our mission, our future

for Australian Catholic University

Abridged version of the University's Strategic Plan
The full version of the Plan may be found at the
the university’s mission

Australian Catholic University shares with universities world-wide a commitment to quality in teaching, research, and service. It aspires to be a community characterised by free inquiry and academic integrity. The University’s inspiration, located within 2,000 years of Catholic intellectual tradition, summons it to attend to all that is of concern to human beings. It brings a distinctive spiritual perspective to the common tasks of higher education.

Through fostering and advancing knowledge in education, health, commerce, the humanities, the sciences and technologies, and the creative arts, Australian Catholic University seeks to make a specific contribution to its local, national and international communities. The University explicitly engages the social, ethical and religious dimensions of the questions it faces in teaching and research, and service. In its endeavours, it is guided by a fundamental concern for justice and equity, and for the dignity of all human beings.

Australian Catholic University has a primary responsibility to provide excellent higher education for its entire diversified and dispersed student body. Its ideal graduates will be highly competent in their chosen fields, ethical in their behaviour, with a developed critical habit of mind, an appreciation of the sacred in life, and a commitment to serving the common good.

ACU National is the only University in the country which is genuinely trans-state in character. Its name projects a national identity, and its different campuses signal six locations that function efficiently and collaboratively. The University seeks to offer students and staff a cohesive, intellectual vision driven by commitment to a single Mission whilst respecting the regional needs of its different campuses.

Mission and Catholic Identity

The University identifies itself with the Catholic tradition, as articulated by the Second Vatican Council, in a way that reflects the light of that tradition upon the wholeness of human learning and knowledge. It is faithful to the Catholic tradition and its beliefs, while claiming the right to act appropriately at times as commentator on them. A Catholic university contributes to an endless conversation between academic scholarship and Catholic faith and values.

The Mission underlines the importance of liberal education and promotes values-oriented learning. It seeks to infuse a deep concern for morality and ethics in all students whose personal formation is of core concern.

Quality Learning

The University is concerned primarily with the progress of knowledge that is extended and disseminated through teaching, scholarship and research. Academic and general staff have a significant role in developing students’ values and professional skills, and they facilitate higher-level understanding of a wide range of disciplinary areas through which graduates are prepared for a full and meaningful life with definite moral and ethical purpose. Such skills contribute to students’ personal, spiritual and moral development, especially through engaging them in analysis, evaluation, interpretation, objective appraisal of arguments, and identification of salient social justice issues. Through teaching and research, the University aims to encourage critical thinking, innovation and scholarly learning and to provide its graduates with education and training that are widely valued in employment and in the life of the community at large.

Spirituality

University life will be open in such a way that all students will have the potential to realise the spiritual and personal values that underpin their capacity to achieve outstanding lives in their professions and in their personal and community relations. Activities which foster their spirituality include scholarly study, liturgical celebrations and participation in their communities, both inside and outside the University. The active engagement of students in their coursework promotes the formation of values.

The core values of the institution reflect directly its Catholic ethos. These values in turn affirm human dignity, promote the well-being of the individual and the common good, and protect human rights.

Ethical Responsibility

A major focus within the University is the education of persons able to exercise moral and professional autonomy in a pluralistic society. Ethical commitment is entirely consonant with the style and character of a public Catholic university which has a Mission-directed responsibility to provide an integrated conception of what is good. Early in their courses students learn the perspectives that core disciplines such as Philosophy and Theology bring to a student’s commitment to the Mission and to the relevance of moral concerns. These concerns pervade the broad curriculum. Learning-for-life in the University especially honours a reflective way of knowing that encourages individual and collective responsibility.
the place of ‘learning’

Learning

The University’s future will depend critically on quality learning outcomes and the provision of well-resourced environments of study. The future requires new models of learning and modes of knowledge transmission.

The University encourages strong staff rapport with its undergraduate and postgraduate students, and aims to foster sustained, supportive interactions between staff and students. It is committed to a policy of flexible multi-mode delivery and is motivated to employ technology in innovative ways.

Research

The University is very strongly committed to the highest standards of quality in research and scholarship and to the significant enhancement of its research and scholarship outcomes and genuine integration of research and scholarship with excellence in teaching and learning.

The University applies funds and physical resources to facilitate research in those areas where the Faculties excel and where focus exists on specific research thrusts. These areas currently include early Christian studies, theology, ethics, spiritual, moral and religious education, lifelong-learning, educational leadership, nursing, exercise science, mathematics education, family/youth studies, and social policy. The University aims explicitly to encourage interdisciplinary research that fosters a real-life orientation and invites community-relevant outcomes.

Community Engagement

Participation of both students and staff in community activities that reflect concern for the welfare of society is an essential part of the University’s raison d’être and staff and students’ identification with it. Consistent with its Mission, the University will engage in substantial analysis of contemporary issues in which its expertise is publicly manifest.

The Educational Environment

The educational environment of ACU National is shaped not only by students’ formal learning experiences but also by their interactions with administrative and academic support units of the University. All these units contribute to the quality of the overall learning environment in which students operate.

The University is aware that the students’ physical environment is an important factor in the process of learning and is committed to maintaining and improving facilities with effective operating systems, efficient day-to-day management, and high levels of regulatory compliance including those relating to occupational health and safety and environmental standards.

The Faculties

The Faculties in their teaching, learning, research, scholarship and creative expression are engaged in the study, interpretation and development of learning across a range of disciplines. In these endeavours they are committed strongly to fostering a culture of inquiry in which staff and students reflect critically on their academic studies in a context of ethos-driven ideas and practice. Faculties recognise their capacity to enable students to reflect upon and form their values and ideals, and acknowledge their responsibility not only to provide a quality university education but also to seek to inculcate in their graduates a spirit of service and to find meaning and purpose in their learning.
institutional directions

Quality

The Australian Universities Quality Agency (AUQA) has reviewed the University and its report is both positive and constructive. The Agency’s audit has validated ACU National’s commitment to quality management and assurance. Recommendations for further improving quality will be part of a precisely implemented work plan which will cover the next five years.

Equity

In seeking to make a contribution to its local, national and international communities, ACU National will make a strong and visible commitment to access and equity. Education of Indigenous students remains a very high priority in the University’s Strategic Plan. The University is heavily committed to the objectives expressed within its Statement of Commitment to Reconciliation [see http://www.acu.edu.au – inetACU (ACUdocs)]

Partnerships

The University respects the diversity that different groups bring to its partnerships and joint ventures in terms of expertise, knowledge, other cultures and religious values. In the context of this diversity the University will join with the community in teaching and research partnerships which are outcome-focussed, ethically informed, and values-based.

The University acknowledges the special importance of its partnerships with Catholic and other education, community and health sectors, with other higher education institutions nationally and internationally, and with industry and business. Engaging with these organisations and institutions in planning teaching, research and community initiatives is essential to advance the Mission of the University and to address its own and its partners’ priorities.

Partnerships which best meet local needs are also a priority for developing the regional character of the University.

Financial Strategies

ACU National competes for funding in times of declining government assistance and increasing costs. Of great financial significance is the University’s commitment to its future capital development. Cost containment and sound resource management are vital to this goal. However, the most powerful opportunities for development rest in the growth of non-government revenue. It is critically important that the University embraces opportunities that pull it away from excessive dependency on government funds. The following are specific strategies for revenue growth:

Fee Income

- The University will target growth in international students and is committed to providing them with appropriate support.
- The University’s acceptance of domestic fee-paying undergraduate students is consistent with government recommendations flowing from the Crossroads review. It is important that the University be entirely consistent in this regard with its Mission and, because of its special Mission, it will continue to enrol fee-paying undergraduate students in ways that express that consistency.
institutional directions

• On-line education provides the University with further opportunities to build on an already developed infrastructure. Distance education programs will be integrated, as appropriate, into campus-based courses.

• ACUcom will further extend its initiatives in appropriate areas of vocational education certificate/diploma courses, internship programs and customised courses targeted to specific niche markets in Australia, Asia, America and Europe. Corporate and community-related programs, run in cooperation with Faculties, have great potential to be expanded in cities where the University is located.

• Research grant income provides an important flow-on effect to the levels of the Institutional Grants Scheme (IGS), the Research Training Scheme (RTS), and Research Infrastructure and Equipment and Facilities funding (RIEF). The University will actively pursue submissions for ARC Discovery and Linkage programs and NH&MRC and other research schemes.

• The University will need to maintain its current focus on marketing to broaden its exposure and increase its capacity to meet current economic pressures.
ACU National is committed to Indigenous education and is motivated to promote its teaching and learning excellence by accessing Learning and Teaching initiatives including the National Institute for Teaching and Learning and Australian awards for quality of teaching. The University has established its own Institute for the Advancement of Teaching and Learning, which is responsible, amongst other things, for academic staff development programs, Teaching Development Grants, and course unit evaluation. The University strongly supports professional development in its workplace community.

Future growth will come from students with an interest in what the University can offer and this should be a target area for specific marketing. Customised course delivery will be a firm focus for the future.

The over-riding significance for ACU National is its existence itself. Its Mission Statement has been affirmed externally and reflects the continuing support it has from the community which it serves. At a time when values are recognised as increasingly relevant to tertiary education, the University positions itself uniquely not just to be responsive to market needs, but also to influence them. The stability of its Mission defines the University’s core strength.
conclusions

- The University will give more focussed attention to its financial dependency, and it will survey anticipated market needs to test the strength of targeted possibilities for action.
- The University needs to define its quality of learning carefully and assist Faculties to put in place specific strategies to achieve stated institutional objectives.
- Communication is a special problem for an institution which is spread so widely.
- All the units of the University will work to synthesise teaching and learning, research and scholarship, and community engagement within a stimulating, workable environment of learning. Such an environment is one that develops experiences which bring students to discover and construct knowledge for themselves, perceive themselves as genuine members of "communities of learning", and makes them co-sharers with staff and fellow-students in the act of discovery and the application of knowledge.

Major actions to achieve the institutional priorities as formulated above are:
- Enhancing the Mission-focus of all the University’s activities.
- Implementing different mechanisms for University funding.
- Conducting ongoing structural reform.
- Targeting internationalisation and international education more effectively.
- Placing an increased emphasis on flexible learning.
- Working to enhance and integrate the culture of research within the University.
- Increasing the range and depth of community engagements and collaborative partnerships.
- Enhancing ACUcom activity.
- Embedding quality more obviously across all the University’s endeavours and working to communicate efficiently a sense of this to all staff and to all units.
- Developing a "culture of evidence" across the University to support its planning and decision-making.
- Achieving a better balance between national direction and local autonomy, and being efficient in its overall operations.
- Working assiduously to put in place the best structures that satisfy the demands of its AUQA quality audit and to enable the University to benefit from the government’s current reforms.
- Instituting changes to ensure course structures that are flexible and efficient so that graduates can better meet shifting professional requirements.
- Recognising other institutions’ pathways so that ACU National can make a special contribution to training for the challenges of the future.
- Putting in place a mechanism to pursue the objectives of a dynamic sense of regionalism.