

Australian Catholic University

Submission to Portfolio Committee No. 3 – Education, Legislative Council (NSW)

Inquiry into the Future Development of the NSW Tertiary Education Sector

July 2020

Submission to the NSW Parliamentary Inquiry into the Future Development of the NSW Tertiary Education Sector

Executive summary

Australian Catholic University (ACU) welcomes the opportunity to make a submission to the NSW parliamentary inquiry into the future development of the NSW tertiary education sector.

ACU's submission highlights that universities' contributions to the NSW community span teaching, research and community engagement, all of which are important to the social, cultural and economic development of the state, and to the nation more broadly.

In considering opportunities to further develop the NSW tertiary education sector, ACU stresses that there is a need to focus attention on areas that are under-served by higher education. This encompasses regional areas, some outer-metropolitan areas, and areas of high population growth. For example, there are large parts of Western Sydney that are presently inadequately served by local university campuses.

To this end, ACU is proud to be opening a new campus in Blacktown in 2021 in partnership with Blacktown City Council. This aligns with ACU's mission and longstanding commitment to supporting equity in education and widening access to higher education. Western Sydney is currently under-served by higher education providers. While 50 per cent of Greater Sydney's population lives in Western Sydney, only 18 per cent of university places are located in Western Sydney. This represents a genuine geographical barrier to participation in higher education.

ACU's course offerings at Blacktown will reflect areas of demand in the local community, including the University's recognised world class research and teaching strengths in health and education. This will help meet the growing demand for locally-trained nurses, midwives, allied health professionals and teachers to staff the hospitals, health clinics and schools of Western Sydney.

More broadly, as the NSW economy deals with a significant downturn consequent to the coronavirus pandemic, universities are especially critical in helping individuals to reskill, and in educating the future workforce. Individuals who may otherwise be unemployed will be able to use the economic downturn productively and emerge from it with improved productive capacity.

Consequently, university graduates will play an important role in supporting NSW with its economic recovery and development consequent to the coronavirus pandemic.

ACU makes the following recommendations with respect to areas in which the NSW Government could play a greater role in the tertiary education sector:

- Areas under-served by higher education: the NSW Government could offer targeted support to universities delivering higher education in areas of community need such as outer-metropolitan, low-SES and disadvantaged communities.
- Infrastructure and collaborative partnerships: the NSW Government could invest in university infrastructure projects, recognising the social and economic contributions universities make to NSW and local communities, and the returns on that investment.

ACU also recommends the following to support the development of the NSW tertiary education sector:

- A broad view of universities' integration with industry should be adopted, so as to include the close and porous engagement of universities with the future employers of university graduates such as health providers and schools.
- Simulation learning should be recognised, and regulated, by accreditation bodies in all disciplines in the health sciences as an effective complement to physical workplace experiences.

ACU provides the following feedback to the inquiry as per its terms of reference.

(a) Tertiary education’s economic development role, especially university campuses and Country University Centres (CUCs) in regional NSW

ACU notes that it is not only regional areas that are under-served by, and can benefit from improved access to, higher education. Some outer-metropolitan areas and/or areas of high population growth, such as large parts of Western Sydney, are also presently inadequately served by local university campuses.

Universities’ contributions to a region or local area span teaching, research and community engagement, all of which are important to economic development.

ACU is a comprehensive university and teaches across a range of fields of study. The University teaches courses in Law, Business, Education, Health Sciences and Humanities in campuses across Australia. Notably, ACU educates the largest number of nurses and teachers in Australia¹ and, as a public university, takes pride in its role in contributing to NSW’s future health and education workforce.

ACU’s NSW campuses are located in Strathfield and North Sydney, with a Blacktown campus opening in 2021 in partnership with Blacktown City Council.² ACU’s Blacktown campus will meet a need for more higher education opportunities in burgeoning Western Sydney. Western Sydney is currently under-served by higher education providers. While 50 per cent of Greater Sydney’s population lives in Western Sydney, only 18 per cent of university places are located in Western Sydney. This represents a genuine geographical barrier to participation in higher education. ACU’s decision to open a new campus in Blacktown aligns with its mission and longstanding commitment to supporting equity in education and widening access to higher education, particularly amongst disadvantaged communities. Socio-economic indicators show high levels of disadvantage in Blacktown, including lower incomes and educational attainment levels, compared to Greater Western Sydney and Greater Sydney.³

ACU’s Blacktown campus will improve access to higher education for the diverse population resident in Blacktown and Greater Western Sydney. This includes individuals from communities that are historically less likely to attend university, including new migrants, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders and those whose parents did not attend university (“first-in-family” students). The Blacktown campus will serve to improve access to university education for these communities.

ACU’s course offerings at Blacktown will mainly reflect the university’s recognised world class research and teaching strengths in health and education, areas of demand in the local community. This will help meet the growing demand for locally-trained nurses, midwives, allied health professionals and teachers to staff the hospitals, health clinics and schools of Western Sydney. The full suite of undergraduate degrees to be offered at ACU’s Blacktown campus in 2021 includes Law, Business Administration and Information Technology.⁴ Several postgraduate degrees and pathways programmes will also be available. The purpose-built campus is projected to teach around 3,000 students by 2025.

The University is pleased to have worked closely with Blacktown City Council in establishing the campus. The Council recognises the economic activity and social and cultural benefit that the concentration of university staff and students will bring to the Blacktown city centre and to surrounding areas. The new campus will enhance Western Sydney’s growing reputation as an emerging cultural and education hub.

ACU has a proud history of supporting and extending the benefits of higher education to communities that are under-represented, which plays an important role in facilitating the economic development of NSW.

¹ Commonwealth Department of Education, Skills and Employment higher education statistics on ‘All domestic students enrolled in Special Courses’; figures refer to students enrolled in courses for initial registration as nurses, and providing initial teacher training, respectively.

² An interim campus opened in 2020.

³ Blacktown City Council. (2017). *Social profile: Blacktown City Council 2016*, at 30.

⁴ For further information and a full list of courses to be offered at ACU Blacktown, see <https://www.acu.edu.au/-/media/feature/pagecontent/richtext/locations/blacktown/ritm0058372-blacktown-brochure-web-accessible.pdf?la=en&hash=BCFF4EFEC313828D91B511B40A377FDA>

For example, ACU participated in the Bridges to Higher Education program, funded by the Federal Government's Higher Education Participation and Partnerships Program (HEPPP), to improve higher education participation rates of students from under-represented communities in Western Sydney.

In this \$21.2 million program, five universities – including ACU – worked with primary and secondary schools, TAFE and community partners in Western Sydney to engage young people who previously might not have considered higher education as an option. Research shows that individuals who undertake higher education earn more over their lifetime than those who do not, and also accrue significant non-financial benefits such as better health and longevity compared to those with lower levels of education.⁵ Significantly, KPMG estimated the Bridges to Higher Education program delivered:

- an economic return to low socioeconomic status (low-SES) communities of \$54 million, equating to a sixfold return on the Government's investment to low-SES communities and a threefold return to the NSW community at large; and
- An expected economic return to the community at large of \$45 million in projected earnings and tax revenues (equivalent to a \$3 return for every extra dollar invested in all Bridges school projects).⁶

The non-financial impacts that education programs like this can deliver to graduates and the broader community are also noteworthy and include:

- greater wellbeing and happiness;
- improved health;
- volunteering and community participation;
- less crime and stronger relationships; and
- less reliance on welfare, as more graduates become employed.⁷

More broadly, as the NSW economy deals with a significant downturn consequent to the coronavirus pandemic, universities are especially critical in helping individuals to reskill, and in educating the future workforce. Individuals who may otherwise be unemployed will be able to use the economic downturn productively and emerge from it with improved productive capacity. University graduates will play an important role in supporting NSW with its economic recovery and development consequent to the coronavirus pandemic. As experience shows, there is a heightened role and demand for university education in times of economic downturn. During the last Australian recession, between 1990-1993 higher education applications amongst those aged 20 years and under increased by more than 20 per cent. Demand from non-school leavers also increased significantly. Domestic undergraduate applications also grew by nearly 13 per cent between 2008-2010 during the global financial crisis.

(b) The mission of NSW universities with a particular focus on the role of universities to serve specific geographic communities

Within the university sector, different universities have different missions. This is not limited to serving a particular geographical region.

While some universities may be driven – and even defined – by their geographical locations, others (such as ACU) have a different type of mission, one that is driven more by the university's identity, its traditional discipline strengths, and a desire to meet its community's needs.

Diversity within the university sector is both a feature and a strength of the Australian university system. This should be acknowledged, valued and protected.

ACU is the largest Catholic university in the English-speaking world and, while it is a public university open to people of all faiths and of none, its mission and operations are strongly rooted in its Catholic identity and values. These include a commitment to the pursuit of knowledge, the dignity of the human person and the common good.

⁵ Deloitte Access Economics. (2016, November). *Estimating the public and private benefits of higher education*. Report prepared for the Australian Government Department of Education and Training; OECD. (2019). *Education at a Glance 2019: Australia*. Retrieved from http://www.oecd.org/education/education-at-a-glance/EAG2019_CN_AUS.pdf; Deloitte Access Economics. (2015). *The importance of universities to Australia's prosperity*.

⁶ KPMG. (2015). *Evaluation of Bridges to Higher Education – Final Report*.

⁷ Bridges to Higher Education, 'Bridges Effect', at http://www.bridges.nsw.edu.au/about/bridges_effect

ACU is actively committed to supporting equity in education and engages in a number of initiatives and courses to widen access to higher education, including for Indigenous peoples, students from low-SES backgrounds, and those experiencing multiple disadvantages.⁸

ACU's mission – and its connection to the Catholic intellectual tradition – is at the heart of everything that it does. This approach guides learning and teaching, and the University's commitment to building a better society by producing high quality, empathetic graduates.

A distinct feature of a university education at ACU is the embedding of a Core Curriculum in all ACU courses, which acknowledges that education is more than just a degree – it is about developing the whole person. As part of the Core Curriculum, all students complete one community engagement unit that asks them to dedicate themselves to the service of those less fortunate and work alongside the margins, where learning happens on both sides. Community engagement encourages students to actively think about their role in society (especially once they enter the workforce), in promoting the dignity of all and working for the common good. The form of community engagement taken by students depends on their field of study.

ACU has recently also partnered with the Ramsay Centre for Western Civilisation to fund scholarships for thirty high-achieving students each year, over five years, to undertake a new Bachelor of Arts degree in Western Civilisation from 2021. The course, which aligns with ACU's mission and furthers the University's commitment to a university-wide strategy for Liberal Arts, will serve to strengthen students' understanding of the liberal arts tradition, by engaging them with the key literature, art, ethics, religion, and philosophy of the tradition. The degree will cover a structured and integrated humanities curriculum from antiquity to the present and include an optional honours year.

(c) The post-pandemic return of foreign student numbers and the financial sustainability and risk management strategies of NSW tertiary education institutions

Overall, ACU is in a strong financial position relative to other universities within the sector. This is due to prudent financial and risk management, including maintaining a responsible level of international enrolments. As such, while the university expects its revenue in coming years to be tens of millions of dollars lower than had previously been projected, ACU anticipates that the implementation of further cost reductions and active budget management will allow it to avoid the staff redundancies and severe cuts made by other universities.

International students constitute around 15 per cent of ACU's student body. This compares with up to 45 per cent at some other institutions. The heavy reliance on international students at some universities has evidently created significant financial difficulties for those institutions in the current situation.

As universities cast around to plug the gaping holes in their revenue streams, it is important for the integrity and sustainability of the sector that governments do not alter policy settings to allow "elite" universities to act in an opportunistic manner, for example by cannibalising the enrolments of mid-tier "working" universities. Avoiding such behaviour will ensure the viability of the current structure of the sector, which encourages the existence of a diversity of institutions that serve a diversity of communities and constituencies.

ACU understands that the Commonwealth Government is considering introducing prudential requirements for Australian universities that would reduce their vulnerability to future financial shocks. To the extent that such measures take into account individual universities' existing good track records and do not unduly compromise the autonomy of universities' governing councils to oversee the strategic direction of their institutions, ACU would support such a measure.

ACU also supports the work of the NSW and Commonwealth Governments to explore pathways to facilitate the progressive return of international students to Australia, noting the significant economic, cultural and social contribution these students make both to the higher education sector and to broader Australian society. Any such action, however, must be carefully managed in accordance with protocols that guarantee appropriate quarantine.

⁸ Further information on some of these initiatives can be found via <https://www.acu.edu.au/about-acu/mission-identity-and-values/our-mission>

ACU acknowledges the NSW Government's \$20 million package to support existing vulnerable international students already in NSW. ACU has taken steps to support its international students during the coronavirus pandemic by providing:

- financial and legal support, including the establishment of a Student Urgent Relief Fund;
- accommodation support; and
- dedicated support services and communication.

(d) The quality of university teaching and research, including the extent and impact of insecure employment in the sector

The research, teaching and learning activities of universities work in a complementary manner to support both quality teaching, and quality research, which underpin and support NSW's (and the nation's) workforce, economy and capacity for innovation. This is reflected in the national Higher Education Provider Category Standards which identify engagement in research, teaching, and community engagement more broadly, as defining features of an Australian University. This nexus was affirmed in the recent Review of the Higher Education Provider Category Standards.

The research and teaching nexus can be conceptualised in at least five broad ways.

- Research informs the content of the courses being taught.
- Students can be taught research methods, which support their learning.
- Students can be engaged in active, research-based learning, which can be found in degree programs that are predominantly structured around problem-based or inquiry-based learning but which can be implemented at the level of the individual course where students undertake a research project.
- Students can be engaged in discovery research, normally where students work (often one-on-one or as part of research teams) with academics to undertake discovery research or complete dissertations.
- The research-teaching nexus encourages academics to engage in pedagogical research, or the scholarship of teaching and learning.⁹

Research activities at universities afford students the opportunity to be taught by the brightest minds and 'expert authorities' in their areas of study. While every student in every field may not always be directly taught by these active researchers, involvement in and exposure to a scholarly community have flow-on benefits to university teaching and learning.

With respect to research at ACU, the University is recognised for undertaking leading research in its core areas of focus and speciality, especially in Health and Education. ACU ranks first or equal first in ten fields of research in Australia, namely: cardiorespiratory medicine and haematology; clinical sciences; cognitive sciences; human movement and sports science; nursing; nutrition and dietetics; psychology; public health and health services; religion and religious studies; and specialist studies in education.¹⁰

ACU is also particularly recognised for its role in educating nurses and teachers for the NSW education and health sectors, and thus continues to make a vital contribution to meeting current and future workforce needs. The quality of teaching and learning at ACU is reflected in the strong employment outcomes of ACU graduates, which is over 90 per cent and above the national average.¹¹ Indeed, ACU is one of the top three universities in Australia for graduate employment.¹² Employer feedback also shows employers are more satisfied with ACU graduates than graduates of other Australian universities – ACU is first in Australia for employer satisfaction.¹³

⁹ Australian Catholic University, *Submission to the Review of Research Policy and Funding Arrangements* (September 2015).

¹⁰ Four-digit Fields of Research (FoR), Excellence in Research for Australia (ERA), 2018.

¹¹ Graduate Outcomes Survey 2017-2019. See QILT survey data reported at <https://www.compared.edu.au>

¹² See <https://www.acu.edu.au/about-acu/reputation-and-ranking/key-statistics>

¹³ Employer Satisfaction Survey, undergraduate cohort, 2018. See <https://www.acu.edu.au/about-acu/reputation-and-ranking/key-statistics>

(e) Levels of integration of the tertiary education sector with industry

ACU submits that the NSW Government should take a broad view of universities' integration with "industry" so as to include the close and porous engagement of universities with the future employers of university graduates, such as health providers and schools.

As a university with longstanding strengths in the fields of teacher education and health sciences, ACU works closely with schools and hospitals.

For example, ACU has school partnership programs to develop students who are specifically suited to work in low-SES schools or in schools with high Indigenous student enrolments, which has resulted from programs developed jointly through university-industry collaboration. At postgraduate level, ACU works closely with industry partners in schools to provide bespoke professional learning opportunities and workforce development, such as embedded models of leadership formation, or literacy and mathematics support. ACU academics and teacher educators also work alongside one another as part of the initial teacher education (ITE) program, co-creating and sharing ideas and resources to enhance the teaching and learning process. This has included, for instance, academics from ACU's NSW School of Education working with teacher educators from a school in Western Sydney to co-construct and develop a theoretical course for a group of Master of Teaching (Primary and Secondary) students. ACU spends approximately \$3.2 million each year organising professional experience placements for approximately 7,000 teacher education students.

In Health Sciences, ACU is also deeply engaged with industry, government, and the community in the education of its students. Curricula are developed and refined in conjunction with industry leaders to ensure they reflect local and international knowledge, rapid changes in the health environment, and advances in student learning. Several collaborative research partnerships have been established with industry partners, while professional appointments to joint chair positions are also in place with several health services. The University is continually working to expand and deepen new and existing strategic partnerships. ACU has developed a framework for managing clinical schools in collaboration with health providers to ensure closer involvement and alignment with their priorities; for example, the Clinical School based in NSW - St Vincent's Health Network – Sydney. ACU spends approximately \$15 million each year organising clinical placements for approximately 8,000 nursing and midwifery students.

(f) The quality of campus life and student freedom of expression

ACU strongly supports freedom of expression and diversity of views on its campuses and in university life. To this end, ACU was a vocal and early supporter of the Federal Government's efforts to formalise free speech protections in Australian higher education.

ACU's governing Senate has approved a dedicated statute on freedom of speech and intellectual freedom, adapting the model code developed by former High Court Chief Justice the Hon. Robert French AC in his independent Review of Freedom of Speech in Australian Higher Education.

The statute, formally adopted in April 2020, affirms ACU's recognition that the open and honest exchange of diverse views is central to ACU's mission within the Catholic intellectual tradition.

ACU noted the apparent unwillingness of some universities to engage in the Western Civilisation courses proposed by the Ramsay Centre for Western Civilisation, following pressure from segments of their university communities. ACU reviewed the opportunity, taking the issue of academic freedom very seriously, and on balance determined to offer these courses in recognition of the wonderful opportunity the courses will provide to students to learn about the liberal arts tradition. The courses went through the full processes of academic and governance procedures.

(g) Foreign political interference within the NSW tertiary education sector

Foreign political interference within the tertiary education sector is an issue of concern to the sector. ACU notes the establishment of the University Foreign Interference Taskforce by the Federal Government, comprised of university and government representatives. The Taskforce has prepared a set of guidelines to support universities to examine existing tools and assist in assessing the risks from foreign interference, to promote greater consistency across the sector and achieve the best possible safeguards. Most recently at ACU, given the increased number of ACU staff and students working and studying remotely due to the coronavirus pandemic, extra measures have been taken to increase cyber

security; including through the introduction of Multi-Factor Authentication and awareness raising on cyber security, to help protect individuals' data, identities, and ACU's information, assets and systems.

(h) The current levels of coordination and/or support provided to NSW universities by the NSW Government

ACU welcomes the NSW Government's commitment to guarantee up to \$750 million in commercial loans to help universities recover from the impact of the coronavirus pandemic. This will be of assistance to ACU, in allowing the university to proceed with the establishment of its Blacktown campus despite declines in revenue consequent to the pandemic.

With respect to further opportunities to support the significant work of NSW universities, ACU suggests the following as areas in which the NSW Government could play a greater role in the tertiary education sector.

1. Areas under-served by higher education

ACU submits that the NSW Government could offer targeted support to universities delivering higher education in areas of community need such as outer-metropolitan, low-SES and disadvantaged communities; recognising the broader socioeconomic benefits delivered to local communities through increased higher education access. This would also provide an opportunity to assist in meeting areas of workforce need in NSW, such as trained nurses, teachers, and in general healthcare and social services.

Measures to support the delivery of initiatives that raise aspirations and facilitate participation in higher education amongst communities that are typically under-represented would support equity groups. Particularly in the current environment and post-pandemic period, extra support is likely to be needed to ensure access and equity in higher education. While economic downturn in NSW consequent to the coronavirus pandemic is likely to result in more individuals undertaking higher education, at the same time, new and existing students are likely to require more support to ensure their success consequent to the pandemic.¹⁴ This calls for more support services for students.

2. Infrastructure and collaborative partnerships

ACU submits that the NSW Government could invest in university infrastructure projects, recognising the social and economic contributions universities make to NSW and local communities, and the returns on investment. In Victoria, for example, the state government has committed to provide \$350 million through a Victorian Higher Education State Investment Fund, to support Victorian universities with capital works, applied research, research partnerships, and assist in boosting Victoria's productivity and economy.

(i) The recent experience with online learning and lessons for the further development of alternative models of tertiary education service delivery

The need to provide socially-distanced teaching due to the coronavirus pandemic led to rapid and unprecedented levels of change to higher education delivery in Australian universities. At ACU, this involved shifting almost all course units online in Semester 1. Further, in response to the Federal Government's request for universities to offer short online courses in areas of national priority, ACU has developed two short courses in Education and a number of graduate certificate courses are being offered in the second half of 2020. These courses are designed to support individuals to retrain or upskill during the coronavirus pandemic and will assist students to gain practical skills and knowledge in areas of high demand.

The new graduate certificate-level courses being offered at ACU are in: occupational health, safety and environmental management; public health; health administration; information technology; education with a focus on integrated STEM; high performance sport; and global health. The short courses were brought together quickly and have been well received. ACU intends to add more courses throughout the year and into the future. Each short course is comprised of four units and will assist students to gain entry into, and earn credit towards, a range of ACU degrees.

¹⁴ Brown, N., Te Riele, K., Shelley, B. & Woodroffe, J. (2020). *Learning at home during COVID-19: Effects on vulnerable young Australians. Independent Rapid Response Report*. Hobart, Australia: University of Tasmania, Peter Underwood Centre for Educational Attainment.

With respect to university courses more broadly, ACU notes that not every element of every course can be effectively offered online. Practicum placements for student teachers and clinical placements for nursing or health science students, for example, must be largely “hands on”. In many cases, this practical experience is a prerequisite to graduation or registration by accreditation bodies.

Such practical training has been significantly affected by the coronavirus pandemic, especially placements for ACU students undertaking health sciences courses. Some accreditation authorities, such as those responsible for Physiotherapy, Speech Pathology, and Paramedicine, however, have responded imaginatively by accepting high-quality simulation as a substitute for physical placements.

There is growing evidence that high-quality simulation can be just as effective for student learning as clinical placements. For example, a landmark study in the United States found no statistically significant differences in clinical competency between nursing students who had traditional clinical experiences and those who had a significant proportion replaced by simulation.¹⁵

It is important to note that simulation is not cheap when done properly, and it is not, nor should it be, a cost-effective way to absorb increased student demand for placements. With minimum standards applied to safeguard and ensure its quality, simulation can be an effective complement (rather than replacement) for physical workplace experiences. The use of high-quality simulation would also reduce some of the burden on NSW hospitals, and reduce the bottleneck of clinical placements.

Consequently, ACU recommends simulation learning be recognised, and regulated, by accreditation bodies in all disciplines in the health sciences as an effective complement to physical workplace experiences.

(j) The appropriateness of current NSW legislation regulating, overseeing and enabling tertiary education

ACU’s unique governance structure, as a national and multi-state university makes this issue of lesser relevance to ACU, than to other NSW-based universities.

¹⁵ Hayden, J.K., Smiley, R.A., Alexander, M., Kardong-Edgren, S. & Jeffries, P.R. (2014). The NCSBN National Simulation Study. *Journal of Nursing Regulation*. Vol. 5, Issue 2, July 2014.

ATTACHMENT A

Australian Catholic University Profile

Australian Catholic University (ACU) is a publicly funded Catholic university, open to people of all faiths and of none, and with teaching, learning and research inspired by 2,000 years of Catholic intellectual tradition.

ACU operates as a multi-jurisdictional university with eight campuses, across four states, one territory, and overseas. ACU campuses are located in North Sydney (NSW), Strathfield (NSW), Canberra (ACT), Melbourne (Victoria), Ballarat (Victoria), Brisbane (QLD), Adelaide (SA), and Rome (Italy). ACU's campus in Blacktown (NSW) will open in 2021.

ACU is the largest Catholic university in the English-speaking world. Today, ACU has around 32,000 students and 2,000 staff.¹⁶

ACU graduates demonstrate high standards of professional excellence and are also socially responsible, highly employable and committed to active and responsive learning.

ACU has built its reputation in the areas of Health and Education. ACU produces more nursing and teaching graduates than any other university in Australia, serving to meet significant workforce needs in these areas.¹⁷

ACU has four faculties: Health Sciences; Education and Arts; Law and Business; and Theology and Philosophy. This consolidation of ACU's previous six faculties in 2014 has created a more efficient and competitive structure focused on the needs of industry and employment partners. ACU has also moved towards the adoption of a shared services model where suitable, to improve efficiencies, internal processes and better allocate resources.

ACU is committed to targeted and quality research. ACU's strategic plan focuses on areas that align with ACU's mission and reflect most of its learning and teaching: Education; Health and Wellbeing; Theology and Philosophy; and Social Justice and the Common Good. To underpin its research intensification efforts, ACU has appointed high profile leaders to assume the directorships, and work with high calibre members, in its research institutes.¹⁸ ACU is a world-leading research university in its priority areas of education, health, and theology and philosophy.

¹⁶ Student numbers refer to headcount figures while staff numbers refer to full-time equivalent (FTE).

¹⁷ Department of Education and Training, '2017 Special Courses' in *Selected Higher Education Statistics – 2017 Student Data* (2018). Accessible via <https://www.education.gov.au/selected-higher-education-statistics-2017-student-data>.

¹⁸ See Australian Catholic University, 'Research at ACU' via <http://www.acu.edu.au/>.