

ACU Sustainability Report 2025

ACU
AUSTRALIAN CATHOLIC UNIVERSITY



Vice-Chancellor and President's statement

At Australian Catholic University, our Catholic mission gives shape and purpose to the way we understand sustainability. It reflects who we are: a community of students, staff, alumni and partners committed to human dignity, the common good, responsible stewardship and service to society.

The ACU Sustainability Report 2025 presents this commitment through the ACU Sustainability Framework, which brings together the moral vision of Laudato si' and the shared global language of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals. This framework helps us to understand sustainability not only as environmental management, but as a whole-of-university commitment to people, communities, institutions and creation.

Across the report, we see this commitment given practical form in teaching, research, operations, policy and partnerships. Our students are formed to engage with the social, ecological and ethical questions of their time. Our researchers contribute knowledge that strengthens health, education, inclusion, climate transition, safeguarding, workplace wellbeing and institutional integrity. Our partnerships with communities, health services, schools, government and industry extend the reach of our mission and help translate values into action.

The report also records ACU's continuing environmental stewardship. We continue to reduce emissions, use renewable electricity, conserve water, minimise waste and develop campuses that support wellbeing and responsible resource use. These actions reflect our belief that care for people and care for creation are not separate responsibilities, but one commitment to a future shaped by responsibility and lasting care.

As we look ahead, ACU will continue to draw on the Sustainability Framework as a guide for how mission and sustainability are expressed within the life of the university. The framework will remain an important foundation for strengthening our shared understanding, deepening our practice, and extending the positive impact of our work.

This report confirms ACU's continuing resolve to act with integrity, serve with purpose and help people, communities and the natural world flourish together.



Professor Zlatko Skrbiš
Vice-Chancellor and President
Australian Catholic University

Acknowledgement of Country

In recognition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people's spiritual connection to Country, and in continuing ACU's commitment to Reconciliation, it is customary to acknowledge Country as we pass through it. We acknowledge and pay our respects to the First Peoples, the Traditional Custodians of the lands and waterways where Australian Catholic University campuses and leadership centres are located, and we thank them for their continued custodianship.

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ACU Sustainability Framework

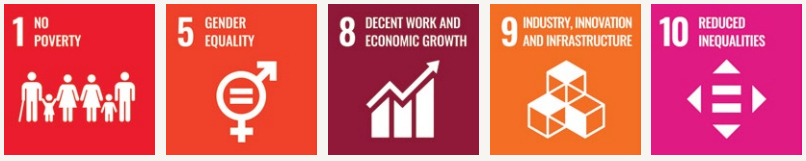
The ACU Sustainability Framework gives the university a clear way to explain what sustainability means in a Catholic university. It brings together two bodies of thought: the Catholic moral vision expressed through the themes of *Laudato si'*, and the global agenda expressed through the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals. In doing so, it provides a framework that is both mission-grounded and outward-looking. It enables ACU to speak from its Catholic identity while also using a language of sustainability recognised across governments, universities, communities and civil society.

The purpose of the framework is to define the scope of ACU's contribution to a more sustainable world. It does not treat sustainability only as environmental management or regulatory compliance. Instead, it presents sustainability as a commitment to people, communities, institutions and creation. This allows ACU to connect all of its activities: learning and teaching, research, community engagement, governance, procurement, campus operations, partnerships and student experience. The framework gives these diverse activities a common structure and shows how they contribute to human dignity, the common good and care for our common home.

The framework is conceptual but also practical. It helps ACU assess whether an activity, policy, story or outcome is genuinely aligned with sustainability as it applies the term. It provides a way to map ACU's work against agreed themes, identify areas of strong contribution and recognise where further action is needed. It also supports clearer communication. ACU is a complex institution with broad concerns, and this framework supplies it with a shared language for explaining how many different forms of activity relate to mission and sustainability.

Most importantly, the framework aligns sustainability with ACU's mission. It shows that sustainability is not an optional addition to university life but instead is a central way ACU gives practical form to its commitments to truth, human dignity, the common good, stewardship, and hope. Through the framework, ACU can ask whether its actions help people and communities flourish, protect the vulnerable, strengthen institutions and care for our shared world.

Laudato si' and the Sustainable Development Goals

LAUDATO SI' THEMES	SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS
Shared humanity and our common home	
Tackling pollution and climate change	
Clean, safe water for all	
Biodiversity and protection of natural ecosystems	
Health, education and social cohesion	
Human dignity and the common good	
Inclusive economic and labour markets	
Sustainable urban environments	
Local, national and international dialogue	
Institutions, legal and regulatory frameworks	



Theme 1

Shared Humanity and Our Common Home

> **"To care for the world in which we live means to care for ourselves. Yet we need to think of ourselves more and more as a single family dwelling in a common home."**
>
> **Pope Francis,**
> ***Fratelli Tutti*, N17**

Shared Humanity and Our Common Home calls us to understand that caring for the earth and caring for people is a single, inseparable commitment. ACU fosters human flourishing in its practical care for communities and places. This includes learning programs that investigate poverty, sustainability and climate change; partnerships that widen access to higher education and support disadvantaged communities; and campus practices that conserve natural resources.

SDG ALIGNMENT

The theme Shared Humanity and Our Common Home aligns with the following Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) of the United Nations:

- SDG 1 – No Poverty
- SDG 14 – Life Below Water
- SDG 15 – Life on Land
- SDG 17 – Partnerships for the Goals

OUR APPROACH

ACU's learning programs and its many partnerships demonstrate its belief in a shared humanity and a single, common home for all.

ACU's curriculum provides opportunities to examine poverty, ecology and the structures that shape disadvantage, including through its core curriculum, which challenges students to consider new perspectives and engage with the world in informed and transformative ways.

Meanwhile, ACU builds community partnerships to widen access to university for disadvantaged groups and so that our students can apply the knowledge they gain in the classroom to their future workplaces.

WHAT WE ARE DOING

Learning that links social and ecological responsibility

ACU's curriculum includes learning that explores the connections between social and ecological responsibility. Areas of study address poverty, gender, health and conflict as development challenges; the relationships between population, food systems, environmental degradation and disadvantage; and the links between ecological sustainability, justice and action at local, national and global scales. Together, these areas of learning provide opportunities to consider how human wellbeing and care for the natural world are interconnected.

Reducing barriers to participation

ACU has pathway and scholarship programs that ease the hardships that restrict some students' access to higher education. These programs include:

- Uni Step-Up, a program that maps a path to tertiary study for Year 11 and 12 students, some of whom are from disadvantaged groups. The program orients students to the university experience and gives them access to introductory ACU units and ongoing academic support.
- ACU equity scholarships, which help students overcome financial hardships and disadvantage.
- Relocation scholarships, which assist students who must move home to attend university.
- Accommodation and Indigenous accommodation scholarships, which reduce or remove housing costs so that students can focus on academic success rather than the stress of making their monthly rent.

Partnering for community benefit and care

ACU builds relationships with a range of partners to deliver immediate and long-term benefits to those partners and to our students. Highlights include:

- Future in Youth, a collaboration with schools and community organisations in low-socioeconomic settings that promotes young people's physical activity, health knowledge and resilience.
- ACU's Exercise Lifestyle Clinics, which connect community participants to ACU students and, if necessary, to local medical centres, schools and hospitals for prevention and rehabilitation support.
- Work integrated learning (WIL), a flagship ACU program that places ACU students in a workplace of their chosen professional discipline, from nursing and midwifery to paramedicine, physiotherapy, nutrition and dietetics. In these placements, students and staff work side-by-side with health professionals and communities in Australia and overseas to deliver health promotion, clinical care and community-centred practice.

Caring for creation

ACU's properties team leads the university's program of environmental stewardship. The team manages campus buildings and grounds to deliver amenity, longevity and environmental benefits that often transcend the boundaries of the campus grounds.

ACU's water management exemplifies this. ACU is one of the most efficient water users in the Australian university sector, consuming just one-third the amount of water per full-time staff and student compared to the Australian university sector in 2024.

This efficiency is by design. In its campus buildings, the university has installed efficient fixtures and sensors to limit daily water demand and, on its campus grounds, ACU irrigates carefully and minimally. It has also increased its application of water-sensitive urban design principles over the past decade, with development of a xeriscaped (zero-irrigation) garden around the St Brigid Health Sciences Building at Ballarat Campus, and the new urban park at the Melbourne Campus that incorporates permeable surfaces, rain gardens and native vegetation that filter stormwater and support local biodiversity.

Embedding partnership in policy and governance

Partnerships are central to the idea of a shared humanity and a common home, and ACU's policies ensure those partnerships are durable and responsible. Key partnership policies include the:

- Educational Partnerships Policy, which provides a governance framework for education partnerships ranging from academic institutions, the Catholic Church, community groups, government and industry
- Ethical Partnerships Policy, which establishes the principles to underpin ACU partnerships, protecting institutional integrity and including explicit exclusion criteria for partnerships that conflict with obligations relating to modern slavery, sanctions and foreign interference risk
- Non-Education External Collaboration Policy, which requires that ACU's research and enterprise collaborations are transparent, mutually beneficial and supported with due diligence and compliance controls.

IMPACT BY THE NUMBERS

- ACU campuses have the capacity to store 600,000 litres of captured rainwater to reduce their dependence on mains-water supply.
- ACU's Open Eyes Nepal partnership has provided 88 patients with free retinoblastoma treatment and 57 patients with a custom-made prosthetic eye, while in 2025, 10 ACU nursing students visited Nepal.
- ACU has the third lowest mains-water use in Australian university sector, with 2.65 kilolitres of mains-water used for each equivalent full-time staff member and full-time student.*

**Tertiary Education Facilities Management Association Annual Survey 2024*

Case study:

Imagining a better world for youth

AUTHOR: EMILIE NG



It's 2023, and Emmanuel Aushana is frantically browsing the internet, comparing youth work degrees across different universities in Melbourne, one hour before the Victorian Tertiary Admissions Centre applications deadline.

All because of one incorrect assumption.

"I just figured all the youth work courses are the same," Emmanuel admits.

But when a friend asked if he had actually researched youth work courses, the nerves got to him.

"And it was the last day we had to submit our preferences. We had to submit them at 5pm, and at 4pm I went onto the websites of different universities that offered youth work to check their course subjects," he says.

Luckily Emmanuel, who is legally blind, can read screens at the speed of thought. Using screen reader software to translate text on his laptop and phone, he "reads" at an astounding 900 words per minute, nearly 10 times the average speaking rate.

Within minutes of researching potential youth work courses, he discovers his first preference university focuses more on youth work policy writing.

But Emmanuel, a self-confessed people-person, is more interested in a course that offers real-world practical training with and for young people.

ACU's Bachelor of Youth Work ticks all the boxes, with its focus on professional work placement, its foundation in sociology, and its strong industry connections paired with in-depth theoretical training on youth development.

With 10 minutes to spare, Emmanuel puts ACU as his first preference.

OPEN TO POSSIBILITIES

Navigating life without vision is all Emmanuel has ever known.

At six months old, Emmanuel's parents were concerned about him appearing cross-eyed.

He was diagnosed with histiocytosis, a rare disorder that can cause blindness.

Doctors attempted to 'fix' Emmanuel's eyes, leading to more than six surgeries on his left eye and several others on his right.

But the surgeries were unsuccessful, and Emmanuel was left completely blind in his left eye but has light perception in his right eye and can see some colour.

While the loss of his eyesight at six months of age was a devastating blow to his family, for Emmanuel, it was a blessing in disguise.

"I've lived my life basically blind from the start," Emmanuel says.

"I don't really have any memory of being able to see fully. I'm kind of lucky in the sense that I became blind when I was that young, so I don't know any different.

"It is what it is. As much complaining as you can do, it's not going to change anything so I might as well live life."

The 20-year-old has applied his positive outlook to everything he does, from excelling in his university studies, working part-time in retail, becoming an ordained a subdeacon in the Chaldean Catholic Church (the first of three distinct ranks of Deacon in the ancient faith) and starting a side-hustle as a traditional Assyrian/Iraqi drummer for weddings and parties.



EXPERIENCING THE YOUTH OF OTHER CULTURES

As someone who has overcome numerous challenges to live a full and independent life, Emmanuel has become something of a role model to his peers.

“I’m the kind of person who people come to for advice,” Emmanuel said.

“I like helping my friends through things or giving them advice, or just simply talking to people. I guess people feel like they can trust me and talk to me.”

Emmanuel has also brought these qualities to his university studies in youth work, supporting young people across multiple placements opportunities, including an unforgettable 16-day immersion experience in Fiji.

Run by ACU in partnership with Fiji-based volunteer organisation Think Pacific, students live with a family in a Fijian community village and run workshops with young people on topics like mental health, public health, climate change and business enterprise.

“To be honest, it was one of the best experiences I’ve had,” Emmanuel said.

“It was like stepping into a different world. It was very enlightening to see the way that they lived in the village, and how community based they all are.

“You could see our work start to impact the youth and their relationships with their own village and their willingness to push through and make the changes that we were speaking about.

“The youth we met obviously asked me a few questions which was good because they were obviously curious and wanted to learn. They were all very, very friendly, and very inclusive of me as well.”

With half of his degree now completed, Emmanuel is keen to explore more ways he can make a difference to the lives of young people.

“A lot of people have helped me through my own life, and I guess it’s kind of my way of giving back,” Emmanuel said.



Theme 2

Tackling Pollution and Climate Change

"The protection of the environment, of resources and of the climate, obliges all international leaders to act jointly and to show a readiness to work in good faith, respecting the law and promoting solidarity with the weakest regions of the planet."

Pope Benedict XVI, *Caritas in Veritate*, N50

Tackling Pollution and Climate Change calls us to understand environmental harm as a matter of justice, stewardship and responsibility for the common good. Pollution and climate change harm ecosystems, but they also harm people, especially the poor. ACU's response is to form students to understand climate, resource use and sustainable development; to conduct research that contributes to energy transition and environmental accountability; and operate its campuses to conserve natural resources.

SDG ALIGNMENT

The theme Tackling Pollution and Climate Change aligns with the following Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) of the United Nations:

- SDG 7 – Affordable and Clean Energy
- SDG 11 – Sustainable Cities and Communities
- SDG 12 – Responsible Consumption and Production
- SDG 13 – Climate Action

OUR APPROACH

At ACU, we acknowledge our responsibility to continually reduce our emission of pollutants including greenhouse gases. We believe that environmental action is most credible when it is embedded in the ordinary decisions of the university, from the content of the curriculum, to the subjects that we research, to the way we procure goods and services and develop our campuses.

WHAT WE ARE DOING

Learning for decarbonisation, resilience and responsible resource use

Climate change, sustainable development and responsible resource use are addressed within relevant areas of ACU's curriculum. Learning in these areas considers climate science and evidence-based responses including renewable energy, mitigation, adaptation and policy; urban decarbonisation and sustainable infrastructure; environmental health; economic justice and community resilience; and the roles of governments, institutions and communities in shaping social and environmental outcomes.

Research that supports transition and accountability

ACU research published in 2025 contributed to climate action and responsible resource use by examining the systems, technologies and corporate governance that support



environmental transition. Examples include:

- Investigating the potential of artificial intelligence to improve energy management in buildings, reduce energy waste and increase operational efficiency. This research contributes to the practical challenge of making buildings more efficient while keeping technical systems readily understandable and useful for decision-makers.
- Examining the links between climate risk and corporate investment behaviour, showing how climate risk can affect investment efficiency and why climate resilience must be integrated into financial, regulatory and policy decisions.
- Assessing the links between environmental accountability, board diversity, corporate carbon performance and sustainability governance. This research revealed that environmental performance is not merely a technical matter, but an outcome of a specific quality of leadership and d**ecision-making.**

Sustainable buildings, energy and campus operations

Our operations team demonstrates ACU's commitment to reduce environmental harm. Wind and solar farms supply 100 per cent of the electricity used on ACU's Australian campuses and the university also operates its own solar systems at the Ballarat and Melbourne campuses.

ACU manages its buildings and grounds with attention to energy efficiency, water conservation and the cleanliness of indoor air, with increasing support for students and staff who choose active modes of transport.

Strategically, ACU develops its campuses with attention to sustainable design principles. Since 2011, every major new ACU building project has incorporated features such as advanced heating, ventilation and air-conditioning systems, smart lighting and controls, high-performance glazing, rainwater reuse, solar generation, low-emission fit-outs, bicycle storage and showers.

Reducing waste and supporting responsible consumption

ACU seeks to minimise the amount of waste it generates and sends to landfill and aims to recycle as much as possible. The university collects paper, cardboard, plastic, electronics, glass and metal for recycling, and garden and food waste for mulch and compost. In 2024, ACU generated 10 kilograms of waste per full-time staff and student, 50 per cent less waste than the university-sector average*.

Embedding climate action in policy and governance

ACU's Sustainability Policy provides our institutional basis for reducing environmental impacts across the university. It requires ACU to establish objectives, publish performance information, apply resource efficiency and behaviour change, and use building design and new technologies to reduce environmental harm.

The policy also commits ACU to designing, constructing and refurbishing buildings and grounds in ways that minimise lifecycle environmental impacts while improving wellbeing and productivity.

Impact by the numbers

- Renewable electricity now supplies around 75 per cent of the energy needed by ACU's Australian campuses.
- ACU has reduced its annual carbon emissions by one third, or almost 10,000 tonnes, since 2020.
- More than 90 per cent of ACU's carbon emissions are sourced from the goods and services that ACU buys, from air travel to furniture to office stationery.
- ACU's Green Star-rated buildings have a combined floor area of around 60,000 square metres, equal to 22 per cent of ACU's total floor area.

**Tertiary Education Facilities Management Association Annual Survey 2024*

Case study:

Turning climate commitment into lower emissions



In 2019, ACU's greenhouse gas emissions reached their highest point. The university emitted approximately 38,000 tonnes of carbon dioxide equivalent, generated by the many ordinary activities of a national university such as powering buildings, flying staff between cities and countries, buying equipment, fitting out campuses, engaging contractors and sustaining ACU's core daily work of learning, research and community engagement.

At least 15,000 tonnes of those emissions came from electricity and around 55 per cent came from ACU's supply chain – from air travel, to furniture and information tech, to cleaning, catering and professional consultancies. The scale of the task was clear. If ACU was to respond seriously to climate change, it would need to change not only what it measured, but how it operated.

Our shift began with one of the most consequential choices available to the university. In 2021, ACU stopped buying electricity generated from fossil fuel sources and moved to 100 per cent renewable electricity. It was a practical decision because it reduced our costs, but it was also a principled one. It recognised that energy is never only an operational input. Instead, like everything that the university buys, it has a moral and environmental dimension, making it a test of our commitment to the common good.

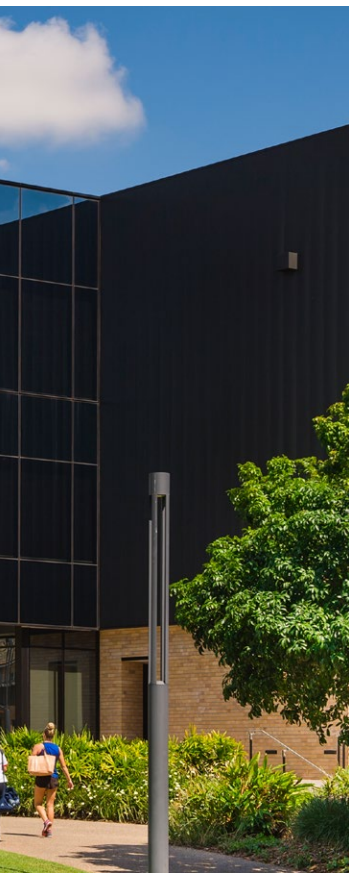
The switch to renewable electricity transformed ACU's emissions profile. By 2024, our greenhouse gas emissions had fallen to 23,798 tonnes of CO_2e – a substantial reduction from the 2019 peak. In the same period, ACU also made reductions in staff travel. In 2019, staff air travel emitted about 6,200 tonnes of CO_2e. In 2025, this was reduced by more than half to 2,850 tonnes.

Although the university has not explicitly sought to align its climate action with the science behind the Paris Agreement's 1.5°C goal, ACU's pathway so far aligns with that global agreement. For example, the Paris Agreement requires that global emissions peak early, fall sharply by 2030 and continue declining toward net zero by mid-century. And so it is with ACU, with our emissions having peaked years before 2025, and our early action opening up a credible pathway towards the Paris Agreement's net-zero milestones – such as emission cuts of 43 per cent by 2030 and 69 per cent by 2040, leading to net zero emissions by 2050 or sooner.

Our operational culture has also changed. For more than 15 years, ACU has ensured that every major new building and refurbishment on campus has incorporated high levels of environmentally sustainable design. This future-focus will shape the ordinary conditions of work, study and community life in the decades ahead, ensuring that lower-carbon operations become business as usual.

Already, that culture is evident in the day-to-day decisions of ACU's Properties Directorate. In 2024, our university:

- used just 3.3 gigajoules of energy for every 100 square metres of floor space, around 45 per cent less energy than the Australian university sector as a whole*





- emitted only 30 kilograms of energy-related CO2e per full-time staff and student, compared with the sector average of 510 kilograms.*

Our success, however, has also revealed our next challenge, and it is a complex one. ACU's decisive action on electricity and air travel emissions means that our supply chain is now the dominant source of the university's carbon footprint. More than 90 per cent of ACU's CO2 emissions in 2024 came from the goods and services it buys. The next stage of climate action will therefore require the university to extend its attention beyond its direct operations into procurement, contracting, supplier engagement and the wider economy in which it participates.

ACU will stay with the task, because for us this work is not simply sound environmental management, but an expression of our Catholic mission. Tackling pollution and climate change means protecting life, reducing harm, acting with restraint and recognising that the climate is a common good shared with the poor, the vulnerable and future generations.

**Tertiary Education Facilities Management Association Annual Survey 2024*



Theme 3
Clean, Safe Water for All

> **"...access to safe drinkable water is a basic and universal human right, since it is essential to human survival and, as such, is a condition for the exercise of other human rights."**
>
> **Pope Francis, *Laudato si'*, N30**

Clean, Safe Water for All calls us to understand water not merely as a utility or operational resource but as a life-sustaining common good. Clean water is a pillar of human dignity, public health and care for creation. ACU responds to this theme through curriculum content that addresses water systems, sustainability and public health, alongside campus practices that conserve water and protect stormwater quality.

SDG ALIGNMENT

The theme Clean, Safe Water for All aligns with the following Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) of the United Nations:

- SDG 1 – No Poverty
- SDG 3 – Good Health and Wellbeing
- SDG 6 – Clean Water and Sanitation

OUR APPROACH

ACU approaches clean, safe water as a matter of stewardship, health and human dignity.

Our students learn about water through several lenses, including the ecology of catchments and coasts, environmental degradation and public health. Meanwhile, ACU's campus operations work actively to minimise potable water use through efficient fixtures, stormwater capture and reuse, careful irrigation and sustainable landscape design.

WHAT WE ARE DOING

Learning that connects water, sustainability and human wellbeing

Relevant areas of ACU's curriculum consider water within the broader contexts of sustainability, human wellbeing and environmental responsibility. This includes learning about the functioning of rivers, catchments and coastal systems; the effects of human activity on water systems; water supply, storage and catchment rehabilitation; and the scientific understanding of resource conservation and environmental problem-solving.

Conserving water through campus design and operations

ACU develops and manages its campuses to minimise potable water use through smart design, efficient fixtures and sustainable landscapes.

In campus buildings, ACU uses efficient fixtures and systems to limit daily water demand. Across its grounds, the university uses careful



irrigation and water-sensitive urban design to reduce reliance on mains-water supply and support more resilient campus landscapes. ACU also captures stormwater in water tanks with a combined capacity of 600,000 litres for reuse in toilet flushing, fire-systems testing and garden irrigation. This reduces our demand for potable water and applies our belief that water is a shared resource that must be used carefully and responsibly.

Protecting stormwater quality and local ecosystems

Sustainable landscape design is a key feature of ACU's water strategy. At the Ballarat Campus, xeriscaped (zero-irrigation) gardens around the St Brigid Health Sciences Building demonstrate how drought-tolerant plantings can provide attractive and resilient landscapes with minimal watering.

At the Melbourne Campus, ACU has replaced a former multilevel concrete car park with an urban park that integrates water-sensitive urban design features such as rain gardens, permeable surfaces and native vegetation. These features help filter stormwater, reduce pollutant run-off into local waterways and support biodiversity.

Together, these projects show how campus design can improve the quality of urban environments, support biodiversity and demonstrate the university's skill in caring for our common home.

IMPACT BY THE NUMBERS

- In 2024, ACU used 2.65 kilolitres of mains-water per full-time staff and student, while the university-sector used around 8,000 litres per full-time staff and student.*
- ACU campuses have a combined 600,000 litres of water storage capacity for captured stormwater.

**Tertiary Education Facilities Management Association Annual Survey 2024*



Theme 4
Biodiversity and Protection of Ecosystems

"...the natural environment is more than raw material to be manipulated at our pleasure; it is a wondrous work of the Creator containing a 'grammar' which sets forth ends and criteria for its wise use, not its reckless exploitation."

Pope Benedict XVI, *Caritas in Veritate*, N48

Biodiversity and Protection of Ecosystems calls us to recognise and act on the understanding that the natural world has value beyond its common utility to human beings. Accordingly, ACU acts on the insight that species, habitats and ecosystems form part of the integrity of creation, and that humanity is called to stewardship rather than domination.

SDG ALIGNMENT

The theme Biodiversity and Protection of Ecosystems aligns with the following Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) of the United Nations:

- SDG 14 – Life Below Water
- SDG 15 – Life on Land

OUR APPROACH

ACU approaches biodiversity and ecosystem protection as an expression of stewardship, ecological responsibility and care for our common home.

Our learning program supports students to acquire knowledge about aquatic, coastal and land-based ecosystems, including the ways human activity affects them. Students examine coastal and maritime hazards, climate impacts on oceans and islands, alpine ecology, conservation, biodiversity, ecological justice and the relationship between people, land and living systems.

ACU's campus operations complement this learning through practical stewardship of buildings, grounds and landscapes. The university uses water-sensitive urban design, drought-tolerant planting and native vegetation to reduce pressure on natural resources and support biodiversity in urban campus settings.

WHAT WE ARE DOING

Learning that builds ecological literacy

Ecological literacy is developed in areas of ACU's curriculum concerned with biodiversity, ecosystems and environmental responsibility. Learning encompasses aquatic, coastal and land-based environments, including coastal and maritime hazards, ecosystem conservation and management, the effects of human activity on natural systems, and the relationship between ecological conditions and the resilience of human communities.

Caring for habitat and campus landscapes

ACU's approach to campus landscape design reflects a practical commitment to conservation, resilience and ecological care.

At the Brisbane Campus, ACU is fostering the native landscape by actively supporting the regeneration



and long-term resilience of its habitat areas. This includes targeted weed control in remnant paperbark forest and nearby native vegetation islands, with priority given to invasive woody weeds and vines.

The campus is also protecting wetland habitat for crakes and rails by retaining tall, grassed pond edges and supporting bush stone-curlews by minimising disturbance to nesting areas, retaining fallen branches and natural debris, and encouraging wildlife-friendly fencing.

Embedding stewardship in campus planning

ACU embeds stewardship in campus planning primarily by treating campus development and capital investment as strategic processes aligned with ACU's mission, identity and values. This enables ACU staff and stakeholders to assess building works and capital projects in relation to heritage, student experience, community engagement, sustainability and enabling infrastructure. Through Campus Development Frameworks, Campus Development Plans and the rolling Infrastructure Plan, ACU gives stewardship a practical planning structure in which future projects are justified, prioritised and assessed for benefits including compliance, amenity and operational impacts.

IMPACT BY THE NUMBERS

- The Melbourne Campus urban park covers 1,800 square meters and has doubled the campus' open space and created a habitat for native birds and insects.
- The external gardens of the Saint Teresa of Kolkata Building contain 21 species of plants, many of them native species, and the Melbourne Campus Park contains 43 species of plants, most of them native species.



Theme 5
Health, Education and Social Cohesion

"The term 'education' refers not only to classroom teaching and vocational training – both of which are important factors in development – but to the complete formation of the person."

Pope Benedict XVI, *Caritas in Veritate*, N61

Health, Education and Social Cohesion calls us to understand human flourishing as the ability to live healthy lives, to learn and to participate meaningfully in community, and to share in relationships of care. From this perspective, health is more than treatment, education is more than credentialling, and social cohesion is more than civil order. Instead, health, education and social cohesion combine as a formula for a life of dignity, of learning with purpose and of participation in community that contributes to the common good.

SDG ALIGNMENT

The theme Health, Education and Social Cohesion aligns with the following Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) of the United Nations:

- SDG 3 – Good Health and Wellbeing
- SDG 4 – Quality Education
- SDG 10 – Reduced Inequalities
- SDG 16 – Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions

OUR APPROACH

ACU approaches health, education and social cohesion as indivisible expressions of its mission.

ACU's research addresses practical problems in health workforce capability, culturally safe care, prevention and health promotion, teaching quality, disability inclusion, service access, safeguarding and youth justice.

ACU's learning program, meanwhile, inspires students to serve communities through health promotion, clinical care, inclusive education, social justice, human rights and ethical professional practice.

The university's partnerships, policies and operations give this approach a practical form: ACU works with schools, health services, community organisations, government and industry to widen participation, deliver care, support students and staff, and strengthen institutional life.

WHAT WE ARE DOING

Learning that forms people for care, inclusion and service

Health, education, inclusion and social cohesion are addressed across relevant areas of ACU's curriculum. Learning includes approaches to health promotion and wellbeing at individual, community and population levels;

the social and physical inequalities experienced by people with mental illness; inclusive educational practice for people with disability and other forms of diversity; and safeguarding through law, policy, institutional accountability and prevention. These areas connect professional practice with the wider conditions that enable people and communities to participate and flourish.

Research that strengthens health, learning and inclusion

ACU research contributes to this theme by improving knowledge of the systems that support health, learning and participation.

In the field of health, ACU's research in 2025 ranged across topics such as the capability of the health workforce, culturally safe care, quality of health services and rehabilitation. This included studies published on maternal wellbeing, paramedicine education, mental health work placements, family violence and walkable neighbourhoods.

In the field of education, ACU research added to knowledge on teaching quality, student engagement and the learning environments of the future. Other research on literacy instruction, reading and writing, early childhood schema learning and AI-assisted language learning shows how evidence, reflection and careful design improves the practice of education.

On the topics of inclusion and social cohesion, ACU's 2025 research examined disability, cultural safety, access to services, life expectancy and the response of the justice system to specific groups. This includes investigations of young people's views of disability, inclusive dance for children with cerebral palsy, Indigenous-led health-data governance, and rehabilitation-oriented youth justice.

Building safe, inclusive and supportive conditions

ACU's policies support health, education and social cohesion by establishing conditions for safety, inclusion, staff development and accountability. Here are some leading examples:

- The Smoke-Free and Vape-Free Environment Policy supports healthy campus environments and directs staff and students to cessation supports including the Employee Assistance Program, Student Counselling Service and Quitline.
- The Professional Learning for Academic Staff Policy and Professional Development for Professional Staff Policy support continuing capability development for staff whose work sustains ACU's educational mission.
- The Students with Disability Policy provides reasonable adjustments, education inclusion plans and access and disability support so that students can participate equitably in learning and university life.
- The Discrimination and Harassment Policy commits the university to a safe and inclusive environment, with complaint pathways intended to be sensitive, fair, timely and confidential.

Delivering care, support and inclusive campus services

ACU's operations throughout 2025 supported health, education and social cohesion through direct services and inclusive campus practices:

- ACU's Melbourne Psychology Clinic and the Mary Aikenhead Clinic at Strathfield provide low-cost counselling and psychological assessment for the wider community, while also offering supervised clinical training for provisional psychologists.
- ACU's campus health clinics offer services including physiotherapy, occupational therapy, speech pathology, social work and exercise physiology, delivered by student practitioners under qualified supervision.
- ACU's Access and Disability Service supports students with temporary or ongoing medical or mental health conditions, disability or responsibilities as carers. The service assists with reasonable adjustments, learning support, exam adjustments and physical access arrangements.

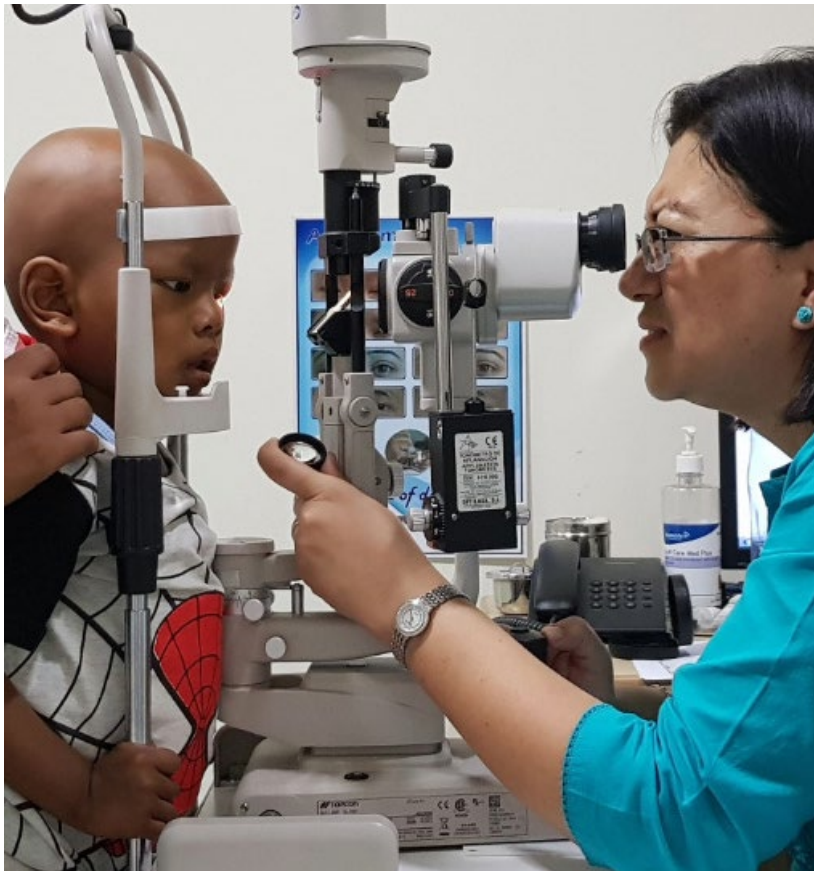
IMPACT BY THE NUMBERS

- In 2025, ACU had 35,357 students enrolled, of whom 26,403 were undergraduate students and 7,229 were postgraduate students.
- ACU was ranked first for Good Health and Wellbeing in the *Times Higher Education* Impact Rankings 2025.
- ACU was ranked first in Australia and ninth worldwide for research quality in education in the *Times Higher Education* World University Rankings by Subject 2026.
- ACU was ranked in the top 35 worldwide for nursing in the Shanghai Ranking's Global Ranking of Academic Subjects 2025.

Case study:

Restoring sight and hope in Nepal

AUTHOR:
MENIOS CONSTANTINOU



In a village in the mountains of Nepal, an elderly grandmother sits outside her home, her eyes cloudy with untreated cataracts. "All of my children, I used to know their faces," says Manisara Gaha in a documentary called Open Your Eyes. "But I've never seen my granddaughter. Maybe her toes are just like mine."

Cataract is a common eye disease that accounts for around six in 10 cases of treatable blindness in Nepal, affecting thousands like Manisara each year.

In Australia and much of the developed world, a simple surgery can restore sight. An ophthalmologist replaces the patient's cloudy lens with an artificial one that allows them to see clearly within hours.

In developing countries like Nepal, cataracts are commonly left untreated. Many patients live in remote areas where ophthalmologists and medical facilities are scarce; others are either unaware of the treatment or unable to afford it.

"Ophthalmology can have a life-changing impact," says Tia Day, one of 10 ACU nursing students who recently visited Nepal and observed both the potential to cure blindness, and the barriers to treatment.

"I learned the impact and prevalence of eye disease, especially cataracts, and how simple and effective cataract surgeries are. Community outreach and clinics are vital in increasing access to care in countries like Nepal, and healthcare systems in developing countries often rely on international support."

It was this understanding of Nepal's eye health challenges that led ACU to partner with Open Eyes Nepal, a not-for-profit organisation that's raising awareness of a rare condition called retinoblastoma.

Like cataracts, retinoblastoma can cause blindness – but the parallels end there. Cataracts affect older adults and are usually treatable through surgery. Retinoblastoma is an aggressive childhood cancer that often requires removing an eye to save the child's life.

What's more, treatment is complex and costly, putting it out of reach for many families.

"It can be a long and drawn-out process," says Dr Purnima Rajkarnikar Sthapit, an ocular oncologist and oculoplastic surgeon who co-founded Open Eyes Nepal in 2021.

"With cataracts, you have a one-time surgery and you're done. Retinoblastoma treatment can take two or three years from diagnosis through to surgery and rehabilitation, and even families from well-off backgrounds can struggle to find the money."

CHANGING LIVES

Dr Purnima Rajkarnikar treated her first retinoblastoma patients more than a decade ago in India, which records more cases than any other country.

Just as in Nepal, low awareness of the condition is a major challenge, as are the hefty treatment costs. Yet some of her Indian patients were fortunate.

"There was an organisation there that helped these young families," says Dr Purnima, who did her clinical fellowship at the Centre for Sight in Hyderabad, with a pioneer of retinoblastoma treatment, Dr Santosh Honavar.

"This organisation provided not only the money for treatment but also the psychological support, which is very important, because to have cancer in the eye of your child is stressful and challenging."

When she returned home to Nepal and established herself as a surgeon at the Tilganga Institute of Ophthalmology, Dr Purnima met many more retinoblastoma patients – and many more parents who couldn't afford the cost of care.

Timely treatment of retinoblastoma is crucial. Without it, death is almost certain.

"We'd see families whose children were recently diagnosed, and they wouldn't tell us that they didn't have the money for treatment – they'd just go home," she says.

"If they don't come back for the follow-up appointment, maybe the child dies. So later I'd call them, and they'd say, 'We don't have the money.'

"As a surgeon, that was heartbreaking to hear, because I have the degree and the skills to treat them, we have the hospital and we have the facilities, but still we were not able to help. It made me feel so powerless."

In 2017, Dr Purnima gave a presentation at the World Cancer Congress in Kathmandu. Her lecture, delivered to some of the globe's leading cancer researchers and healthcare professionals, explained how children with retinoblastoma often needed to have their cancerous eye removed and replaced with a glass eye.

It was there that she connected with Professor Suzanne Chambers, now the executive dean of ACU's Faculty of Health Sciences.

"After listening to that lecture, Dr Suzanne came to me and said, 'I want to help you'," Dr Purnima recalls.

Professor Chambers launched Open Eyes Global in 2018. The charity has since helped scores of Nepalese retinoblastoma patients whose families could not afford a customised prosthesis.

Three years later, Dr Purnima founded Open Eyes Nepal with an expanded remit. Beyond providing prosthetic eyes to patients free of cost, it also spreads awareness to enable early detection, funds surgical and laser treatment and ongoing rehabilitation, and provides guidance and support to parents.

Since 2023, when ACU announced its partnership with Open Eyes Nepal, 88 patients have had free retinoblastoma treatment, and 57 now have a custom-made prosthetic eye – care that would otherwise be largely inaccessible.

Dr Purnima performed the surgery on every one of them.

There's Sejan, a boy from the Gorkha district who received treatment after his first birthday and has been cancer-free ever since. Or Januka, a three-year-old girl whose mother, a single parent who worked at a carpet-weaving factory, couldn't afford to pay for care.

Other families have travelled from all over Nepal for free treatment, from places like Mahottari, Bardiya and Dailekh.

"It makes me immensely happy to help these patients and help these families," says Dr Purnima, who has worked at the Tilganga Institute of Ophthalmology since 2016, and has performed surgery on hundreds of retinoblastoma patients.

"We're very lucky to have this partnership with ACU. We can change lives. We do change lives."

FROM CLASSROOM TO CLINIC

In early 2025, when Tia Day and her fellow ACU nursing students were in Nepal for their short-term international study experience, they encountered patients like these – people whose lives could be transformed through medical treatment.

At the Tilganga Eye Hospital and the Grande International Hospital, they had the rare opportunity to observe live surgery.

"None of the students had ever been in an operating theatre before," says Darren Jacob, a nursing lecturer at ACU's Melbourne Campus, who led the study tour alongside Associate Professor Rebecca O'Reilly. "That was a highlight for many."

Meeting patients at the Kanti Children's Hospital was both enlightening and challenging, says Tia, who one day hopes to work in paediatrics. She struggled with the emotional toll of seeing preventable blindness, particularly in children.

"We witnessed some confronting ethical dilemmas," she says.

Despite these challenges, the trip deepened Tia's passion for nursing. She and her peers saw firsthand how targeted outreach and partnerships can change lives for the better.

"We are delighted to hear the stories of children whose lives have been transformed by our work with Open Eyes Nepal and the Tilganga Institute of Ophthalmology," says Chris Riley, ACU's Pro-Vice Chancellor (Global and Education Pathways).

"What started out as a community engagement initiative has expanded to become an invaluable clinical development opportunity for ACU students, staff and healthcare professionals across Nepal."

MAKING PROGRESS

While eye health is still a major issue in Nepal, the country has made significant progress in recent years, consistently demonstrating a remarkable reduction in the prevalence of blindness.

"We are a success story," says Dr Purnima, whose research has explored the effects of various eye conditions on the Nepalese population. "Eye disease is a global problem, but the treatment available in Nepal is world-class treatment."

Much of the progress stems from the work of the Tilganga Institute, which in the early 1990s worked closely with the Fred Hollows Foundation to launch the Nepal Eye Program – a cornerstone in the fight against blindness in Nepal.

There is still much work to be done, Dr Purnima adds, particularly in raising awareness of the many eye conditions that can cause blindness if not treated early.

"Raising awareness is crucial," she says. "It's the most important thing."

This goes not only for the young children and families affected by life-threatening retinoblastoma, but also for the hundreds of thousands of older adults who fall victim to debilitating cataracts each year in Nepal. Although the case estimates vary, it is without a doubt the most prevalent eye condition in the country.

Which brings us back to Manisara, the elderly Nepalese woman whose cloudy eyes prevented her from seeing her cherished granddaughter.

In the end, the surgery restores her sight, as it does for many Nepalis who receive treatment for cataracts.

Now able to see, she confirms that her granddaughter's toes really are just like hers.

"So, that's what you look like," Manisara says, chasing after the child. "I see you, and here I come!"



Theme 6
Human Dignity and the Common Good

> **"The more we strive to secure a common good corresponding to the real needs of our neighbours, the more effectively we love them."**
>
> **Pope Benedict XVI, *Caritas in Veritate*, N7**

Human Dignity and the Common Good calls us to recognise that every person possesses an inalienable worth that cannot be reduced to usefulness, category or output. In this sense, dignity and the common good are inseparable: we flourish not in isolation but within communities and institutions that enable belonging and hope.

SDG ALIGNMENT

The theme Human Dignity and the Common Good aligns with the following Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) of the United Nations:

- SDG 1 – No Poverty
- SDG 2 – Zero Hunger
- SDG 5 – Gender Equality
- SDG 10 – Reduced Inequalities

OUR APPROACH

For ACU, human dignity and the common good are foundational values. They shape the university's work in widening access to education, supporting students experiencing hardship, fostering inclusion, advancing gender equality, strengthening cultural safety and serving communities through learning, research, policy and engagement.

Across a range of disciplines, ACU guides its students to see people not as problems to be managed, but as persons with dignity, agency and a right to participate fully in community life. Similarly, its partnerships and services operate to set aside the barriers that often prevent students and communities from flourishing.

ACU's policy framework gives institutional depth to this commitment. ACU's policies on matters such as equal opportunity, gender and family violence, discrimination and harassment, disability, remuneration and cultural leave embed dignity and care into the university's day-to-day life.

WHAT WE ARE DOING

Learning that forms students for justice and participation

Questions of human dignity, justice and participation are considered in relevant areas of ACU's curriculum through issues including poverty, food security, gender equality, disability, race and social inclusion. Learning examines the social and structural conditions that contribute to disadvantage; inequalities associated with gender and participation; the relationship between food systems, society and the environment; and culturally responsive, inclusive and anti-racist approaches to professional practice.



Supporting food security and wellbeing

ACU's nutrition and dietetics courses deliver learning programs that connect students with real-world food and nutrition challenges. ACU's work integrated learning (WIL) program in nutrition and dietetics settings is a key part of this, enabling students to apply knowledge in a range of professional practice placements.

And in a deeply practical project at the Melbourne Campus, ACU colleagues in nutrition and dietetics, student life and other areas established and cultivated an edible garden that provides dinner kits for students, including fresh vegetables and herbs, homemade basil pesto prepared by garden volunteers and nutrition and dietetics staff, and dry pasta. The initiative has improved students' access to nutritious food and demonstrated how community-based food initiatives can support wellbeing and dignity in university life.

Advancing gender equality and safety

ACU advances gender equity by strengthening women's leadership, addressing structural barriers to participation and progression, and supporting safe, respectful and trauma-informed workplaces:

- ACU's Women's Leadership for Mission program supports participants to build knowledge, skills and networks that foster women's participation and leadership in the Church, society, economic life and political life.
- ACU's Athena Swan Bronze Award Action Plan identifies barriers to equity, diversity and inclusion and sets actions to reduce gender pay gaps, improve women's representation and progression in senior roles, among other initiatives to improve ACU's support to its women employees.
- Policies on equal opportunity, gender-based violence and support for victims of domestic violence support equal opportunity for all employees and trauma-informed support services including medical, legal and counselling and processes for employees subject to gender-based and family violence.

Strengthening inclusion through research and services

ACU research consistently contributes evidence on barriers to participation and the design of more inclusive systems. Research published in 2025 showed that:

- negative attitudes and stereotypes continue to shape unequal experiences for young people with disability in education, employment and community life
- a co-designed, evidence-based resource for inclusive dance experiences for children with cerebral palsy empowered their fuller participation in community settings
- geography, social capital and access shape educational pathways for rural and urban youths' aspiration to participate in higher education
- Indigenous methodologies on health data are a critical part of achieving equitable service outcomes, with consent-based, selective data sharing, custodial stewardship and Indigenous-led governance important means of protecting sovereignty and cultural safety.

IMPACT BY THE NUMBERS

- 2.2 per cent of domestic students were Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander peoples in 2025.
- ACU is one of only two universities in Australia recognised with the Carnegie Community Engagement Classification, a framework for assessing and recognising how higher education institutions partner with local, regional and global communities.
- Staff can access up to 35 hours per year under ACU's Community Engagement Time Release Policy to participate in community-based activities that contribute to the common good.



Theme 7
Inclusive Economic and Labour Markets

"The economy needs ethics in order to function correctly – not any ethics whatsoever, but an ethics which is people-centred."

Pope Benedict XVI, *Caritas in Veritate*, N45

Inclusive Economic and Labour Markets calls us to understand work, enterprise and economic participation as matters of dignity, justice and belonging. In this frame, economy exists for the person, not the person for the economy, and economic life is legitimate when it is ordered toward the common good.

SDG ALIGNMENT

The theme Inclusive Economic and Labour Markets aligns with the following Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) of the United Nations:

- SDG 1 – No Poverty
- SDG 5 – Gender Equality
- SDG 8 – Decent Work and Economic Growth
- SDG 9 – Industry, Innovation and Infrastructure
- SDG 10 – Reduced Inequalities

OUR APPROACH

ACU considers that practising, researching and learning about inclusive economic and labour markets is part of its mission to uphold human dignity and contribute to the common good.

ACU's learning program invites students to understand work, markets and enterprise from the viewpoint of rights, equity and human flourishing. Students examine these questions in the context of employment law, modern slavery, human rights, macroeconomics, entrepreneurship, innovation, inclusive education and anti-racist professional practice.

ACU's research contributes to knowledge of the conditions that support fairer economies and labour markets, from corporate governance to board diversity, to workplace wellbeing and workforce inclusion.

WHAT WE ARE DOING

Learning that forms students for decent work and responsible enterprise

Work, economic participation and responsible enterprise are considered within areas of ACU's curriculum concerned with employment, business, law and professional practice. Learning addresses workplace health and safety, psychological wellbeing, employment rights and entitlements, discrimination and inclusion, as well as severe forms of labour exploitation such as forced labour, debt bondage and child exploitation. It also considers legal, policy and supply-chain responses intended to support decent work and responsible economic participation.

Research that supports fairer systems and better work

ACU research contributes to this theme by examining the quality of economic activity, the conditions under which people work, and the governance settings that support more responsible outcomes. In 2025, ACU published research showing that:

- board diversity and board independence are associated with stronger carbon and ESG performance
- role ambiguity and job overload affect workplace functioning, psychological wellbeing and resilience, among Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australian employees
- for sessional teaching staff in pre-registration nursing programs, their sustained engagement depends on the clarity of their roles, workplace collegiality and quality of internal communication
- procurement can help disadvantaged groups gain access to better-quality jobs when labour standards such as job security, training, employee voice and fair work conditions are embedded into contracting and supply chains.

Building employability, enterprise and economic participation

ACU's engagement activities help students and partners connect learning with work, enterprise and social contribution:

- ACU's work integrated learning (WIL) places students in workplaces, professional settings, clinical environments, internships, projects and simulations where they apply classroom learning in practice.
- ACU's Co-Lab program connects learning to enterprise and employment through a community-focused innovation system. Co-Lab's co-working hubs and entrepreneurship programs provide mentoring, workshops, pitch programs and more to support students, alumni and the wider community to develop ventures.

  Co-Lab also connects students with startups and innovative businesses via research commercialisation and industry collaboration.

Protecting decent work through policy and procurement

ACU's policy framework supports decent work through defined employment conditions, wellbeing support, flexible work, equitable remuneration, capability development and responsible procurement.

- A suite of four policies set formal employment conditions for each category of staff, including arrangements for hours, work patterns, notice, severance, induction and remuneration.
- The Professional Development for Professional Staff Policy supports ongoing capability development for staff whose work sustains the university's mission.
- The Childcare Support for Academic Staff Policy provides targeted assistance for eligible academic staff returning from parental leave to participate in research dissemination beyond employment settings.
- The Procurement Policy requires probity, modern slavery risk reduction and consideration of positive social impact in sourcing decisions.

Addressing modern slavery and supply-chain risk

ACU's anti-slavery work is a central expression of its commitment to decent work, ethical business practice and the protection of human dignity.

ACU applies governance oversight to this commitment through the Senate, the Finance and Resources Committee, and the Eradicating Modern Slavery Working Group and embeds decent-work expectations in its contracts.

The university also maps risk across its supply chain, targets higher-risk categories including cleaning, security, construction and clothing, and strengthens due diligence through supplier questionnaires and a dedicated supplier portal.

IMPACT BY THE NUMBERS

- 95 per cent of ACU graduates were employed according to the Graduate Outcomes Longitudinal Survey 2024, which surveyed employment for domestic undergraduate students and domestic postgraduate coursework students in the labour force.
- ACU's Co-Lab has facilitated more than 110 industry and university connections.
- The NSW TechVouchers program has generated at least $300,000 in research revenue through SME-researcher collaboration.

Case study:

When the bubble turns yellow

AUTHOR:
MENIOS CONSTANTINOU



In an underground coal mine in China, an environment that's among the most hazardous workplaces on earth, the methane gas that seeps naturally from coal seams can ignite with devastating consequences. Danger escalates quickly, decisions must be made fast, and the stakes of a missed warning could hardly be higher.

On a December afternoon at one such mine in the Shanxi coal-producing region, the methane readings were climbing. So was the temperature. Individually, neither had crossed the line into danger territory – but together, they were starting to tell a different story.

On a monitor above ground, a coloured circle was drifting slowly toward the upper limit of its safe range. At 3.27pm, it crossed that limit. The bubble turned yellow, a signal that would give the mine's safety team a warning – and a decision to make.

The warning came from a deceptively simple tool designed to reduce complex streams of real-time hazard data into a single, readable symbol.

It's called the Bubble-Wall Plot, and it was developed by a team of researchers including Professor Niusha Shafiabady, the head of ACU's IT discipline and Director of its Women in AI for Social Good Lab.

In their study, published in PLOS One, she and her colleagues describe how the plot can be handily used to develop visual warning systems in high-stakes environments where complexity can prove fatal.

"In these high-risk situations, if you miss something, it can cost human lives," says Professor Shafiabady, who undertook the research alongside a team of computational intelligence experts, including Dr Robert Wu from the University of Technology Sydney.

"If the system is too complex, if someone is tired or under pressure, even an expert, it might make it very difficult for them to make sense of what's going on. It's crucial to be on time and to provide some kind of interpretability to the hazards."

At their simplest, data visualisation tools based on the Bubble-Wall Plot consist of one circle and two lines. The lines define a safe zone – an upper and lower boundary for whatever variable is being monitored.

When conditions are normal, the circle – or bubble – sits within that zone. When it crosses the boundary, it changes colour: blue for safe, yellow for anomaly, red for warning.

The logic is immediate and instinctive, Professor Shafiabady says, making it relatively easy to interpret.

"We were looking to create something that achieved that need for simplicity, displaying the changes over time in a way that could be understood by an inexperienced user."

SIGNAL THROUGH THE NOISE

When exploring existing data visualisation tools, the research team discovered a consistent problem: they were either too complex for easy interpretation, or too static to reflect what was happening in real time.

Their goal was to create a tool that would overcome these shortcomings.

The team collected continuous real-world data from gas and temperature sensors at the Zhongxing coal mining site, combining these variables into a single weighted index. The complex datasets could then be collapsed into one number, with the bubble's colour change providing a signal to the end user.





It sounds simple, but the truth is that developing the tech was no walk in the park.

"What we had to do was to come up with a model that would effectively predict the hazards in real time with the best accuracy possible using all the available data," Professor Shafiabady says.

"It really took a lot of work to come up with a system that was comprehensive, accurate and reliable, but also simple enough for a person who isn't a data scientist to understand and interpret the results."

When a safety threshold is crossed, as in the above-described coal mine scenario, the next step is a human decision, made in real time and based on the best available information.

This, says Professor Shafiabady, is one of the most important things to note about warning systems based on the Bubble-Wall Plot: they're designed to support human judgment and decision-making, not replace it.

A TOOL FOR EVERYWHERE

Though the coal mine case study proved the concept, the technology's real power lies in its adaptability.

Beyond coal mines, the researchers have explored potential applications in oil and gas, where sensor data can flag pipeline corrosion before it becomes catastrophic, and in healthcare, where it could apply to diabetes patients connected to an insulin pump, with the tool responding as blood sugar moves towards dangerous levels.

The logic is straightforward: identify the variables that create or signal risk in a given environment, establish safe boundaries for them, and put the model to work.

"As long as we have a system that we have data on," Professor Shafiabady says, "we can come up with some kind of creative AI methodology to predict all kinds of hazards using different models."

She also describes more vivid scenarios closer to home, like summer bushfires during the punishing extremes of heat and drought that are common on our continent or keeping tabs on shark risk at our crowded surf beaches. In the latter example, inputs like tagged shark data, drone sightings, and environmental factors like murky water and the presence of baitfish could be synthesised into a single visual indicator for lifeguards.

The tool would function less as a predictive system and more as a live monitor, translating a stream of incoming information into a visual that tells a story.

Professor Shafiabady even imagines a public-facing sign on the promenade, its colour shifting with the risk level, giving beachgoers information before they decide on whether to enter the water.

"In the beginning, people might find such a thing to be a bit odd," she concedes, "but after a while, they'd get used to it and start to understand how to use it and what it means."

HUMAN-CENTRED DESIGN

Underlying this technology is a philosophy that Professor Shafiabady returns to repeatedly. Even the most sophisticated tools are next to useless if people can't make sense of what it's showing them.

This has become more pressing as data systems have grown richer and more complex. The field of explainable artificial intelligence, which seeks to make algorithmic decision-making legible to human users, has expanded rapidly in recent years – and for good reason. A system that produces accurate outputs but buries them in complexity can have serious limitations.

"AI empowers people and organisations by analysing large data sets quickly and accurately, enabling faster decision-making – but we don't want to just rely on an algorithm," Professor Shafiabady says

She points to her recent co-authored study, published in Sensors, and its finding that the first 'hype cycle' of AI development prioritised tech above humans. The movement towards explainable AI is aimed at illuminating how algorithmic models make decisions, with more transparency and interpretability.

"If the end user can't make sense of the 'why' behind a decision, it's not a good solution," says Professor Shafiabady, whose expertise in the field of AI and computational intelligence is internationally recognised.

"I think the most dangerous thing about AI is the risk that people move towards losing their ability to think and analyse. We don't want that to happen."

It's a principle that runs through much of Professor Shafiabady's work in this space: a statement that new technologies like the Bubble-Wall Plot should be made with people in mind.

For her and many of her colleagues, the question of how technology is designed is inseparable from the question of who it's designed for. When developed ethically and used responsibly, such technologies can be a force for good.

"If we follow these principles and ensure that the systems we build are human-centred and human friendly, we will stand on safe ground. We'll develop tools that make complex things easier – and in the moments that matter most, we may even save lives."



Theme 8

Sustainable Urban Environments

> **"Developing the created world in a prudent way is the best way of caring for it, as this means that we ourselves become the instrument used by God to bring out the potential which he himself inscribed in things."**
>
> **Pope Francis, *Laudato si'*, N124**

Sustainable Urban Environments calls us to understand place as a moral, social and ecological reality. In this reality, buildings, campuses, streets, green spaces, transport systems and shared amenities matter because they shape whether people can learn, work, gather, belong and flourish.

SDG ALIGNMENT

The theme Sustainable Urban Environments aligns with the following Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) of the United Nations:

- SDG 1 – No Poverty
- SDG 11 – Sustainable Cities and Communities
- SDG 15 – Life on Land

OUR APPROACH

ACU approaches sustainable urban environments as part of its responsibility to shape places that support human dignity, ecological care and the common good.

ACU's students are challenged to understand the relationship between urban places, vulnerability, participation and sustainability. This requires close study of urban inequality, homelessness, food security, disaster resilience and the social conditions that make communities more or less able to flourish.

ACU's research, meanwhile, adds to the sum of knowledge on healthier and inclusive neighbourhoods. ACU's campus planning and management builds and operates places where the university's core business of research and learning can occur in a climate of security, amenity and resource efficiency.

WHAT WE ARE DOING

Learning that links place, sustainability and community life

Relevant areas of ACU's curriculum explore how the design, functioning and resilience of places affect people, communities and the environment. Learning considers transport, housing and homelessness, urban decarbonisation, natural hazards and disaster resilience, and the relationship between food systems, communities and environmental conditions. These perspectives encourage consideration of urban sustainability as both an ecological and a social challenge.

Research that supports safer and healthier places

ACU research contributes to sustainable urban environments by examining how design, access and local conditions affect health, safety and participation. In 2025, ACU published research that:

- examined pedestrian hazard perception and gap acceptance to develop and validate a virtual-reality tool for assessing how

pedestrians judge street-crossing risks, which will inform future pedestrian road-safety research, education and intervention

- investigated neighbourhood walkability and found that residents of higher-walkability neighbourhoods accumulated more purposeful and higher-intensity walking patterns, supporting the view that neighbourhood design can improve urban liveability and residents' health
- studied healthy eating in an Australian priority community to identify how food access, affordability and cultural fit influence healthy lifestyles, finding that responses need to be community-based, community-accessible and community-owned.

Designing sustainable and life-giving campuses

ACU's commitment to environmentally sustainable design has ensured that major new building projects integrate efficiency, health and stewardship of resources. The university now has numerous buildings that are exemplars of sustainability:

- The Daniel Mannix Building at the Melbourne Campus has a six-star Green Star rating and incorporates active-mass cooling, underfloor air distribution, furniture and fittings low in volatile organic compounds that harm health, and high-performance windows.
- The John Paul II Building at the Brisbane Campus features automated ventilation, zoned lighting and high daylight access.
- The St Brigid Health Sciences Building at the Ballarat Campus has a five-star Green Star rating and employs solar generation, zero-irrigation landscaping and high-recycled-content materials.
- The Mercy Building in Brisbane set an ACU benchmark for integrated energy management through its advanced HVAC system, while the Veritas Building at the Canberra Campus uses high-performance windows, high indoor air quality and rainwater reuse to support its five-star Green Star rating.
- The Saint Teresa of Kolkata Building at the Melbourne Campus has a five-star Green Star rating and uses advanced air-conditioning and lighting systems, efficient glazing, smart controls, rooftop solar, energy-saving lifts and escalators, and design features that support indoor comfort and healthy air quality.

Creating accessible, inclusive and supportive learning environments

ACU's Physical Teaching Space Standards help ensure that teaching environments are designed to improve learning outcomes, inclusion and student experience. The standards provide for flexible spaces that support different teaching approaches, with technology, Wi-Fi, writable surfaces, breakout areas and room configurations that enable collaboration, communication and group work.

The standards also provide accessibility features including wheelchair access, adjustable-height tables and compliance with disability requirements.

Embedding place-based responsibility in policy and governance

ACU's policy framework establishes a framework for planning, design, community engagement and campus management to deliver an increasingly sustainable urban environment at each of its campuses. Key policies include:

- The Capital Planning Policy establishes a rolling infrastructure plan and governance arrangements for capital planning, prioritisation and delivery across physical, social and virtual infrastructure projects
- The Facilities Planning, Design and Management Policy requires campus spaces to be planned, designed and managed to support teaching, research and engagement, provide amenities and maintain health and safety standards
- The Community Engagement Time Release Policy supports staff participation in community-based activities that address social justice issues and assist communities experiencing disadvantage or marginalisation.

IMPACT BY THE NUMBERS

- There are more than 100 simulation spaces across ACU, all equipped with state-of-the-art software and equipment to simulate real-life medical scenarios.
- Nearly 60,000 square metres of ACU's Australian floorspace is rated as either five-star Green Star, indicating Australian excellence in better, healthier and more responsible buildings, or six-star Green Star, indicating world leadership in better, healthier and more responsible buildings.



Theme 9
Local, National and International Dialogue

> **"Today, in view of the common good, there is urgent need for politics and economics to enter into a frank dialogue in the service of life, especially human life."**
>
> **Pope Francis, *Laudato si'*, N189**

Local, National and International Dialogue calls us to understand dialogue as a disciplined practice of listening, truth-seeking, encounter and shared responsibility. It means bringing conviction born of mission into public life in ways that honour the dignity of others, seek the common good and respond constructively to shared problems.

SDG ALIGNMENT

The theme Local, National and International Dialogue aligns with the following Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) of the United Nations:

- SDG 1 – No Poverty
- SDG 13 – Climate Action
- SDG 16 – Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions
- SDG 17 – Partnerships for the Goals

OUR APPROACH

ACU considers local, national and international dialogue as a means to serve human dignity, justice and the common good.

Our students work across professional disciplines and economic sectors to evaluate dialogue in the context of community engagement, peace and conflict, public health, ecological justice, global development, institutions and more.

ACU's partnerships, as ever, seek to apply these ideas through collaborations with schools, communities, health services, government and industry as well as with other universities.

ACU's policy framework supplies guardrails to these activities with standards for educational and ethical partnerships, research and enterprise collaborations, community engagement, academic freedom and data governance.

WHAT WE ARE DOING

Learning that develops partnership and public responsibility

Dialogue, partnership and shared responsibility feature in areas of ACU's curriculum concerned with community engagement, public health, education, peace, justice and human rights. Learning considers reciprocal and ethical relationships with communities and organisations; equality and mutual respect in community engagement; and the institutional, social and political conditions that enable constructive dialogue across difference. Some learning contexts also provide opportunities to connect academic study with community-based experience.



Supporting national and international collaboration

ACU participates in partnerships that support knowledge exchange, institutional capability and international cooperation. A leading example is ACU's participation in the Strategic Alliance of Catholic Research Universities (SACRU), a network of Catholic universities committed to research, education, sustainability and the common good.

ACU's hosting in October 2025 of the SACRU Autumn School at its Rome Campus focused on the universal right to freedom of scientific research, including the right to investigate and publish without censorship or interference, while working within accepted human-rights norms.

ACU participates in the Laudato Si' Action Platform, a Vatican-sponsored global initiative that supports Catholic institutions, communities and families to put the principles of Laudato Si' into practice. Developed through collaboration across the international Catholic community, the Platform encourages shared learning and action in response to the seven Laudato Si' Goals. ACU joined the initiative in 2021, committing to integrate these goals across research, learning and teaching, community engagement and university operations. Through this participation, ACU contributes to a global Catholic response to interconnected social and ecological challenges and to the shared work of caring for our common home.

Embedding ethical and accountable partnership

ACU's policy framework supports dialogue by ensuring that partnerships and collaborations are structured, ethical and accountable.

The Educational Partnerships Policy provides a governance framework for education-related partnerships with academic institutions, the Church, community groups, government and industry.

The Ethical Partnerships Policy establishes a principles-based approach to partnership suitability, protecting institutional integrity and identifying exclusion criteria for partnerships that conflict with obligations relating to modern slavery, sanctions and foreign interference risk.

The Non-Education External Collaboration Policy requires research and enterprise collaborations to demonstrate transparency, mutuality and robust relationship management, supported by due diligence, compliance controls and training requirements.

These policies make dialogue durable. They help ensure that collaboration is not merely opportunistic, but mission-aligned, responsible and capable of serving the common good.

IMPACT BY THE NUMBERS

- 5,507 international students from more than 100 countries enrolled at ACU in 2025.
- ACU has relationships with more than 200 universities and educational institutions worldwide.
- ACU has 152,000 graduates around the globe.



Theme 10
Institutions and Legal and Regulatory Frameworks

> **"If everything is related, then the health of a society's institutions has consequences for the environment and the quality of human life."**
>
> **Pope Francis,**
> ***Laudato si'*, N142**

Institutions and Legal and Regulatory Frameworks calls us to recognise that human dignity, justice and the common good must be given durable form through policies, governance and accountable institutions.

SDG ALIGNMENT

The theme Institutions and Legal and Regulatory Frameworks aligns with the following Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) of the United Nations:

- SDG 8 – Decent Work and Economic Growth
- SDG 16 – Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions
- SDG 17 – Partnerships for the Goals

OUR APPROACH

ACU regards institutions and legal and regulatory frameworks as practical instruments of the common good.

The university enables its students to understand the laws, institutions and ethical systems that shape working life, human rights, business conduct and international cooperation. ACU's research also contributes to stronger institutions in its search for answers to questions about safeguarding, rule of law, governance, justice and corporate conduct. ACU's policies help translate values into daily practice, with clear standards on integrity, conflicts of interest, fraud control, data governance and ethical partnerships.

WHAT WE ARE DOING

Learning that forms students for justice, rights and institutional responsibility

Relevant areas of ACU's curriculum examine how laws, regulations and institutions shape rights, responsibilities and the common good. Learning encompasses workplace rights and safety, human-rights responsibilities in business and supply chains, migration systems, justice and restorative practice, peacebuilding, and safeguarding. Across these areas, attention is given to institutional accountability, due diligence, ethical decision-making, grievance and protection mechanisms, and the role of law and policy in preventing harm and supporting just and stable communities.

Research that strengthens protection and accountability

ACU researchers have a strong track record in investigating the conditions under which institutions protect people, govern responsibly and respond to harm. In 2025, our researchers published research that:

- identified risks and barriers where cultural change must accompany policy compliance in a range of religious organisations and settings



- showed that institutional quality matters in rule-of-law failures, board diversity, corporate carbon performance, ESG outcomes and climate disclosure
- indicated that justice systems are strongest when they rehabilitate and reintegrate offenders and build their social and economic capabilities – with research focusing on culturally safe programs for First Nations young people and group treatment programs for young offenders in custody
- demonstrated that contracting and supply-chain settings can support fairer employment, particularly when procurement systems embed job security, training and fair conditions, with public procurement and active labour-market policy having a key role in this outcome.

Institutional integrity, accountability and responsible decision-making

ACU's policy framework sets formal controls for the university's own integrity, risk management and accountable decision-making. Critical to this outcome are policies such as these:

- The Anti-Bribery and Corruption Policy, which prohibits bribery, facilitation payments, improper gifts and similar misconduct, and extends these standards to relevant third parties acting for or with the university.
- The Declaration of Interest Policy, which requires staff and affiliates to make annual and ongoing disclosures of actual, potential and perceived conflicts, submit management plans, update declarations when circumstances change and report relevant foreign interference risks.
- The Fraud and Corruption Control Framework, which assigns oversight responsibilities to Senate, the Senate Standing Committee, the Audit and Risk Committee and senior officers.
- The Data and Information Governance Policy, which sets accountability for ACU's data and requires authorised access, secure handling, appropriate retention and responsible disposal.

IMPACT BY THE NUMBERS

- ACU maps labour-rights risks across a supply chain of more than 3,000 suppliers, with targeted attention to higher-risk categories including cleaning, security, construction and clothing.
- Between 2015 and 2025, enrolments in ACU's Thomas More Law School increased more than sevenfold, rising from 163 students to 1,168.

Internal assurance and verification

ACU undertook an internal assurance and verification process for selected environmental information and claims contained in the ACU Sustainability Report 2025. The purpose of this process was to provide confidence that material environmental claims included in the report are supported by appropriate evidence, accurately reflect the information available to the university, and are expressed in a reasonable and appropriately qualified manner.

The review focused on those environmental disclosures considered most important or most susceptible to error or overstatement. Its scope included greenhouse gas emissions and emissions reductions; renewable electricity; energy consumption and performance; water use, storage and reuse; waste generation and management; comparisons with Australian university-sector performance; Green Star ratings and other building sustainability attributes; and selected qualitative claims relating to campus environmental performance and biodiversity.

For each matter within scope, ACU identified the source evidence supporting the claim, the responsible area within the university, the verification required and an appropriate internal reviewer. Supporting evidence included greenhouse gas inventories and calculation records; recognised emissions methodologies and factors; electricity, energy, water and waste records; procurement and renewable-energy documentation; Tertiary Education Facilities Management Association benchmarking data; Green Building Council of Australia certification information; building, architectural and asset records; and relevant campus management and operational records.

The review considered both the numerical accuracy of reported information and whether the language used in the report reasonably represented the underlying evidence. Where the review identified wording that could imply a greater degree of certainty, causation or environmental benefit than the available evidence supported, the relevant claim was amended or qualified before publication.

On the basis of this review, ACU is satisfied that the selected environmental information and claims within the scope of the internal assurance process are supported by the evidence reviewed and, in all material respects, provide a reasonable and accurate representation of the matters reported.

This process was conducted internally by ACU and was proportionate to the resources and reporting arrangements applying to the 2025 Sustainability Report. It was not an independent external assurance engagement or audit, and no independent assurance opinion has been provided over the report. Information outside the defined scope of the internal assurance process has not been subject to this level of verification.

Looking ahead

Looking ahead, ACU will continue to approach mission and sustainability as deeply connected parts of its identity as a Catholic university. The ACU Sustainability Framework will remain an important way of expressing this connection, helping the university understand sustainability not only as environmental responsibility, but as a broader commitment to people, communities, institutions and creation.

The framework gives ACU a shared language for reflecting on how its work contributes to human dignity, the common good and care for our common home. It also helps the university recognise that sustainability is expressed in many forms: through learning and teaching, research, service, community engagement, campus life, partnerships, governance and the daily decisions that shape institutional practice.

In the period ahead, ACU will continue to draw on all ten thematic areas of the framework as a guide for reflection, communication and action. These themes remind the university that sustainability is not a single issue or activity. It is a way of seeing the whole of university life in relation to the needs of people, the health of communities, the integrity of creation and the responsibilities of institutions.

ACU's approach will remain grounded in service and hope. As a Catholic university, ACU seeks to contribute to the common good by forming people, strengthening communities, caring for the vulnerable and acting responsibly within the world it shares with others. This continuing commitment will guide the university as it considers how best to deepen the relationship between mission and sustainability in the years ahead.

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