milestone for 2027	Expected outcome and timeframe
Domestic students admitted to a bachelor course on the basis of VET	UA data sharing enrolments data: 2024 bachelor, domestic commencing enrolments with 'VET basis of admission 1' as % of total bachelor, domestic commencing	32.1%	33%	35% by 2030
Retention rate of domestic bachelor students admitted on the basis of VET	UA data sharing retention data: 2023 into 2024 retention rate for bachelor, domestic commencing	67.8%	72.0%	75.0% by 2030
Success rate of domestic bachelor students admitted on the basis of VET	UA data sharing success data: 2024 success rate for bachelor, domestic commencing	83.2%	85.0%	85.0%

Research

Sustaining national capability and supporting innovation through research and research training

Vision

CDU will strengthen Australia's domestic research capability by developing the next generation of researchers equipped to address the challenges and opportunities of Northern Australia. Growing and sustaining the domestic PhD pipeline is critical to Australia’s sovereign research capability, particularly in areas where specialist expertise is limited and nationally significant knowledge must be developed and retained. CDU will increase the attractiveness and accessibility of research training, strengthen pathways into higher degrees by research and develop First Nations research leadership. Our ambition is to build research capability in the north that Australia cannot afford to lose and that communities, industry and governments can draw upon.

Action

In 2027, CDU will strengthen its domestic Higher Degree by Research (HDR) pipeline in response to declining participation driven by cost-of-living pressures, uncompetitive stipends and strong employment opportunities. Increasing part-time candidature also lengthens completion.

CDU is responding through part-time stipends, Research Training Program (RTP) stipend top-ups, MRes stipends for First Nations candidates, project-based recruitment aligned to research strengths, and industry and government links, including through the National Industry PhD Program. A declining domestic pipeline is a sovereign capability risk for Northern Australia, reducing capability and increasing reliance on interstate and international expertise.

CDU seeks Commonwealth action to extend the RTP Fees Offset from 4 to 5 years, particularly for First Nations candidates; increase the maximum stipend and address adverse tax implications of top-ups and supplementary income; enable NT Government and other public-sector organisations to participate in the NIPhD Industry Researcher stream; and extend the RTP internship agreement window from 18 months to 2.5 years.

International and domestic HDR pipelines are complementary. International recruitment and partnerships provide critical mass that sustains supervision and research capability for domestic candidates. Commonwealth settings should protect regional HDR recruitment from international student caps, reduce visa barriers for genuine fee-paying HDR candidates and provide greater flexibility around the RTP 10% international expenditure cap.

First Nations research training represents a distinctive area of national capability. CDU’s Practice-Based PhD enables doctorates grounded in First Nations languages, knowledge systems and cultural authority. First Nations candidates and communities can shape the research question, methodology, cultural governance and decisions about how knowledge is interpreted, protected, shared and used, including through First Nations languages and culturally grounded forms of evidence.

Delivering this work appropriately requires specialist First Nations supervisors and examiners, cultural and language authorities, translation and transcription capability, on-Country engagement, culturally appropriate ethics and governance, Indigenous data sovereignty and intellectual-property protections, tailored academic and wellbeing support, and appropriate payment and recognition for Elders and community knowledge holders. These are essential to academically rigorous and culturally accountable research, but their costs are not adequately recognised in standard doctoral funding models. CDU seeks recognition and sustainable resourcing of this nationally distinctive capability.

Measure

Indicator	Data source	Provider baseline	Milestone for 2027	Expected outcome and timeframe
HDR domestic enrolments	HESC – Preliminary 2025	273	250	250 by 2027

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.