



Australian
National
University

Strategic Plan – VC Progress Report

When I became your Vice-Chancellor in January 2016, I was clear we had to change. The expectations on a great university – particularly a national university – are so high that you have to strain year after year to improve if you’re going to avoid treading water or falling behind your peers.

It took my whole first year to consult across the campus on how we would frame our new direction. When we launched the ANU Strategic Plan in February 2017, I said *“We want to rise to the challenge of being a national university that serves our society and reflects our society in all its diversity”*. These themes – serving the society that is looking to us to help transform it; and changing ourselves enough to resemble Australia – have guided everything we have done since. The excellence we now insist on everywhere. The equity we demand in our staff and student body, changed forever by the proactive measures we have embedded to address the legacy of privilege. The engagement with industry and the public policy impact as we strive to translate our work for the benefit of the community beyond our campus. These have been pivotal years for ANU.

We have made great progress, despite some extraordinarily challenging and turbulent times.

Building on a Culture of Academic Excellence Research and Innovation

We have hired 49 brilliant early and mid-career researchers through the ANU Futures scheme, and have hired more women than men – a founding principle of the scheme. ANU launched the Grand Challenges Scheme, which aims to address significant research challenges and deliver solutions to national priorities. Our three current Grand Challenges are Our Health in Our Hands, Zero-Carbon Energy for the Asia-Pacific, and Indigenous Health and Wellbeing. Our most recent Excellence in Research for Australia (ERA) results showed an increase in the proportion of staff contributing to the highest quality research, and that 90 per cent of our research was rated above world standard – a great improvement over ERA 2015. That said, I am worried about what the latest research indicators appear to show about our trajectory, particularly our normalised citations – proving again that the pursuit of excellence in academia must be relentless.

Education and Student Experience

Our students continue to enjoy their time at ANU, and graduate with a qualification that distinguishes them as leaders and scholars. Student Experience Survey scores improved year-on-year, but we know 2020 was an exceptional year and we couldn’t meet the high expectations of many of our students. We have work to do to deliver an experience equal to the world’s best, but we are now more flexible in the microcredentials and short courses we offer, and the integration of our on campus and digital experiences. Demand for ANU places remains very high – we have 4.5 applications for every undergraduate place. The reality is, our students, their families, their future employers all expect us to keep improving. The challenge of offering distinctive excellence in preparing our future leaders is one every ANU staff member needs to meet.

We have undertaken sector-leading radical reform to our admissions processes to widen access to ANU for students from every walk of life. The Kambri Scholarships – a \$50 million investment in scholarships for talented First Nations students anywhere in Australia – represent a landmark in Australian higher education. It is an initiative that exemplifies the role of Australia's national university, as does our Admissions, Scholarships and Accommodation portal through which domestic students can join ANU. Our new admissions model ensures the best students from every school in our nation receive an offer of study from ANU. We have work to do to ensure ANU is accessible to students from low socioeconomic status backgrounds – the Go8 outperformed ANU in the proportion of commencing low SES undergraduate students in 2019.

Our staff have remained extraordinarily engaged through delivery of the ANU Strategic Plan. Our regular VOICE survey results have indicated strong improvements in staff engagement across all areas over the past decade, although colleagues have indicated factors such as workload are growing as potential issues.

Delivering on our Unique National Responsibilities

Engagement and societal transformation

As the national university, we set ourselves the toughest possible task in our engagement: to provide the inspiration, ideas, evidence, even just the discussion space, that will lead to a society that is transformed for the better.

Our journey is underway. A recent survey of senior public servants showed that ANU was valued and respected, and ahead of other universities in public policy engagement especially in Asia and the Pacific – but that we are uneven in our approach. We have brought together some of the enduring assets from which our University benefits with a rejuvenated focus on close, agile engagement with the Australian Public Service and the elected government. This is a great platform from which to build broader engagement and impact, and it's work many more of us can share in. Measuring our progress remains a core challenge that we must respond to.

The University's work with First Nations communities has seen strong progress. We delivered on our Reconciliation Action Plan (RAP) 2018-20, and developed its successor for implementation in 2021. ANU hosted the First Nations Governance Forum in 2018 and the ANU Treaty Forum in 2019, two nationally significant policy dialogues in response to critical questions facing Australian society. Our new First Nations Portfolio, led by Vice-President (First Nations) Peter Yu, will provide a focal point for our work.

Achieving Equity – Within ANU and in Society

The University continues to address unacceptable forms of enduring inequities across campus. We are working hard towards becoming a university that reflects the richly diverse makeup of Australia and one that as a whole institution supports and strives for gender equity. ANU has expanded parental leave entitlements, providing our staff with up to 26 weeks of paid leave for both primary carers and their partners, allowing for greater flexibility for families within our community. The University also received the SAGE Athena SWAN Institutional Bronze Award in 2019 through the Science in Australia Gender Equity (SAGE) program with work underway to achieve the Silver Award this year. We have also established the Inclusion, Diversity, Equity and Access (IDEA) office to support and ensure University-wide engagement on gender equity principles and actions. We will also introduce the new position of Dean of Equity and Diversity later this year to ensure success in modifying out practice, policies and culture.

Building a Culture of Collegiality and Engagement – Across and Beyond ANU

Our community at ANU is one to be proud of. During the most trying year for our University, our community came together to establish the ANU Staff Urgent Relief Fund, where staff have donated over \$175,000 to support staff in need.

The University's alumni continue to be our finest ambassadors, part of a network over 130,000 strong worldwide. Our engagement with alumni has been difficult to measure in recent years, but a new range of metrics will generate durable data from 2022. Our investment in alumni engagement and fundraising has been significant since 2017, led by our Vice-President (Advancement) Barbara Miles. The outcomes speak for themselves, with more than \$32 million raised in 2020, exceeding an ambitious target in a challenging year.

Creating an Unrivalled Campus Environment

2019 saw the opening of our new Kambri precinct, the new heart of our campus. With world-class facilities, Kambri has become a bustling hub for study, student services, entertainment and coffee on campus. This is just one piece of the University's new Campus Master Plan, which was launched in 2019 and aims to improve our campus infrastructure and experience for staff, students and visitors.

We have grown our student accommodation facilities in order to meet our accommodation guarantee to undergraduate students, with new Bruce and Wright Halls, Fenner Hall and Wamburun Hall – although we have paused the SA8 project and have learned some lessons through that project.

In 2020, the University launched the ANU Below Zero Initiative, which commits to reducing our emissions to below net zero by 2030. As the national university, ANU has a responsibility to lead the nation in line with world's best practice on emissions reduction.

We remain ambitious for our University and the contribution we can make to our world. Looking back over the span of the past five years, most pleasingly of all, our achievements have been a shared enterprise. We have seen staff come together as colleagues, and students and stakeholders work with us as a community. Collectively we have delivered on an ambitious agenda to redefine what it means to be Australia's national university for our times. That work continues, but I am acutely aware that our successes so far are the successes of our community and staff. Our achievements are due to your efforts and your commitment. From the bottom of my heart: thank you.