



**2017 Mission Based Compact**  
**Between the Commonwealth of Australia and Australian Catholic University**

**PURPOSE**

This compact is an agreement between the Commonwealth and the University. Entering into a compact is one of the quality and accountability requirements which a higher education provider must meet under the *Higher Education Support Act 2003* (HESA) as a condition of receiving a grant. Specifically, subsection 19-110(1) of HESA requires Table A and Table B providers must, in respect of each year for which a grant is paid to the provider under HESA, enter into a mission based compact with the Commonwealth for a period which includes that year.

**MISSION**

Australian Catholic University (ACU) has a distinctive history and Mission, and was founded from Catholic tertiary institutions that had been training teachers and nurses since the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century. The University is therefore both a modern institution and one which has its roots in the earliest days of Catholic post-secondary education in Australia. The ACU Mission Statement was refreshed in 2014 to strengthen its distinctive Catholic identity and focus that, *"within the Catholic intellectual tradition and acting in Truth and Love, Australian Catholic University is committed to the pursuit of knowledge, the dignity of the human person and the Common Good"*. By fostering and advancing knowledge in education, health, commerce, the humanities, sciences and technologies, law, and the creative arts, ACU and its students contribute to the local, national and international communities.

The University has developed and grown substantially over the last six years and its strategic positioning has now entered a new phase. ACU has transitioned from a university striving towards ambitious targets to one that is comprehensively embedding excellence. Today, ACU is a multi-jurisdictional institution, with campuses in New South Wales, the Australian Capital Territory, Victoria, Queensland and South Australia, and a study centre in Rome. ACU continues to be one of the fastest growing universities in Australia, with its student population at over 32,000.

ACU welcomes students of all beliefs and backgrounds, benefitting from the University's unique perspective and ethical approach to teaching, learning and research. ACU is committed to providing its students with a quality higher education experience, enriched with a focus on respect for the dignity of all people, an appreciation for the principles of social justice and a commitment to serving the Common Good within its students. ACU's graduates will be skilled in their chosen fields, ethical in their behaviour, with a developed critical habit of mind, an appreciation of the sacred in life and a commitment to serving the Common Good. Community engagement is also a core part of every student's experience at ACU and is embedded within the courses to allow students to give back to their communities and make a difference through opportunities, such as volunteer experience programs.

ACU is Australia's leading Catholic university and is supported by more than 2,000 years of Catholic intellectual tradition. The University will continue to focus on delivering quality programs with an innovative and practical learning and teaching experience. ACU is devoted to achieving excellent student satisfaction and graduate outcomes, and being at the forefront in improving the access and outcomes of equity groups. The 2020 Targets within the ACU Strategic Plan 2015-2020 articulate the critical focus areas for 2017 and beyond, as well as the University's values and aspirations which are mission-critical and are at the heart of its identity. The University will continue to align its programs and course offerings to meet student, employer and industry needs and requirements as a way to maintain its high graduate employability and build capacity in response to future changes in skills needs.

## INNOVATION

ACU strives to be a world-leading research University in its areas of specialisation and have a culture of research excellence that is aligned to its Identity and Mission. The University's Research Institutes and Faculties include some of the very best researchers in the world, attracting outstanding students, collaborators and partners. Within its research programs, ACU has a holistic approach to innovation centred on its Mission and research strength in its priority areas of Education, Health, Theology and Philosophy, and Social Justice and the Common Good.

The University is committed to expand its domestic and international partnerships through the extensive Catholic university network and the establishment of relationships with strategically aligned institutions in Asia, Europe, United States of America and emerging connections in Latin America anticipated in 2017. This enhanced domestic and international profile is based upon priority partnerships and activities involving staff, students, programs and research.

As a University with a unique specialisation and core strengths in education and health, ACU's key industry partners are the public sector and education and health service providers. Strong industry partnerships exist with hospitals as well as education departments enabling effective translational research implementation and enhanced knowledge transfer. In addition, these strong relationships and partnerships ensure that ACU students graduate with the professional skills and knowledge that employers seek in today's market.

ACU works collaboratively with the various Catholic Education Offices and, in New South Wales is supervising a cohort of education leaders in the Doctor of Education degrees. ACU plans to continue its record of innovative engagement with its partners in the Asia-Pacific region which is subject to continued funding from AusAid.

ACU has a strong record of community engagement and outreach both in Australia and internationally and continues to build linkages supporting social justice. The University is well placed to build on current initiatives and is committed to improving the quality of engagement locally, regionally, nationally and internationally.

ACU recognises the importance of a climate that encourages innovation and the management of intellectual property and continues to make significant progress in research and research training with the view to playing a pivotal role in the national research and innovation system in Australia. There is strong community orientation and benefit from ACU research although moves towards commercialisation are relatively recent. Through collaboration with universities and other government and business partners, ACU is increasing its commercialisation exposure, focussing on the potential commercial value of ACU research outcomes. ACU's industry collaborations are increasing and this will undoubtedly increase opportunities for direct commercial benefit from investments.

The University recognises that all academic staff as well as Faculties and discipline areas have a responsibility to ensure that the research publication and other outputs meet appropriate definitional and quality standards and support the University's strategic directions. As outlined in the University's Research Publication Policy, all staff and students must also comply with ARC and NHMRC policies, stipulating that publication metadata must be submitted to the institutional repository (ACU Research Bank) as soon as possible after the paper is accepted for publication, and that publications arising from funded research be deposited into an open access repository within 12 months from the date of publication. Academic staff members and research students report their research activity information to ensure these data are verified, maintained and monitored for compliance with HERDC specifications.

## TEACHING AND LEARNING

ACU places a high value on critical thinking, community engagement, and consideration of the ethical dimension in all areas of study. In 2014, ACU launched its university-wide Learning and Teaching Framework 2014-2017: Learning for Life. The Framework was implemented with the aim of transforming the future direction of learning and teaching at the University. Its aspirations for achieving excellence in learning and teaching are entrenched in the six hallmarks of the Learning for Life Framework:

1. Distinctive ACU graduates
2. Excellent teaching practices
3. Excellent learning experiences
4. International, culturally diverse and equitable education
5. Research-informed teaching
6. Value and reward great teaching

ACU's commitment to quality learning and teaching as well as student outcomes has been the platform for the development of the Learning for Life Framework. The Framework addresses the needs of the diverse student population by ensuring students have access to pedagogy that addresses a variety of learning styles, learning experiences, resources and assessments. Course redesign projects arising from the ACU Learning and Teaching Framework will assure that ACU courses have appropriate opportunities for undergraduate research experience and work related learning.

Throughout 2017, the University will continue to effectively manage changes in student load across its courses and campuses, while providing an excellent student experience, through new and improved teaching and physical infrastructure; teaching and learning resources; student support services; and research capability. ACU empowers students to think critically and bring about change in their communities and professions. The University's commitment to equal access to education continues to make a positive difference in student's lives through a high-quality, contemporary and practical higher education experience. ACU ensures that its course offerings, teaching and learning methods are appropriately tailored to meet local and Australia-wide requirements and to meet workforce needs. ACU works closely with the jurisdictions to identify and address workforce shortages, and to prevent an oversupply of graduates in any particular field.

ACU has also taken heed of the Commonwealth and State Governments focus on raising teachers' literacy and numeracy standards. ACU will assess students' literacy and numeracy capabilities upon entry; through interim testing, rigorously monitor performance throughout the course of study; and intervene with remedial action, where required and appropriate to do so. In addition to supporting pre-service teachers, the University is committed to continue to monitor and evaluate its various strategies and initiatives related to learning and teaching quality enhancement and assurance. The University has a reporting framework that is aligned with the student life cycle and is being further developed to ensure it is responsive to a range of pathways and a diverse student body. The sector wide indicators that are being tracked include the number and rates of access, participation, retention/attrition, success and completions. Information and data used to inform practice draws from a range of sources, including the suite of Quality Indicators for Learning and Teaching (QILT), Student Experience of Learning and Teaching (SELTs), Course Reviews and Student Barometer results and direct engagement with student representatives.

ACU's suite of student support services is closely aligned with the ACU Learning and Teaching Framework and supports the achievement of excellence and timely interventions for students at risk. During 2017, the University will continue to support student retention and achievement. This will include monitoring the performance of particular student cohorts, identifying at risk students and providing intervention strategies, using Learning Management System analytics to monitor student engagement with online learning, and identifying student use of services such as Library and Academic Skills Unit.

## RESEARCH AND RESEARCH TRAINING

ACU is committed to enhance significantly its research profile and the quality of the research training it provides to its Higher Degree by Research (HDR) students. The ACU Strategic Plan 2015–2020 identifies a well-defined focus on areas aligned with the University's Mission and the key areas of its learning and teaching: Health; Education; Theology and Philosophy; and Social Justice. These fields of research provide a coherent framework for the institution's overall research strategy.

In its desire for improved research performance, ACU has set itself a number of over-arching goals: to see growth in its research capacity; improvement in its research quality; improved HDR experience and training; and growth in research partnerships. The barometer of its success will be the public Excellence in Research for Australia (ERA) ratings of each university's performance in nominated fields of research and feedback from students. In 2015, ACU was the most improved institution in research according to ERA. ACU achieved its strongest ever performance and confirmed its rapidly rising research trajectory with the University's 'excellence index' ranking increased from 35 to 21 since the 2012 assessment. 94% of ACU research is at or above world standard, the University achieved four scores 'well above world standard', in fields of research identified as strategic priorities: Human Movement and Sports Science, Nursing, Public Health and Health Services and Psychology.

In the initial phase of the research intensification strategy ACU has established seven research institutes, each aligned with one or more of the University's strategic priorities in research: health and wellbeing; education; social justice; theology and philosophy; and the Common Good. These institutes and/or centres will establish collaborations with national and international concentrations of high quality researchers in the relevant fields.

Other strategies to continue intensifying ACU's research profile included innovative changes in governance, operations, structure and performance based funding; the recruitment of recognised researchers to ACU; enhancement of the capacity of current ACU researchers; and the establishment of multiple funded pathways to participate in research and research training for staff and HDR students. In addition, enterprise bargaining has produced an enhanced academic workplace that focuses on providing more time for talented researchers to concentrate on research endeavours, under a robust model to ensure freedom of intellectual inquiry. Faculty performance targets have been adjusted to provide for increased research, as well as teaching outcomes. Furthermore, the ERA results and other evaluation initiatives are being used strategically to further shape ACU's research strategies at team, school, faculty and University levels.

During 2017, the drive for quality will be accompanied by a more concentrated investment of the funding available for research. ACU will ensure that resources are directed towards lifting institutional research profile and ERA ratings in our selected areas, with further success anticipated in 2018. There will be a shift towards more competitive and strategic allocation of resources for research, based on substantial proposals that align with institutional strategy and objectives and rigorous assessment by senior experts (including experts external to ACU). A consequence of this strategy will be greater critical mass in areas of strength, which provides the collegiality, interactions, team projects, and breadth of approach that drive much high quality research and will also provide a strong research environment for HDR candidates.

The University's research candidature profile is also gaining momentum, with a growing number of research students under the supervision of researchers within ACU's seven newly established research institutes. HDR students are only enrolled in areas where ACU has research excellence. This will, in the main, be in the areas in which ACU has achieved a rating of at least 3 in the ERA, providing a high-quality research environment for HDR candidates. HDR strategies are in place to ensure good progress, on-time completions and high quality outputs. These include panel memberships for the confirmation seminar, upgrading to the doctorate seminar, work-in-progress seminars and the pre-submission seminar.

The University will continue to provide developmental support for early-career researchers through secondments to our research institutes and centres, through targeted support such as grants in conjunction with senior researchers, and through various career development programs.

## EQUITY

ACU is well positioned to contribute to priority Government strategies which are focused on the transformative effects of higher education and the achievement of social as well as economic outcomes. The University is committed to providing opportunities for people from all backgrounds including underrepresented groups such as students from low socio-economic status and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander backgrounds.

Consistent with the University's Access and Participation Plan 2015-2017, equity outcome targets include: collaborations with 200 Equity Pathways partner schools through ACUgate programs annually; annual increases in the participation rate of students from low socio-economic backgrounds, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students and rural and remote students; and achieving success rates of low socio economic background students, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, rural and remote students and students with a disability at or above the sector rate.

In 2017, ACU will seek to enhance its outreach and partnership initiatives which aim to improve equity for the disadvantaged. These include collaborative activities with partner schools, partner community organisations, VET providers and partner universities such as Bridges to Higher Education NSW, Widening Participation Forum Queensland and LEAP Victoria. The University's 'ACUgate' programs aim to create student and parent awareness of higher education, raise student aspiration to higher education and provide students with a variety of pathways to access higher education. A particular focus during 2017 will be on ACUgate Mathematics and Science programs. The University continues to work with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and through ACU Satellites to increase take up of culturally appropriate ACUgate programs by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students.

Student support services that meet the needs of equity groups will continue throughout 2017. ACU Smart, a transition to university program for equity students, will be conducted annually. ACU Smart helps to prepare new students from low SES backgrounds and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students for university studies by easing the transition from school to university. A two to three day course is conducted the week before Orientation in a supportive, interactive and friendly environment. The program builds students' confidence and provides an opportunity for students to meet teaching and support staff as well as current students. In 2015, a total of 436 students participated, with 92-100% students reporting more confidence starting university.

Other support initiatives from ACU's Learning for Life Framework will foster participation and success by the targeted equity groups through curriculum development, educational technology use and quality teaching. Support programs are in place to provide easy access for equity groups to library resources and technologies, and to information literacy programs, to support student participation and success. The University ensures academic skills and career development embedded in the curriculum meet equity group needs and provides admissions processes that are suitable for students entering ACU through equity programs. Professional support is also available for academic staff to meet the needs of learners from equity groups.

The indicators for measuring progress related to the access, participation and outcomes of equity groups are integrated within the University's overall reporting framework. This is aligned with the student life cycle and is responsive to a range of pathways and a diverse student body. The University will continue to monitor and evaluate its equity strategies and initiatives throughout 2017.

