“Education should be a joy,” said Mrs Najdecki, pictured above, (insert). “Education gives you more than qualifications. It is absolutely central. It expands your mind and gives you skills at every stage, and it doesn’t stop.”

Mrs Najdecki, with a Master’s in English from UNSW, gained a Graduate Certificate in Religious Education from the Canberra Campus in 1993; then, while principal of St Francis Xavier College in Belconnen, she took further Diploma units through the Brisbane Campus. She graduated from ACU National with a Master of Educational Leadership degree in 2000.

“I enjoyed having really current literature made available throughout my studies,” Mrs Najdecki said. “Because so many fellow students were also principals, we had excellent, professional discussions about what the theory meant in practice. The facilitators were fantastic. The class groups were small enough so we could get to know each other.”

National offerings
Mrs Najdecki was invited to join the Canberra Chapter of the University in July 2006, and the Senate shortly afterwards.

“After 30 years involved in secondary education, I really wanted to know what happened to our graduates at the tertiary level, to see how I could assist, and this has been an educational experience in itself.

“I had been aware of activities at the local, Canberra, level, but was now made aware of the rich diversity of ACU National’s offerings and activities right across the eastern seaboard.”

Vibrancy and vitality
Quick to emphasise to new staff the benefits of being part of a larger system of 55 schools within 88,000 square kilometres, Mrs Najdecki sees similar strengths for staff, students and graduates of ACU National.

“There is definitely strength in numbers,” she said. “The diversification and specialisations of each of the six campuses is going to mean even more resources and units are available to students.”

Just as importantly, staff, students and graduates have broader horizons through being aware of the diverse needs and expertise of both regional and metropolitan campuses.

At the same time, however, the distinct nature of each campus was also of benefit, she said. “From my experience, being part of a small campus has great advantages. There is a unique vibrancy and vitality at each campus.”

‘Culture, support and passion’
By way of example, Mrs Najdecki explained how the location of the Canberra Campus allowed “a close working relationship” to develop with the Canberra-Goulburn CEO. CEO staff sometimes lecture and tutor at the University, helping to produce graduates who tend to understand the culture of Catholic schools. The University has introduced programs to prepare more mathematics teachers in response to community needs, and the CEO helps support high achievement by offering a range of scholarships.

Mrs Najdecki said she was pleased with the attributes of ACU National graduates.

“The students have been in reasonably small cohorts and they really understand the craft of teaching,” she said, adding that they are sought after by all schools because of the quality of their education.

“We also find them to be very collegial. They maintain those close networks with their peers. It’s a great strength. Teaching is all about relationships. ACU National graduates tend to be self-confident, feeling that they have been well prepared. We are delighted to welcome them into our schools.”

As an employer, Mrs Najdecki has also been pleased to support the professional development of staff by enrolling them in postgraduate programs such as Master of Educational Leadership studies.

“While I’ve studied at five different universities over the years, I have always had a sense of ‘coming home’ at ACU National. The culture, the support and the passion for education marks our University as a very special place.”

Second-year education student Kelly Fletcher from the Canberra Campus is pictured above.