



ACU Vision

2033

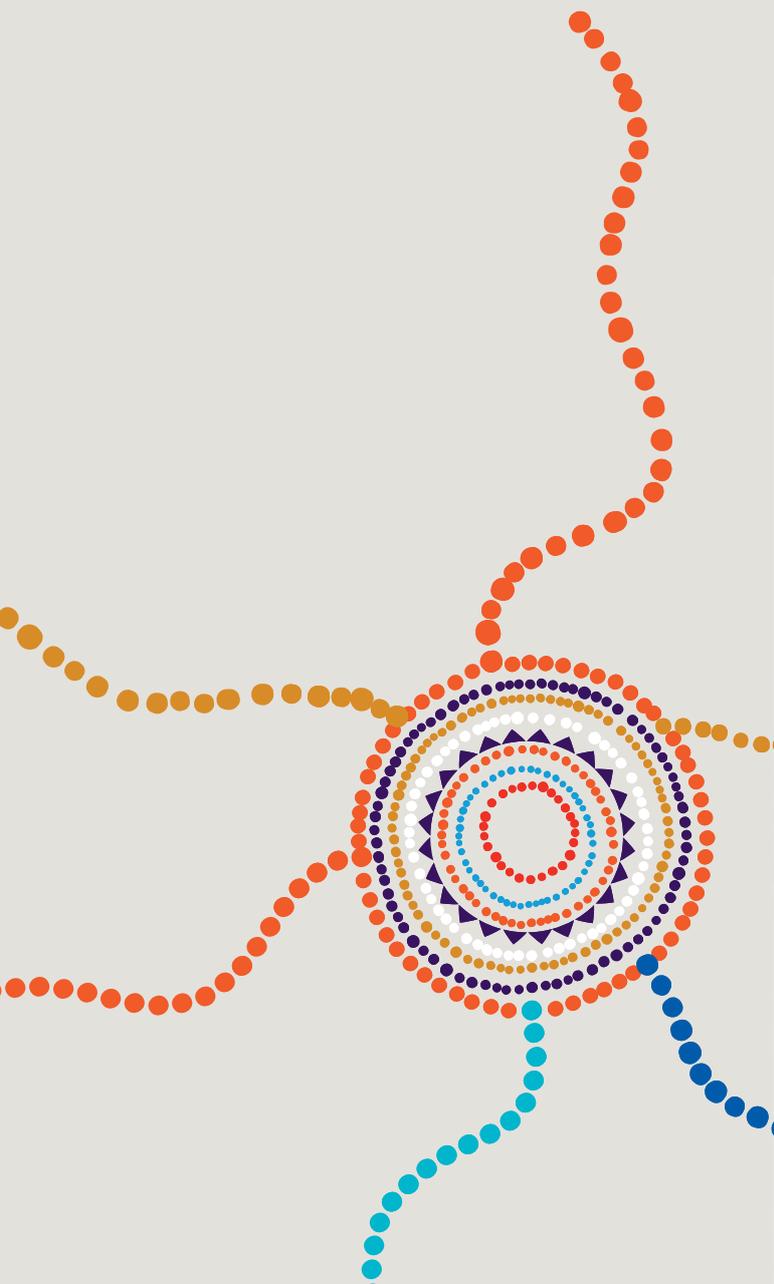
Consultation findings summary report

December 2022

Prepared with data gathered and structured by Nous Group for Australian Catholic University

Acknowledgement of Country

In recognition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples' deep spiritual connection to Country, and in continuing the university'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 are located, and we thank them for their continued custodianship.



Overview

On 12 September 2022, the university released a discussion paper entitled *Our Landscape*, providing the ACU community with core insights on the global and local macro trends we face as a Catholic higher education institution.

The release of *Our Landscape* initiated a university-wide conversation centred around the challenges and opportunities ahead, especially in light of the rapidly unfolding socio-economic, technological, regulatory and geopolitical changes impacting on the university setting.

Through online submissions, virtual and in-person discussions,¹ a multiplicity of voices and perspectives was heard from across the university community.

This summary report contains a snapshot of the key topics the ACU community raised as part of this brainstorming and idea-gathering phase. The ideas and input put forward by the ACU community were synthesised and structured into a proposed framework to guide future strategy conversations over the coming months.

A more comprehensive and granular version of this report can be requested from the ACU Vision 2033 team by sending an email to **ACUvision2033@acu.edu.au**.

As we begin the second phase of consultations (December 2022 to January 2023), we invite the ACU community to engage with the findings presented in this report, either individually or as a team.

Your contributions play a central role in shaping the future of our university. As such, we encourage you to discuss these findings at committees, portfolio townhalls, workshops, team meetings and other appropriate channels and venues.

Let's continue the conversation

Your input, feedback and questions are welcome and encouraged to enrich our strategy journey.

Submit your ideas through the online form or via email by **Tuesday 31 January 2023**.

Email: ACUvision2033@acu.edu.au

1. Nous Group was engaged by the university to undertake strategy consultation with the ACU community. As part of Consultation Phase 1, Nous Group facilitated the majority of the interviews, focus groups and other targeted consultation sessions. Nous Group also aggregated the data and structured the data from online submissions (ACU Vision 2033 portal and via email).



What objectives drive consultation phase 2?

1. To review, refine, and augment the proposed framework with new ideas and insights.
2. To translate these overarching topics into strategic themes and opportunities.

What was asked at consultation phase 1?

Question 1

What major challenges and opportunities will shape our strategic context?

Question 2

What impact do we want to have over the next decade?

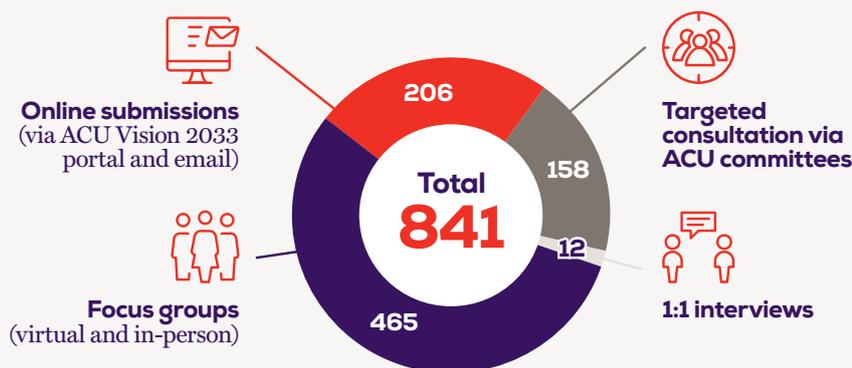
Question 3

Where will we focus our efforts to achieve this impact?

Who joined the conversation?

First consultation round (30 June to 21 October 2022)

Participants by consultation method



Participant groups



What are the emerging findings and insights?

Six overarching topics emerged from consultation phase 1.²

A distinctive Catholic university			
A connected global partner	An adaptive education leader	A purposeful knowledge creator	A caring, inclusive community
A flexible, responsive institution			

2. It should be noted that the data gathered as part of this process will be iteratively analysed, augmented and re-organised throughout the strategy development process.



A distinctive Catholic university

Context: All discussions included an exploration of what it means for ACU to be a distinctive Catholic higher education institution.

Key insight: ACU should embrace its Catholic identity more confidently by translating mission into impact.

ON CHALLENGES, THE ACU COMMUNITY IDENTIFIED:

- balancing ACU's role as a Catholic institution and a modern public Australian university
- operating in an increasingly secular and deinstitutionalised global and local context
- addressing ongoing societal misconceptions about ACU (a university for Catholics only; perceived challenges around the expression of diversity; misunderstandings around compulsory enrolment in Catholic units)
- improving and enhancing overall understandings of the Catholic intellectual tradition, including the dignity of the human person and the common good
- clearly articulating the value of ACU's mission to external stakeholders
- balancing ACU's anchoring identity as a Catholic university with a more expansive focus as a global higher education provider. It was pointed out that being Catholic is often insufficient to attract students or strategic partners.

ON STRATEGIC OPPORTUNITIES, THE ACU COMMUNITY DISCUSSED:

- translating mission into impact by identifying a small number of grand societal challenges to inform and drive ACU's action into the communities it serves. Examples included:
 - challenges faced by developing countries (the 'global south'), including inequality and access to health and education
 - advancing social justice to support and empower marginalised groups
 - environmental sustainability and the transition to net-zero
- the opportunity to lead national efforts in theological education (lay leadership formation, including women)
- positioning ACU as a welcoming place for all by creating 'meaning' and being 'relevant' to those outside of the Catholic community
- proactively contributing to public debate and leading conversations on current and new areas of institutional expertise
- deepening institutional efforts to teach the whole person, promoting thought and ethical leadership
- positioning ACU as a symbol of respect for belief and as a defender of faith
- prioritising efforts towards excellence as a university, independent of ACU's position as a Catholic institution.

A connected, global partner

Context: Participants discussed the opportunity for ACU to grow and deepen its global presence, influence and impact.

Key insight: ACU should leverage, diversify and scale global strategic partnerships to capture emerging opportunities.



ON CHALLENGES, THE ACU COMMUNITY IDENTIFIED:

- heightened competition for global student markets in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic
 - students have greater access and exposure to a wide range of Australian universities and competitive higher education providers
 - ACU's current academic offer is overly focused on education and health sciences fields
- suboptimal alignment of current partnerships (local and global) to impact-driven initiatives across the university
- as a small to mid-sized university in the Australian context, ACU has limited capacity and capability to deliver solutions to partners and communities
- ACU has a limited number of joint and industry-based appointments, when compared to other universities
- internal system barriers reduce the effectiveness of partnerships.

ON STRATEGIC OPPORTUNITIES, THE ACU COMMUNITY DISCUSSED:

- being the 'solution provider' of choice for local and global partners
- expanding ACU's capacity and diversifying its capabilities through value-adding partnerships
- deepening ACU's focus on the Asia-Pacific region to continue delivering on mission
- exploring growing faith-based student markets in South America and growing ACU's presence in the African region
- investing in program diversification and innovation, as well as delivery (including opportunities to increase online delivery of pathway programs)
- leveraging the Rome Campus to:
 - expand global strategic partnerships
 - provide staff with unique professional development opportunities
 - grow transnational education (TNE) initiatives
 - diversify research funding opportunities
- leveraging ACU's leadership in the Strategic Alliance of Catholic Research Universities (SACRU) to develop global leadership. Beyond being Catholic, ACU must prioritise efforts to position itself as a high-quality, influential and easy-to-work with partner to truly benefit from this alliance.
- prioritising philanthropic endeavours by nourishing relationships with alumni and donors globally.

An adaptive education leader

Context: Participants discussed the relevance, attractiveness and impact of ACU's current education portfolio.

Key insight: ACU should innovate in course design and delivery to ensure its offer remains mission-aligned and attractive to changing markets.



ON CHALLENGES, THE ACU COMMUNITY IDENTIFIED:

- overreliance on:
 - domestic undergraduate students (especially school leavers), at the expense of other cohorts
 - education and health sciences
 - full-degree undergraduate courses
- low ATAR and high attrition as cited concerns undermining the university's high-quality outcomes
- limited resources allocated to grow and innovate within and across core disciplines such as business, arts, law, theology and philosophy
- misconceptions about the core curriculum among prospective students (ie, perceived cost of opportunity; ACU enforcing Catholicism).

ON STRATEGIC OPPORTUNITIES, THE ACU COMMUNITY DISCUSSED:

- diversifying the education portfolio to enable growth into new markets. This included the possibility of exploring the following streams:
 - STEMM (science, technology, engineering, mathematics and medicine)
 - postgraduate and life-long learning programs (including market-relevant short courses and micro-credentials)
 - innovation within existing areas of teaching strength
 - interdisciplinary approach to course design
 - capturing the data science/AI/machine learning market via product innovation
- leveraging emerging technologies (augmented reality, virtual reality) to enhance the student experience and meet future workforce needs
- re-imagining the campus experience by leveraging ACU's unique footprint
 - provide international students with a personalised and flexible multicampus experience (eg, enabling students to choose more than one campus across the course of their studies at ACU)
- targeting market-leading positions:
 - ACU as authoritative voice and industry leader in health and education
 - #1 nationwide in the arts
- embedding ethical and thought leadership across the education portfolio
- developing suitable lay leadership programs, scaling the pro-bono program offered by the Thomas More Law School and an increased focus on student mental health and wellbeing were cited as opportunities to drive impact.



A purposeful knowledge creator

Context: Participants brainstormed future-focused ideas to enable impact-focused research.

Key insight: To translate mission into action, ACU should embrace trans-disciplinarity, leverage partnerships and pursue community-informed research endeavours.

ON CHALLENGES, THE ACU COMMUNITY IDENTIFIED:

- overemphasising research output over impact-focused research
- uncertainty arising from the changing research landscape in Australia (eg, the future of Excellence in Research for Australia, ERA)
- perceived institutional 'humbleness'. Participants often raised concerns regarding ACU underplaying both its research achievements and community-impact success stories
 - unlike other universities, ACU does not currently have a research news portal or outlet to showcase expert commentary
- internal factors undermining research outcomes:
 - restrictive internal business processes
 - complex governance arrangements
 - perceived low-risk appetite
 - cited lack of trust across the university
- ACU's voice can feel diluted in local markets as the university spreads thin its marketing and engagement resources across its campuses.

ON STRATEGIC OPPORTUNITIES, THE ACU COMMUNITY DISCUSSED:

- focusing research endeavours on addressing complex and systemic global and local issues by:
 - prioritising participant and community informed and led research (global and local)
 - scaling further research produced in the humanities
 - building on existing strengths in health, education and arts to lead transdisciplinary research on complex issues such as aged care, mental health, access to education
 - exploring other transdisciplinary and mission-aligned research in areas such as:
 - social justice and ethics – to reduce global inequality
 - Artificial Intelligence (AI) – at the intersection of health and social sciences
 - leveraging and expanding existing partnerships to:
 - broaden scope
 - provide additional capacity
 - enhance and seize greater funding opportunities (eg, international research funding, philanthropy)
 - diversify capabilities
 - multiply impact
 - build global profile and strengthen institutional reputation (eg, rankings)
- building on the successes of the research identification strategy to continue increasing research output and driving up research rankings
- developing a research news outlet where ACU can showcase data-driven expert commentary, advancing the common good through greater dissemination of free and accessible information.

A caring, inclusive community

Context: Most discussions highlighted ACU's emphasis on the human person as a key institutional strength.

Key insight: Building on current strengths, ACU should place greater emphasis on cross-institutional diversity, equity and inclusion efforts.



ON CHALLENGES, THE ACU COMMUNITY IDENTIFIED:

- seeming misalignment between mission and action in realms such as:
 - inclusion, as well as equity and widening participation
 - cross-institutional cultural awareness and responsiveness
 - First Peoples' voice across portfolios (participants cited limited and siloed efforts to integrate First Peoples' knowledge at ACU)
- complexities around maintaining a vibrant on-campus student experience as demand increases for online and hybrid learning.

ON STRATEGIC OPPORTUNITIES, THE ACU COMMUNITY DISCUSSED:

- continue the university's emphasis on the human person to enable a strong sense of belonging amongst students and staff over the coming decade. The university should develop:
 - develop innovative frameworks and models to replicate the in-person sense of belonging in online and/or hybrid environments (students and staff)
 - invest in student wellbeing, support services and pastoral care
 - support small class-sizes.
- embracing a whole-of-university approach to strengthen and amplify First Peoples' voice:
 - place greater emphasis on First Peoples and embed approaches in areas such as student access, participation and success, and research, employability and community engagement
 - facilitate meaningful and tangible change towards self-determination and national reconciliation
 - increase and embed First Peoples' representation at ACU (cited examples include developing clear governance structures and an Elder Council for matters which impact First Peoples students)
- to be a truly inclusive community, ACU should focus efforts on creating a culturally diverse and safe environment for all
- leveraging philanthropic efforts and alumni engagement to support and scale equity and widening participation initiatives.

A flexible, responsive institution

Context: Participants identified institutional barriers to innovation, collaboration and agility.

Key insight: To unlock innovation and agility, ACU should actively foster cross-functional collaboration and a 'test and learn' mindset.

ON CHALLENGES, THE ACU COMMUNITY IDENTIFIED:

- opportunities to innovate and collaborate are limited by rigid policies, inefficient processes and risk averse attitudes across the university. These structural barriers lead to:
 - a siloed and distrusting culture that breaks down connectedness
 - overly complex systems disempower staff from making decisions
 - poor communication across teams
- resource availability and allocation limits opportunities for innovation and quality improvement. Cited examples include:
 - resources being spread too thinly across faculties and not following areas of greatest strategic priority
 - increased teaching and administrative demands faced by faculty staff.

ON STRATEGIC OPPORTUNITIES, THE ACU COMMUNITY DISCUSSED:

- fostering an organisational culture of greater transparency, autonomy and trust by:
 - nourishing a ‘test and learn’ mindset across the university
 - reviewing and improving processes, systems and structures for efficiency and agility
 - develop university-wide communication channels for staff to share creative ideas and initiatives
 - enable appropriate cross-skilling and upskilling of staff
- increasing digital capabilities to ensure ACU keeps up with industry and workforce trends
- supporting staff from neurodiverse backgrounds to participate effectively within ACU’s workforce.

Let's continue the conversation

Your input, feedback and questions are welcome and encouraged to enrich our strategy journey.

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If you would like to access the full version of this report, please email the ACU Vision 2033 team: ACUvision2033@acu.edu.au