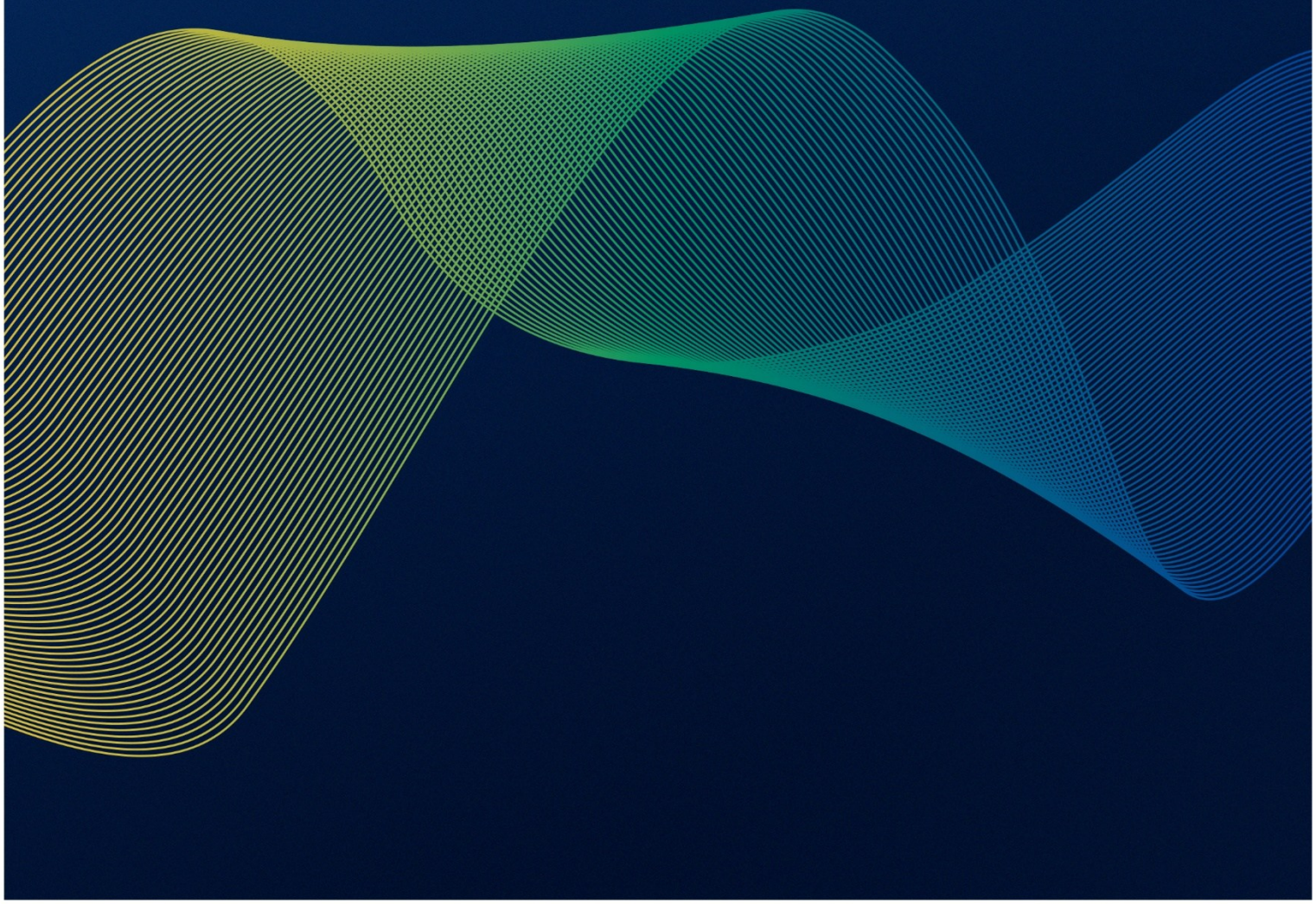
Australian Government

ATEC
Australian Tertiary Education Commission

THE UNIVERSITY OF NEWCASTLE AUSTRALIA

2027 mission based compact between the ATEC and the University of Newcastle



Preface

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

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

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

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

Our mission

In 2027 the University of Newcastle will continue to be Australia's leading comprehensive regional university and a national leader on the targets in the Australian Universities Accord. We do this by providing opportunities to students who have experienced educational disadvantage, and by supporting them to succeed, at scale, in the regions.

The University's Strategic Plan, Looking Ahead 2030 and the underlying Education, Research and Engagement Plans, and Flagship Model sets out our values, strategies and future plans. This includes our institutional mission to be a world-leading university working for our communities to deliver educational excellence and new discoveries.

This Compact reiterates two goals of Looking Ahead: to deliver an outstanding student experience, preparing graduates for life; and to serve our regions by taking research that matters to the world. Accordingly, we identify a coordinated set of actions to strengthen equity, workforce capability, tertiary system integration and research impact.

First Nations leadership and success

For more than 43 years, the Wollotuka Institute has been the national leader in advancing First Nations leadership, participation and success. This will continue through self-determination, culturally grounded governance, expanded pathways into priority professions, and targeted support to improve retention and outcomes. We will build on our record of success at scale, with the largest cohort of First Nations students, with the highest success rates at scale in Australia. We aim to welcome 1,500 undergraduate students by 2030.

A compact for thriving regions

Across national, state and regional priorities, the University focuses on aligning education and training with areas of workforce demand – particularly health and ageing, education, housing and construction, STEM, and humanities and social science – while supporting regional economic transition and future skills needs.

In addition to working for the Hunter and Central Coast we will increase strategic engagement in New England, Orana, Mid Coast and Northern NSW.

We will continue to increase access, participation and attainment for under-represented groups, embedding evidence-informed practice, strengthening enabling pathways, and improving support for diverse learners, including those with disability and from regional or low SES backgrounds.

Quality teaching goals focus on lifting teaching standards through inclusive curriculum design, educator capability development, and systematic use of student data to drive continuous improvement and better learning outcomes.

The joined-up tertiary system domain seeks to create seamless pathways between VET and higher education, including credit recognition, co-delivered programs and shared infrastructure with partners such as TAFE.

Finally, research goals centre on sustaining national capability through increasing high-quality research training, priority-driven research, strong industry partnerships, and societal impact.

Importantly, the Compact sets out a balanced profile of domestic and international students. We currently enrol 17% international students, growing steadily to 23% in Newcastle and Central Coast. Our unique approach means students enrol, live and study end-to-end in regional Australia.

The University looks globally, with a strong focus on the Asia Pacific. Our Singapore Campus will grow, having achieved EduTrust certification. Our diverse international student body will grow through select, strong international partnerships, supported by growth in safe, affordable student accommodation.

Enrolment strategy and priorities

By 2030, we will shape a balanced, sustainable and future-ready student profile, comprising 77% domestic and 23% international students, with 77% undergraduate and 23% postgraduate enrolments. 5% FEE-FREE Uni Ready participation will support continued regional access, alongside a shift toward more flexible delivery, maintaining a strong on-campus experience while expanding online provision. This profile supports measured growth, strengthens postgraduate pathways, and enables high-quality, accessible learning for our diverse student body.

Increasing access and participation

We will build on our strong track record in First Nations participation, targeting growth of 20% by 2030 to reach ~1,500 undergraduate students.

We will maintain representation from low SES students and students with disability aligned with our regional demographics.

We will increase participation across our regions, particularly in communities with low attainment, including Cessnock, Muswellbrook, Singleton, the Upper Hunter and the Central Coast. To address structural barriers such as limited transport, we will expand blended delivery and tertiary harmonisation, supported by pathways and TAFE credit arrangements.

Achieving this requires reducing the number of marginally-funded students to increase high-quality, targeted supports and improve built infrastructure. Currently, more than 1,850 students are marginally funded, including 24% low SES, 5.4% First Nations, 19% regional, 20% with disability, and 29% entering via enabling, VET, or work and life experience.

Quality education and student success

Our strategy for undergraduate education is based on a blended, face-to-face model that best suits our student needs, and will not include 100% online education by default.

We will strengthen Career-Ready placements – where 99.8% of students experience high-quality work-integrated learning in regional industry, business and not-for-profits, increasing employability.

A comprehensive university for growing regions

As a comprehensive regional university, we will maintain a course mix aligned to strong demand, including in health, education, STEM, business and humanities. Growth to 2030 will focus on National, NSW and regional priorities in skills areas such as engineering, health and allied health disciplines, alongside expanded pathways from TAFE and enabling programs.

We will also pilot integrated VET-HE delivery models and co-located education hubs with TAFE NSW to improve access and scale in key disciplines.

Campus growth includes strengthening Tamworth as a campus and regional hub and expanding the Central Coast in response to population growth and increasing demand. With regional populations projected to grow significantly – particularly younger cohorts and Aboriginal communities – the University will play a critical role in expanding access, outreach and flexible learning.

Regionally grounded international strategy

Finally, our international strategy will remain regionally grounded, with diversified source markets, strong Southeast Asia engagement, and expanded transnational education capability. We will grow international enrolments – particularly on the Central Coast, and over time pivot away from the Sydney Campus, with a view to international students living and learning in regions. Our strong track record of Southeast Asian engagement is supported by staff based in Malaysia, Vietnam and the Philippines whose knowledge is supports regional engagement and exchange of students and academics. Our Singapore campus will become a hub for transnational education and student mobility across Southeast Asia.

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

The University will prioritise growth in areas aligned to Australian, NSW and regional priorities, including health and ageing, housing and construction, digital capability, net zero and climate change, and sovereign capability in critical minerals, food security, and advanced manufacturing.

Through targeted course growth, expansion in regional delivery, Career-Ready Placements, industry partnerships and flexible delivery, we will strengthen workforce capability and ensure graduates meet emerging skills needs across our regions.

Educated graduates and engaged research will continue to support major regional transitions in the communities where University staff and students live, learn and work.

Action

The University will increase enrolments, success and completions in disciplines aligned to workforce demand, responding to major upheaval in regional economies. Priorities include sustained growth in engineering, all health disciplines, housing and construction, and surveying, expanding clinical training through a dedicated clinical hub, and a new dentistry qualification on the Central Coast. As a comprehensive university we will retain a powerful humanities, arts and social sciences capability.

Supporting national and NSW priorities

These initiatives support national priorities in health and ageing, housing and construction, digital capability, net zero and climate change, and sovereign capability in critical minerals, food security, and advanced manufacturing.

They also align with NSW priorities for workforce development and tertiary harmonisation. Industry and community engagement and participation in the Workforce and Training Advisory Group ensure programs respond to regional needs.

Regional health and First Nations outcomes

Tamworth will transition to a campus and regional health hub, expanding end-to-end training and integration with local health services. Wollotuka will expand on the Central Coast, responding to significant Aboriginal population growth through culturally-informed actions that improve participation and success.

Employability and flexible learning

Expanded Career-Ready Placements and digital and AI literacy across curricula is supporting student employability. Building on TAFE partnerships, we are expanding identified credit pathways, and VET-university collaboration, including co-located delivery on the Central Coast and engineering-aligned activity in Muswellbrook. We will recognise workplace learning through expanded industry credit mapping.

We are increasing access for working learners by expanding online and hybrid education, building on successful programs in postgraduate mental health, supporting upskilling and reskilling in priority sectors in the NSW Skills Plan.

Future capability, outreach and student success

From 2027 redesigned Engineering and Surveying, strong HASS capability and targeted infrastructure upgrades will strengthen capability in renewable energy, critical minerals and the net-zero transition. Blended offerings will increase retention in Architecture and Building FOE. Outreach and pathway programs, including for defence personnel and athletes, Children's University, UniSTEPS, HunterWiSE, Fast Forward and UniNext will expand, supporting participation across diverse cohorts. Peer-assisted learning and mentoring will further improve retention and workforce outcomes, particularly in communities experiencing industrial transition.

Measure

Indicator	Data source	Provider baseline	Milestone for 2027	Expected outcome and timeframe
03 Engineering and Related Technologies				
Total student enrolments	HESC – Verified 2025	2,120	2,200	2,700 by 2030
Success rate	HESC – Verified 2024	83.73%	85.0%	89.9% by 2030
Provider retention rate	HESC – Verified 2024	88.50%	89.0%	90.0% by 2030
04 Architecture and Building				
Total student enrolments	HESC – Verified 2025	1,088	1,135	1,350 by 2030
Success rate	HESC – Verified 2024	85.72%	87.0%	89.9% by 2030
Provider retention rate	HESC – Verified 2024	76.98%	80.0%	90.0% by 2030
06 Health				
Total student enrolments	HESC – Verified 2025	5,590	5,620	6,000 by 2030
Success rate	HESC – Verified 2024	95.98%	95.0%	95.0% by 2030
Provider retention rate	HESC – Verified 2024	87.07%	88.0%	90.0% 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

Our commitment to First Nations education and research advances self-determination, strengthens pathways and supports long-term community and cultural prosperity. The University will continue to be guided by its internal cultural governance structures, driving continuous improvement in First Nations leadership, access, participation and success at scale. We are committed to strengthening cultural capability across all staff and students to ensure a culturally responsive environment grounded in First Nations knowledge and values.

Led by the Wollotuka Institute and informed by the Wollotuka Cultural Standards, we will create opportunities for First Nations staff and students to lead, influence and succeed across the institution.

Action

The University operates through self-determined, culturally grounded governance to strengthen First Nations leadership, access and success. Cultural governance includes the Board of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education and Research, which is Aboriginal-led and advises the Vice-Chancellor; Nguraki Elders; and our Elders in residence. Cultural governance ensures First Nations leadership decides priorities and resource allocation.

Embedding cultural standards

The University will continue to operationalise the Wollotuka Cultural Standards across all areas of teaching, research, engagement and student support to ensure culturally responsive and accountable practice. These standards will guide institutional behaviour, strengthen cultural capability, and support continuous improvement.

Student success

The University delivers success at scale, with a cohort more than twice that of other universities >80% retention. To further improve participation, retention and success, we are expanding the number and impact of Student Advancement Officers, identifying priority disciplines and cohorts where First Nations students require additional academic, cultural and wellbeing support. This will strengthen success pathways and reduce attainment gaps.

First Nations health workforce

The University will expand the successful Miroma Bunbilla program, increasing First Nations participation in the Joint Medical Program. Miroma Bunbilla will expand into more disciplines to strengthen culturally supported pathways into medicine, nursing and allied health, and grow the pipeline of First Nations health professionals. In 2026 the University will graduate it's 200th First Nations graduate from the Joint Medical Program.

Regional outreach and pathways

In 2027 the University will employ additional staff in Dubbo and Tamworth, strengthening local relationships. This will be complemented by at least three targeted camps, outreach activities and engagement programs for First Nations students from the Central West, Far North-West and New England, to build aspiration, pathways and support successful entry into university.

Across all initiatives, the University will strengthen culturally grounded student support, mentoring and transition programs promoting belonging and completion. These are delivered in partnership with First Nations communities and informed by continuous evaluation and improvement to ensure they remain effective and community-led. We will establish at least five additional advancement officers in 2027.

Together, these actions reinforce the University's commitment to self-determination, community partnership and sustained improvement in educational outcomes.

Measure

Indicator	Data source	Provider baseline	Milestone for 2027	Expected outcome and timeframe
First Nations total enrolments	HESC – Verified 2025	1,079	1,100	1,500 by 2030
First Nations success rate	HESC – Verified 2024	86.55%	87.0%	89.9% by2030
First Nations retention rate	HESC – Verified 2024	78.96%	79.0%	83.3% 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

The University of Newcastle will continue to be a university of choice for students from under-represented cohorts, building on our longstanding leadership in equity, access and student success. The University is committed to excellence through equity, ensuring inclusive pathways, strong support and a deep sense of belonging that enables all learners to thrive.

Through enduring partnerships and engagement with communities, schools, industry and government, we remain responsive to community needs and contribute to social mobility and workforce participation. We will strengthen innovation and capability in equity practice, embedding evidence-informed approaches, scalable initiatives and continuous improvement across teaching, research and engagement.

Action

The University is advancing access, participation and attainment for under-represented and priority cohorts through a coordinated and evidence-informed approach. In 2025, the University established the Engagement and Equity Division, led by the DVC Engagement and Equity, reinforcing the priority of equity as a driver of success and social impact.

Excellence in equity

Re-establishing the Excellence in Teaching for Equity in Higher Education program, will strengthen inclusive teaching practice and improve attainment outcomes for equity cohorts. The program builds academic capability in evidence-based, student-centred approaches that support success across diverse learner groups, with an initial cohort of 5-10 academic and professional staff teams planned in 2027.

Increasing access and success

The University is continuing to strengthen enabling education pathways, with targeted focus on regional communities including the Central Coast and Upper Hunter, ensuring accessible entry into higher education and supporting transition into degree programs.

Support for students with disability is growing through improved service coordination, strengthened reasonable adjustment processes and investment in inclusive learning environments that enable full participation. We will also revise the Equity, Diversity and Inclusion Strategy to strengthen coherence across equity initiatives and increase the success and retention of students with disability by introducing College-based Disability Support Officers in 2027.

Research-informed practice is being embedded through the Centre of Excellence for Equity in Higher Education (CEEHE), supporting scaling of effective interventions including outreach models, transition support programs, and initiatives that improve retention and completion outcomes for equity cohorts.

Safety

Our anti-racism agenda will progress through implementing policy frameworks (launched in 2027) promoting cultural safety and accountability and address systemic barriers.

We are building whole-of-university capability by delivering ongoing gender-based violence education and training to all staff and students, with measurable increases in training completion and confidence to recognise, prevent and respond to harm.

Accountability and impact

An evaluation framework will guide the implementation and continuous improvement of Needs Based Funding, ensuring resources are directed to initiatives that demonstrate measurable impact on participation and success.

A trauma-informed approach will be implemented to improve support for survivors of gender-based violence, ensuring safe, coordinated and responsive support services.

Measure

Indicator	Cohort	Data source	Provider baseline	Milestone for 2027	Expected outcome and timeframe
Total enrolments	Students with disability	HESC – Verified 2025	4,760	5,000	5,500 by 2030
Total enrolments	Students from low SES backgrounds	HESC – Verified 2025	4,991	5,100	5,500
Total enrolments	Regional	HESC – Verified 2025	5,235	5,300	6,000
Total enrolments	Remote	HESC – Verified 2025	46	50	60
Success	Students with disability	HESC – Verified 2024	85.16%	86.0%	89.9% by 2030*
Success	Students from low SES backgrounds	HESC – Verified 2024	87.89%	88.5%	89.9% by 2030*
Success	Regional	HESC – Verified 2024	89.82%	90.0%	89.9% by 2030*
Success	Remote	HESC – Verified 2024	87.30%	88.0%	89.9% by 2030*
Retention	Students with disability	HESC – Verified 2024	82.25%	83.0%	86.2% by 2030*
Retention	Students from low SES backgrounds	HESC – Verified 2024	83.18%	84.0%	86.2% by 2030*
Retention	Regional	HESC –Verified 2024	86.79%	86.8%	86.2% by 2030*
Retention	Remote	HESC – Verified 2024	88.89%	88.9%	86.2% by 2030*

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

**The 2030 targets that have been provided for equity groups are the success and retention rates of our broader student population. The logic is that the University of Newcastle is seeking to achieve parity of outcomes for all students equally, regardless of educational disadvantage. We would expect these 2030 targets to move as our overall success and retention rates move, with the long-term goal of continuously improving the outcomes for all students over time.*

Quality teaching

Raising the quality and recognition of higher education teaching

Vision

The University of Newcastle will continue to champion a future where high-quality teaching is inclusive, evidence-informed, and designed to enable success for all learners. In 2027, we will embed continuous improvement in teaching practice, strengthen the capability of our educators, and ensure our curricula respond to diverse student cohorts. We will prioritise equity by designing culturally safe, accessible and flexible learning environments, particularly for regional, First Nations and under-represented students. Through collaboration with the sector and alignment to national standards, we will build a culture where excellent teaching, strong student outcomes and equity of opportunity are central to our mission.

Action

Professional learning and academic development

A major focus of 2027 will be establishing more comprehensive and integrated approach to professional learning and academic development. Academic capability will not be viewed as a series of isolated training activities, but as a structured career-long pathway supporting excellence in teaching, research, engagement and leadership.

We will strengthen expectations for teaching capability through probation requirements. All newly appointed continuing academic staff will be expected to successfully complete the Graduate Certificate in Higher Education, or an approved equivalent, as part of probation. This will ensure all academics develop a strong foundation in contemporary pedagogy, curriculum design, assessment practice, student engagement and inclusive education.

Professional development opportunities will be expanded across all career stages and will include mentoring, peer learning, leadership development, communities of practice, discipline-specific development and targeted support programs. Particular emphasis will be placed on supporting early-career academics, sessional staff and emerging academic leaders. Development pathways will be linked more clearly to academic expectations, performance and career progression, helping staff understand how they can build capability and prepare for future opportunities.

Peer review will become a more significant component of academic development. Guided by our Quality Teaching Model, we will embed peer review as an evidence-based developmental practice supporting reflection, dialogue and continuous improvement. Academics will receive structured feedback on teaching with opportunities to develop through peer engagement.

Teaching quality and academic capability

In 2027, a system-wide approach will strengthen teaching quality, curriculum excellence and academic capability, grounded in equity and evidence-informed practice. First Year Coordinators will support inclusive curriculum design and student success from commencement. Courses will be progressively redesigned to improve consistency, accessibility and academic rigour through stronger learning design and authentic assessment.

Student experience

Improving the student experience will remain central through closer integration of student feedback, QILT outcomes, progression data and graduate success measures to inform targeted improvements.

Academic progression

We will review academic expectations, progression and promotion processes to improve clarity and consistency. Promotion frameworks will better recognise teaching excellence, educational impact, scholarly practice, peer review and student success, while embedding promotion readiness within ongoing performance and development planning.

Measure

Indicator	Data source	Provider baseline	Milestone for 2027	Expected outcome and timeframe
Overall educational experience	QILT SES – Verified 2025	77.6%	78.0%	82.0% by 2030
Teaching quality and engagement	QILT SES – Verified 2025	79.7%	80.0%	84.0% by 2030
Student support and services	QILT SES – Verified 2025	70.4%	72.0%	76.0% by 2030

Joined-up tertiary system

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

Vision

The University will lead creation of an inclusive tertiary system that removes barriers between vocational and higher education and enables lifelong learning for our region. We will deliver integrated, industry-aligned pathways that allow learners to move fluidly between qualifications, supported by transparent credit, flexible design, and a single, simple entry experience. Through deep partnerships with TAFE NSW and sector peers, we will co-locate teaching, share infrastructure, and build place-based education hubs that respond to workforce needs. Our approach will expand opportunity for equity cohorts, accelerate skills development, and position the University as a leader in tertiary harmonisation and regional transformation.

Action

In 2027, the University will implement a coordinated plan to advance tertiary harmonisation, establishing itself as a leader in integrated tertiary delivery and regional workforce development, supported in part by reducing marginally funded students.

Credit architecture

We will develop and implement a consistent credit architecture, including guaranteed block credit, dual-admission pathways enabling transparent and portable learner progression from VET to higher education.

Increasing access

In 2027 we will negotiate to pilot integrated education hubs and co-located delivery models with TAFE NSW in priority disciplines such as health, business, IT and engineering, leveraging shared infrastructure and place-based precincts to improve access and scale delivery in Central Coast and Hunter regional communities. We will pursue arrangements with TAFE to collocate and build pathways in skills area including Nursing, Early Childhood Education (aiming for full year credit from Diploma), Engineering and Business, as well as upskilling students with add-on certification for roles such as School Learning Support Officers.

We will plan a unified student experience, creating a single ‘front door’ for all learners, simplifying admissions, credit recognition in at least 10 programs, while strengthening advising and support services to support completion and reduce attrition, announcing these over 2026 and 2027.

University of Newcastle will also prioritise equity and regional participation, embedding First Nations pathways, aligning with workforce skills needs, and expanding access to lifelong learning – e.g. TAFE pathways into the dentistry program will launch in 2027, with credit recognition into the 3+2 model.

Pilot models

The University will lead curriculum alignment and co-design with industry and TAFE, developing flexible, stackable qualifications, including pathways and curriculum with higher education apprenticeship diplomas leading to associate degrees, and associated micro-credentials aligned to workforce needs through the Advanced Manufacturing Centre of Excellence, and the New Energy Skills Hub.

We will deliver pilot programs and build a scalable business case for government investment, supported by robust evaluation metrics focused on student outcomes, workforce impact, and system efficiency.

Through these actions, the University will drive a seamless, agile tertiary system that accelerates skills development, strengthens industry partnerships, and delivers inclusive economic and social outcomes for our regions.

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	Internal repository – 2025	1,668	1,700	2,100 by 2030
Attrition rate of domestic bachelor students admitted on the basis of VET	Internal repository – 2025	16.5%	15.0%	10.0% by 2030
Success rate of domestic bachelor students admitted on the basis of VET	Internal repository – 2025	88.0%	88.5%	90.0% by 2030

Research

Sustaining national capability and supporting innovation through research and research training

Vision

The University of Newcastle sustains Australia's capability and supports innovation through high-quality, priority-driven research and comprehensive research training. The University's research addresses key national challenges across health, energy, sustainability and advanced technologies, contributing to Australia's social, economic and environmental wellbeing.

Through Higher Degree by Research programs, the University develops highly skilled graduates with advanced technical expertise, critical thinking and industry-ready capabilities. Strong partnerships with industry, government and the community support knowledge translation and real-world impact, ensuring a sustained pipeline of research talent and innovation that benefits Australia now and into the future.

Action

A key priority is strengthening the domestic Higher Degree by Research (HDR) pipeline. Australia is experiencing a decline in domestic PhD participation while advanced research capability is becoming increasingly important to national productivity and sovereign capability.

The challenge is not simply awareness of doctoral study. In a strong labour market, many talented graduates, particularly in STEM and health disciplines, can move directly into well-paid employment. A PhD therefore carries a significant opportunity cost. Cost-of-living pressures, the length and uncertainty of candidature, and limited visibility of careers beyond academia further weaken participation, particularly for regional, low socioeconomic, First Nations and mature-age candidates, those with caring responsibilities, and mid-career professionals.

Increasing HDR numbers

The University's response is to strengthen the research pipeline and the value proposition of HDR study. We are expanding opportunities for undergraduate students to engage in research through projects, honours pathways, scholarships, internships and industry-connected research experiences. Working with our institutes in energy, health and transition, students gain exposure to research addressing major challenges in areas such as energy transition, regional health, defence and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander-led research, helping them understand research impact and career opportunities.

The University has increased HDR stipends and scholarship support and is strengthening connections between research training and employment through industry PhDs, scholarships, internships and collaborative projects. We are also expanding flexible pathways, including part-time, and professionally-focused doctorates, to support working professionals and candidates with caring responsibilities.

To support student success, the University continues to invest in supervision quality, mentoring, wellbeing services, professional development and targeted support and scholarships for underrepresented groups.

A national priority

Universities cannot reverse the national decline alone. Rebuilding domestic HDR participation will require coordinated action from government, industry and universities to improve the financial attractiveness, flexibility and employment relevance of doctoral study. Priorities include appropriately indexed Research Training Program; superannuation and more consistent paid parental, carers and sick leave; flexible and portable support for part-time and industry-based candidates; expanded Industry PhD and employer co-investment models; and targeted support for First Nations and other underrepresented candidates.

Measure

Indicator	Data source	Provider baseline	Milestone for 2027	Expected outcome and timeframe
HDR domestic enrolments	HESC – Verified 2025	911	705	1,219
HDR domestic completions	HESC – Verified 2024	151	260	260

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.