



ACU Vision

2033

Our Future
Discussion Paper

March 2023

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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.





Vice-Chancellor's introduction: Our purpose

In my inaugural lecture as Vice-Chancellor, I spoke of the purpose of an Australian Catholic university. I argued that its purpose was to engage in academic pursuits in a manner consistent with Catholic social teaching and to serve others in a way that enables their growth and flourishing. I also stressed that the achievement of this ambition not only depends upon the university's identity and strengths, but on the contexts in which it is operating. By this I mean the challenges that it is facing, and the opportunities that it envisages.

Over the past year, we have been asking our Australian Catholic University community and key stakeholders to consider how we might fulfil our purpose over the coming decade. Considering the social, economic, and global contexts in which we are operating, we have been asking where they believe ACU should focus its efforts to fulfil its purpose and achieve the greatest impact between now and 2033.

This input has allowed us to understand what most matters to our community and to begin developing a picture of what our collective future ambition looks like. This paper synthesizes that ambition into an emerging view of our future direction, priorities, and strategic opportunities. It describes how we see our education program and research endeavours evolving in the years ahead, how we propose to partner with community and like-minded organisations, and the institutional drivers of our success.

This document is an invitation to a conversation. It emerges from the work and discussions to date and its goal is to share our thinking so that you, our staff, students, partners and other stakeholders can help us shape the future of ACU.

We look forward to hearing your thoughts and guidance as we enter the next round of consultations and start drafting the strategy that will become ACU Vision 2033.

Professor Zlatko Skrbis
Vice-Chancellor and President
Australian Catholic University

Overview

Building on and integrating the findings and insights gathered during consultation, *Our Future* provides a draft blueprint of ACU's strategic aspiration towards 2033. It outlines a set of interconnected strategic themes, grounded in our Catholic telos and ethos.

These themes inform three strategic priorities, expounded in *Our Future*. To ensure our institutional mission is delivered with purpose and impact, these priorities are transversal by design and purposefully cut across our education, research, and engagement endeavours.

Our Future is underpinned by a comprehensive analysis of the current and emerging internal and external factors impacting on the university's growth, competitiveness, and performance. This analysis will continue over the coming months, as we test the value and feasibility of the illustrative strategic opportunities.

Our Future will guide the university towards the next and final stage of strategy discussions.

Let's continue the conversation

Your input, feedback and questions are encouraged to enrich our new ten-year strategy, as we approach its final drafting stage.

Submit your ideas through the online form or via email by Friday, 5 May 2023.

Email:
ACUvision2033@acu.edu.au

Your contributions will continue to play a key role in shaping the future of ACU. *Our Future* is our opportunity to collectively review, refine, and expand the strategic opportunities, target outcomes, supporting initiatives, and actions for our shared future.

Our mission

Mission is central to our work at ACU. We are constantly striving to bring the mission to life – to harness it to crystallise our collective purpose and impact

In Catholic tradition, integral human development – the development of the whole person – is crucial to the purpose of a Catholic university. This encompasses human development and human dignity in all its facets: intellectual, physical, social, spiritual, economic and as an engaged member of a thriving community. ACU Vision 2033 is animated by our focus on developing the whole person, crafted into a statement of our purpose and impact.

Mission with purpose and impact

We develop the whole person within their communities and across their life stages. We empower people as they learn, develop, and grow with resilience.

We enable people to flourish at all stages of their life and foster experiences of ageing that have meaning, purpose, and build belonging.

We build research-enabled adaptability in an ever-changing world, centred on the dignity of the human person and the common good.

We are a catalyst of positive change in our communities and societies—our integral approach to human development allows us to develop considered solutions to the major issues of our time.

Our mission

Within the Catholic intellectual tradition and acting in truth and love, Australian Catholic University is committed to the pursuit of knowledge, the dignity of the human person and the common good.



Our strategic context: the challenges and opportunities ahead

The university develops ACU Vision 2033 at a time of significant change in the higher education sector.

The decade prior to the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic was a generally buoyant one in the higher education sector. The introduction of the demand-driven system spurred strong growth in the domestic market, particularly in the first half of the decade. At the same time, sustained economic growth in China and the Asian region more broadly, in conjunction with a relatively benign geopolitical environment, supported high rates of growth in the international student market.

ACU prospered in that environment, nearly doubling in size from 2010 to 2017 – with most of the growth driven by the core areas of health and education. ACU students graduated into professional careers, the institution delivered on its mission, and the organisation's finances were generally healthy.

Those market conditions have now passed. There may be renewed growth in the domestic and international student markets in the years ahead, but the forces constraining growth are likely to be far stronger than they were in

the past decade. As such, ACU no longer faces a straightforward path to growth and fulfilment of mission.

Indeed, growth has been stalling since 2015. Student load in 2022 was 6 per cent lower than it was in 2017. Excluding ACU Online and Blacktown Campus, load in 2022 was 15 per cent less than 2017. Declines have been experienced across all faculties, including in health and education. ACU cannot rely on the market and its traditional strengths for a buoyant future. The organisation needs to create its own conditions for growth in the decade ahead, driven by innovation, bold strategic moves, and a sustained focus on the future. Setting the platform for growth in the years ahead will enable ACU to deliver on its mission and maximise its contribution to the societal issues that are core to the mission.

The following table provides a synthesised overview of the potential landscape for the higher education sector in the decade ahead, as well as its projected impact for ACU.

	POTENTIAL HE TRAJECTORY	IMPLICATIONS FOR ACU
Domestic student market	Decades-long transition to a knowledge and services-led economy will fuel demand for workers with higher education degrees. School leaver population will grow temporarily, courtesy of the Costello baby bonus. ¹ However, the federal government's trillion-dollar debt and need to fund spending growth in health, aged care and defence will limit its capacity to fund additional student places. Growth in the total funding envelope will be marginal and aligned to specific government priorities.	Broad-based growth in the domestic market will be limited. ACU will need to be agile in its response to market opportunities and government priorities; develop new programs/ disciplines to grow new/underserved cohorts. For example, expanding pathway programs and enabling postgraduate students to upskill/reskill. In addition, ACU could seek to package programs together , for example in areas like management, leadership, digital/STEM, and health care.
Global student market	Emerging market maturity and geopolitical concerns may limit the growth of the China market. Other markets (India, SE Asia, Latin America, Africa, and the Middle East) have the potential to support decades of further growth. ² However, it will take many years to match the scale of the China market. Although ACU's enrolment is diverse and it has thus far not relied on the China market, it is likely to be impacted by the heightened competition caused by universities' international diversification efforts.	Opportunities exist for ACU to build market share in regions where Catholic education has strong brand recognition . Limitations in domestic market funding mean this will become a priority. A distinct university-wide global plan will be required to win share. To succeed, such plan needs to focus on product, quality, partnerships, and diverse recruitment channels.
Economic and social drivers	Ageing population will grow demand for caring services. Long-term increase in the dependency ratio will place a premium on workforce participation and productivity. The changing nature of work will propel demand for creativity, critical thinking, and adaptability. Inflationary pressures will continue to impact on the cost of university operations (faster than the growth in revenue per student – for the foreseeable future), meaning university margins will be squeezed.	Workforce growth in many of the professions ACU serves will be strong – but competition with other providers is likely to intensify. As such, producing distinctive graduates is critical to ACU's success. Workforce participation and productivity is a major economic opportunity, one which is strongly aligned with mission. ACU has the opportunity to leverage its strengths to address workforce participation challenges. ACU will need to maintain tight cost controls and focus spending on areas that support strategic direction and future growth.
Global societal challenges	The United Nations Sustainable Development Goals and key issues such as inequality and environmental degradation continue to animate community action across the globe. Universities are at the forefront of developing community-based solutions to these challenges. Catholic institutions bring unique perspectives and strengths to tackling intractable issues, grounded in subsidiarity and a focus on human dignity and the common good.	ACU has a key role to play in solving complex issues related to the dignity of the human person. ACU has the capacity to play a lead role in some of the UN SDGs and <i>Laudato si'</i> domains. We need to prioritise a targeted set of issues and goals that fit our mission and capability .
Government policy	Alongside its long-term budget constraints, the government will prioritise research and education aligned to areas of economic growth and issues such as the energy transition, chronic disease, ageing, productivity, sovereign manufacturing capability, and the development of associated new technologies. The focus on research commercialisation is likely to retain bipartisan support.	ACU needs to raise the profile and strategic relevance of its research and education in areas of socio-economic need (in domains that align or are adjacent to ACU strengths). ACU needs to systematically grow its commercialisation capability , partnerships, and output.

1. The Howard government introduced the baby bonus in 2004 and increased it in subsequent years. The number of children born soared from 2005 to 2010 and has held relatively constant since then. The first increase (approximately 10,000 additional 18-year-olds) will occur in 2023, rising to a 50,000 increase in the number of 18-year-olds by the year 2026, then will stay relatively constant in the 4-5 years thereafter.

2. Assuming the geopolitical environment does not deteriorate further.

	POTENTIAL HE TRAJECTORY	IMPLICATIONS FOR ACU
New technologies and the impact of digital	Digital technologies, mainly led by the growth of AI, machine learning, big data, virtual/augmented reality, wearables, and hybrid work/learning will reshape all of the sectors that ACU teaches into, its research program, the way ACU delivers its education programs, and all aspects of its operations.	ACU Vision 2033 needs to define education, research, engagement, and operational strategies that adapt to and harness digital technologies . The organisation needs to build a learning culture which enables an agile adaptation to future technological developments. ACU needs to grow its digital and STEM capabilities across its education, research, engagement, and operational endeavours.
Heightened competition	Competition from within the sector will be fierce. ACU cannot rely on its traditional strengths in health and education. Competition from outside the sector, in Australia and internationally, has loomed over higher education for the last 10-15 years, without dislodging the incumbents. The growth of AI, sustained low unemployment, online education, and third-party credentialling could be the triggers that disrupt the higher education market over the next decade.	The organisation and its strategy need to be bold and differentiated. ACU will need to find new ways to harness its unique strengths and add to them in ways that secures demand from students and research partners. ACU's relationships – with communities, international networks and alliances, partners, students, alumni, industry bodies and government – and its organisational dynamism will form the shield against competitive threats.

Our focus

ACU needs to choose carefully where to focus its endeavours, investments, and the development of its capability.

By 2033, we will have

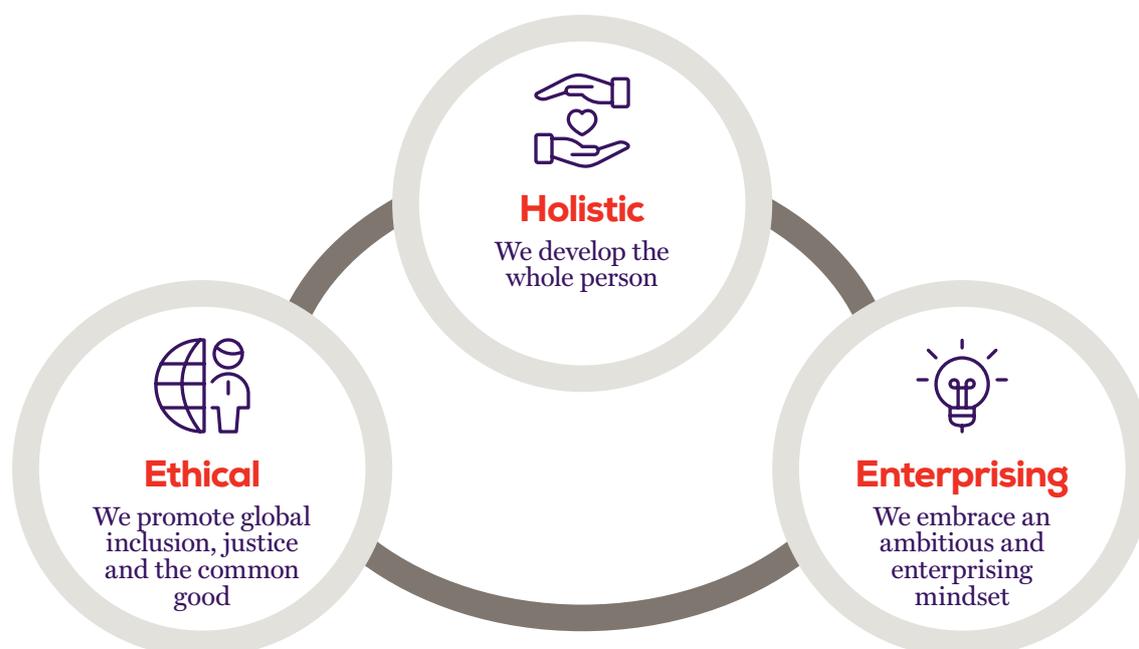
- Secured a reputation across Australia for leading a transformational impact on each of our three priorities
 - Forged a global reputation for our innovative work and impact on at least one of the three priorities
 - Developed deep community, government, and industry links in scoping, funding and executing the strategic themes and related programs of work
-

Our strategic themes

We are a university of service. Over the next decade, we will use education, research, and partnerships as our vehicles to create a flourishing future for our communities within and

across local, regional, national, and global boundaries.

We will do so guided by our unwavering commitment to amplify our mission through **three interconnected themes.**



These themes are grounded in our Catholic telos and ethos, best expounded in *Ex Corde Ecclesiae*:

A Catholic University will be able to help the Church respond to the problems and needs of this age[...] Included among its research activities, therefore, will be a study of *serious contemporary problems* in areas such as the dignity of human life, the promotion of justice for all, the quality of personal and family life, the protection of nature, the search for peace and political stability, a more just sharing in the world's resources, and a new economic and political order that will better serve the human community at a national and international level.³

These interconnected themes will define how we prioritise and allocate resources and investment. They will inform our education, research, and engagement endeavours and delineate the strategic initiatives and operational plans that underpin the day-to-day life of the institution. The themes will be a core feature of the way we learn, teach, and engage with students and alumni. Shaped by their learning experience at ACU, our graduates will model ethical practices and understandings of the world; respect the dignity of the whole person; advance the common good; and display an ambitious and enterprising outlook as global citizens and social agents.

3. Apostolic Constitution of the Supreme Pontiff John Paul II on Catholic universities *Ex Corde Ecclesiae* [31-32], italics in original.

Our strategic priorities

To seize new opportunities and maximise our institutional potential, ACU's strategic priorities will enhance our core strengths through adaptability, purposeful innovation, and discovery in new realms.

The three priorities presented here draw from the insights and input of the ACU community during two rounds of strategy consultations.⁴ As such, they synthesise our community's collective response to the following questions:

- What is central to our mission?
- Where and how can we deliver the greatest value to our communities?
- What will distinguish, maximise, and future-proof our potential over the next decade?

Priority

1

To enable people to develop intellectually, spiritually, physically, socially, and emotionally within their communities.

Priority

2

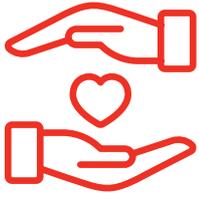
To advance the dignity of the human person and communities.

Priority

3

To foster communities of collaboration, education, and knowledge creation.

4. Consultation Phase 1: 30 June to 21 October 2022.
Consultation Phase 2: 14 December 2022 to 31 January 2023.



Priority 1

To enable people to develop intellectually, spiritually, physically, socially, and emotionally within their communities.

Context

ACU has been developing an integrated approach to its healthy ageing work, incorporating health care, education, and social connection, among other related dimensions. Building on the tangible successes delivered to our communities, as part of ACU Vision 2033, the University has the opportunity to extend this holistic framework to all life stages (early childhood, youth transitions, adulthood, and ageing).

Chronic disease and an ageing population are driving unsustainable growth in the cost of health and aged care, without corresponding improvements in outcomes and quality of life. System-wide approaches and reform are needed, including innovation in models of care, digital health, predictive healthcare, workforce, and leadership capability. ACU has the capability, networks, and relationships to make a difference. Investment will be required in ACU's digital and STEM capabilities to support the holistic, technology-enabled health care models of the next decade.

Illustrative strategic opportunities

- **Establish a capability/centre for the development of human flourishing.**
- **Create a multidisciplinary network centre to support children and young people to thrive and learn.**
- **Partner with health providers to re-envision and transform health care and health outcomes in Australia.**
- **Become the national leader in management and leadership education for professionals in the Church and care sectors.**
- **Develop the human-centred care and education workforce of the future.**
- **Transform ACU campuses into precincts focused on community and enterprise.**



Priority 2

To advance the dignity of the human person and communities.

Context

Participation and engagement in all aspects of society is core to the dignity of the human person, which is central to the purpose of a Catholic university and a core component of ACU's mission. This includes participation in the workforce as well as access to social institutions and networks. This priority builds on the work ACU has done over the past three years with the veteran community and their families and our focus on healthy, inclusive ageing. Likewise, it reinforces our commitment to work with, learn from and support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.

ACU is well-placed to make a difference here. The institution teaches into workforce domains that are at the heart of the Australian labour-market of the future: healthcare, education, aged care, and the professions. The organisation is under-strength in the digital aspects of these fields and in the managerial professions. As such, it will need to grow its capability in these domains.

ACU could further deliver on this priority by focusing on exploring and advancing the dignity of the human person in the digital age. This re-configuring of the human experience through digital disruption will lie at the core of public policy and public debate. As global economies and societies become ever more dependent on new technologies which replicate human cognitive functions, the challenge of adopting technology in ways that improve the human condition and retain the dignity of the human person will become

ever-more central. ACU has the opportunity to position itself at the forefront of this challenge.

To succeed, ACU should seek support from philanthropists animated by these issues and collaborate with global institutions, for example through the Strategic Alliance of Catholic Research Universities (SACRU) network.

The role of a Catholic university in the age of technological advancement is envisaged in *Ex Corde Ecclesiae*.

This guidance remains pressing and relevant in the current age.

In the world today, characterized by such rapid developments in science and technology, the tasks of a Catholic University assume an ever greater importance and urgency. Scientific and technological discoveries create an enormous economic and industrial growth, but they also inescapably require the correspondingly necessary *search for meaning* in order to guarantee that the new discoveries be used for the authentic good of individuals and of human society as a whole. If it is the responsibility of every University to search for such meaning, a Catholic University is called in a particular way to respond to this need[...] What is at stake is the *very meaning of scientific and technological research, of social life and of culture*, but, on an even more profound level, what is at stake is *the very meaning of the human person*.⁵

Illustrative strategic opportunities

- **Build a workforce participation capability/centre/industry alliance linked to areas of labour market need.**
- **Build a capability/centre for incorporating ethics and human-centred design into the development (and application/use) of new technologies.**
- **Be a leading voice in workforce adaptation to AI and emerging technologies.**

5. *Ex Corde Ecclesiae* [7], italics in original.



Priority 3

To foster communities of collaboration, education, and knowledge creation.

Context

Education and collaborative knowledge creation have been central to the Church's work for two thousand years. Education and discovery are, likewise, at the heart of ACU's mission and activity. We will continue this legacy in ACU Vision 2033 through our commitment to developing the whole person in our education and research endeavours. Our focus areas will include the design and operation of education systems, the development of the education workforce, and the training of school and system leaders. Our work will weave First Peoples' knowledges into curriculum, research, and community engagement. We will be central to the development of collaborative, lifelong learning models, aligned to the evolving nature of work and life, and to the incorporation of new technologies, AI among them, into a human-centred approach to education and work.

Our concentration on collaboration, education and knowledge creation will include a distinct focus on integrating and scaling ACU's existing strengths and component parts. For example, by bringing together and strengthening our IT, health, and business academic endeavours, ACU has the opportunity to develop its capability in technology-enabled models of care. This would enable

the University to play a more integral, innovative, and mission-aligned role in patient-centred health care. It would also deepen ACU's strategic partnerships with Catholic health care providers and attract new cohorts of students to the institution.

In Consultation Phase 1, stakeholders advocated for ACU to embrace its Catholic identity more confidently by translating mission into action. The ACU community cited examples of strategic possibilities for the University. These include leading national efforts in lay leadership formation and development (including women) and positioning ACU as a symbol of respect for religious belief and a leader in contemporary global dialogue between faith and reason. This opportunity could be championed as part of the University's collaboration, education, and knowledge creation agenda in ACU Vision 2033.

This could include applying our interdisciplinary strengths to explore how religious traditions and practices shape, support, and enhance contemporary society.

To succeed, this priority may require funding support from philanthropists and collaborative partnerships with like-minded organisations, in Australia and globally.

Illustrative strategic opportunities

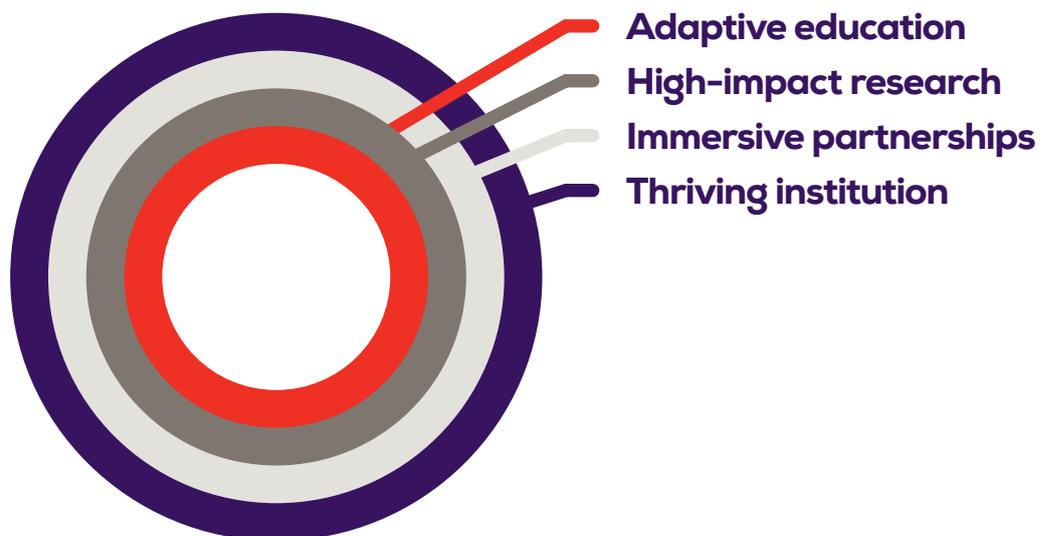
- **Convert ACU's new literacy and STEM investments into a global centre of excellence.**
- **Lead the development of theological frameworks for solutions to global societal challenges.**
- **Lead future-focused models of care, with foundational capabilities in healthcare.**

Our success

ACU's success in the decade ahead will stem from the appeal and quality of our education programs, the impact and excellence of our research endeavours, our ability to forge strategic partnerships, the dynamism of the institution's staff and culture, and the vibrancy of its campuses.

Stakeholders reinforced the importance of each of these elements during the first round of strategy consultation in 2022, calling for ACU to be an 'adaptive education leader', a 'connected global partner', and a 'purposeful knowledge creator', underpinned by a 'flexible, responsive institution'.

Subsequent deliberations have distilled the drivers of success into four key domains:



Adaptive education

By 2033, we will have

- A more diverse student profile, including significant growth in equity groups and First Peoples, as well as international, postgraduate and HDR students
- Integrated new discipline strengths in STEM into our programs
- Earned a sustained reputation amongst students, staff, and employers for our unique approach to the development of the whole person

Diversify and grow

ACU's growth and viability over the last 15 years has been sustained by government-funded undergraduate students.⁵ Growth has stalled in these cohorts – many are declining. At the same time, new models of micro-credentialing, lifelong learning and the growing need for people to transition into new careers across their working lives is creating new cohort opportunities. The result: by 2033, ACU will have a **more diverse student profile** than it has today. International students, award and non-award mature age students, postgraduate cohorts, and HDR students will make up a larger proportion of ACU's student base than they do today, for example, collectively up to half or even more of ACU's student headcount. Diversification goals will include growing access and participation amongst First Peoples and equity groups.

Course and discipline domains will draw heavily on current areas of strength in health, education, and the humanities (arts, business, law, theology, and philosophy) integrated with major **new ACU capabilities in computer science and technology**. New disciplines might also include adjacent STEM domains, such as bioscience.

New disciplines will be designed and developed in **collaboration with industry and with a strong core of research and education links with other disciplines**. A technology/computer science 'faculty', therefore, might include the name 'applied' in its title and feature double degrees or applied units in areas such as digital health, STEM education, e-learning, cyber security, digital humanities, ethics, and human-centred design. Work-integrated learning for these students would draw on ACU's industry connections and the digital transformation agenda in aged care, business, the Church, education, health care, law, and social welfare.

Deliver innovative, student-focused education

ACU's education model will wrap around the student, with a focus on development of the whole person. We will foster an ethical, caring mindset and cultivate the growth of students' adaptability and resilience. We will graduate students who are career-ready with networking opportunities, work-integrated learning and twenty-first century skills built into their courses as part of ACU's industry-immersed model of education.

ACU's courses will be progressively transformed to embed the 3-D model of a digitally-rich education: **digital skills** and literacy (including data analytics/visualisation and competence in baseline workplace software packages such as the Microsoft and Adobe suites); **digital experiences**, such as the use of augmented/virtual reality in coursework and simulations; and **digital applications**, including the use of artificial intelligence and the 'internet of things' in discipline-specific business applications.

ACU's schools and faculties will build a nexus between research and their education programs, including their curricula and student experiences. Teaching practices will be evidence-based and supported by scholarly-active academics with strong links to industry.

5. Over 80 per cent of ACU's funding comes from the federal government. ACU's dependency on Commonwealth funding is 25 per cent higher than the sector average.

Adapt to a changing landscape

Our Landscape provided an overview of key trends in the higher education sector, including digital transformation, the rise of micro-credentialing, and the emergence of new sources of competition. A key manifestation of these changes is students' growing demand for flexibility and competitors' development, in response, of new models of provision.

ACU will need to adapt its education programs and its student experience accordingly, delivering **accessibility, personalisation and flexibility through enrolment, stackable credentials, and hybrid delivery models** that enable students to study in ways that suit their lifestyle and preferences. This will be especially important for ACU to grow its presence in postgraduate and mature age student markets. ACU will also need a sharper proposition to attract international students, developing **course offerings, work experience settings, and delivery locations that align to international students' preferences** and drivers of choice.

Discussion questions

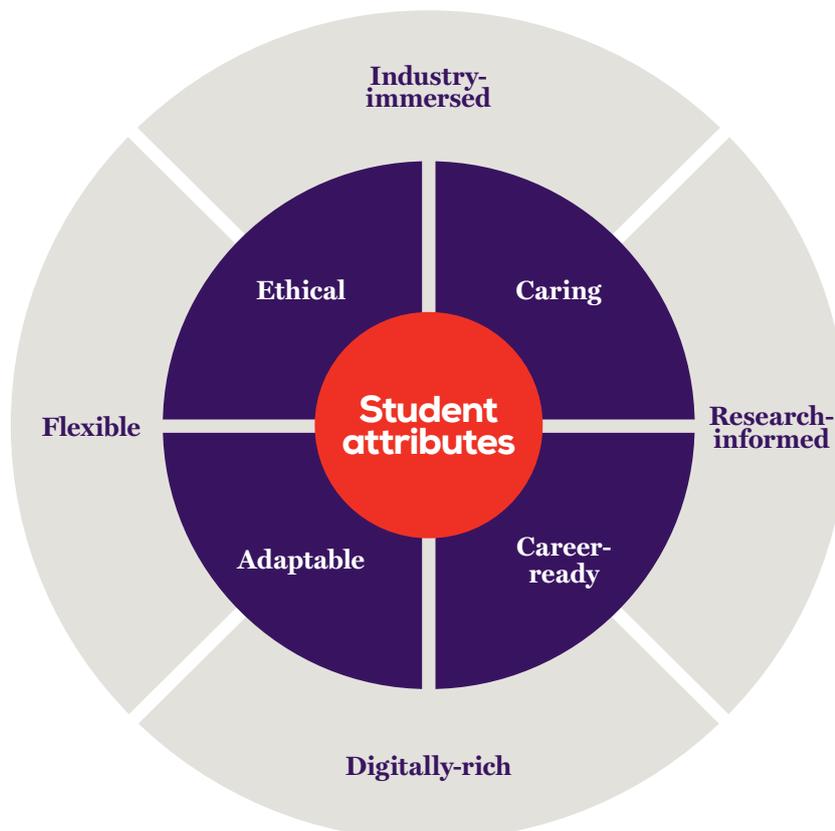
Q1: How can ACU adapt its education model to develop the whole person?

Q2: How can ACU better deliver globally-relevant, accessible, personalised, and flexible learning experiences to its students?

Q3: What would enable the growth and diversification of our student community over the next decade?

Q4: What would enable ACU to be the preferred place for our students to return to and pursue further education over their lifetime?

ACU education model



High-impact research

By 2033, we will have

- Achieved sustained diversity in our sources of research funding
- Developed a reputation for our focus on outcomes, our engagement with community and industry, and our impact on key issues linked to human dignity and the common good
- Sustained our reputation for research excellence and infused research into all our education programs

ACU's current approach to research stands on the outcomes of the previous research-intensification strategy. The model rapidly lifted ACU's research capability and publication output for several years, delivering pockets of deep strength and growth in key research output metrics that underpin the institution's rise in international rankings. This approach has built concentrations of research activity in institutes that relied heavily on internal sources of funding.

ACU Vision 2033 provides the vehicle for ACU to transition to a more multi-faceted approach to research; one which retains excellence at its heart but is much more engaged with external partners and communities. The focus will be on delivering high quality research to impact the major societal challenges of our time, by leveraging connections across faculties, institutes, and integrating with the University's education programs. The transition will see ACU researchers move to a 'research-portfolio' management approach, where publications are but one form of measurable output and impact.

Research-led solutions, co-developed with stakeholders, as a sustainable strategy for growth

ACU seeks to find solutions to societal challenges that align to the organisation's mission and areas of research and educational strength. Many public and private sector organisations share this goal, including the Catholic health, education, welfare sectors, and beyond.

ACU will form partnerships and alliances with such like-minded organisations, domestically and internationally, to span the community-based solutions development and

delivery value-chain that empowers action. It will align its research endeavours in service of the shared goals of the local communities in which it operates and the global communities it supports. Wherever possible, this will involve co-development research models, and jointly-scoped and funded programs of work.

The approach will be underpinned by an externally-focused culture and dedicated skills around external engagement, partnership development, and networking/relationship building. ACU will also build its entrepreneurial capacity and capability, to lift levels of contract research, consulting and commercialisation as activities that enhance impact.

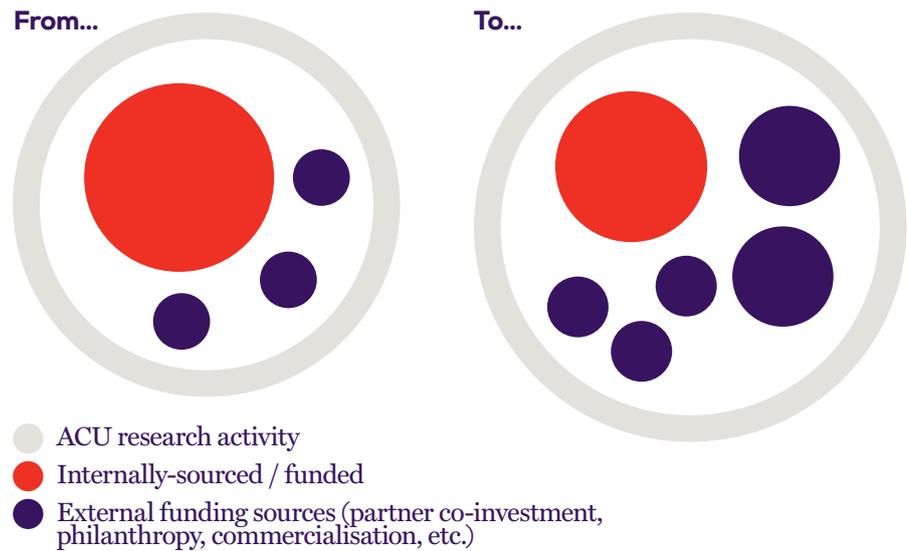
ACU's physical research capacity is currently limited and dominated by higher-level academics. As such, ACU Vision 2033 will include a greater emphasis on PhD students and early-career researchers to widen the research-profile, as well as joint PhD programs with domestic and international partners from public and private sectors. Internal funding and resources will focus on seeding impact-focused programs of work and partnerships, particularly those that harness (and grow) ACU's capabilities across disciplines. Research-only roles will be more limited as the university progressively transitions to a wider base of research-and-teaching staff with an increased focus on a variety of strategically aligned external-funding that includes grant and non-grant sources.

The target outcome will be reshaping ACU's research resources, activity, and funding profile, as illustrated in the following schematic. This will enable the long-term growth of high-quality research activity, impact, and income.

Transitioning to a new model of research



Shifting the locus of research activity and funding



Internally interconnected, externally relevant: A research culture that breaks down silos and fosters research-informed education

ACU's future research model will access the full gamut of the university's research capability by reducing internal boundaries to interdisciplinary research, and by enforcing sustained, strong interconnections between research institutes and faculties. This will help the university produce relevant, contemporary research and research-led education programs that link across discipline boundaries to enhance the student experience.

ACU Vision 2033 will support the growth of research activity within faculties through greater use of research-and-teaching roles, reduction in the complexity to gain supervisor status and increases in HDR loads, broadening the faculty contribution to research at ACU and helping to grow the university's research output, which has plateaued over the last three years.

Breaking down institute-faculty silos will provide ACU students with greater exposure to research and research-active academics and enable the development of research-informed curricula. Faculties and institutes will harness these connections to grow the pipeline of

graduates and HDR candidates and widen career-path options available to early-career researchers. Ideally, courses at all levels will incorporate some research exposure and/or be structured to enhance the pipeline to major areas of research activity.

Externally engaged research will also form a major attractor to students as they seek to be part of the networks that are attempting to solve the major challenges of the day. Joint PhDs, Masters and Honours projects with major collaborators will be a major engine of growth.

Discussion questions

Q1: How can ACU transition to a more externally-engaged model of research?

Q2: What cross-institutional initiatives would enhance opportunities for research collaboration?

Immersive partnerships, inclusive communities

By 2033, we will have

- Forged a series of strategic partnerships, replenished, and renewed over time, sustained by a co-development mindset and capability
- Harnessed our co-development approach to galvanise project-specific relationships and outcomes
- Deepened our engagement with community, centred around our campuses, students, alumni, research partners and the communities they live and work in

Co-development of partnerships focused on impact

ACU's relationships with industry, government, and community organisations, including a diverse, thriving Catholic sector, will be crucial for it to sustain its impact and long-term viability in the face of growing competition and constrained government funding. High-value, immersive co-development partnerships, and targeted multi-party alliances will become a greater part of the research mix.

Immersive partnerships, providing a basis by which the university's staff and students integrate more directly with external organisations, will feature mutual

development of goals and return multi-faceted benefits (e.g., mission-related impact, workforce development, leadership training and joint intellectual property). Joint staff appointments, shared professional-development, mutual board representation, and integrated student programs will deepen the connections. To serve this agenda, ACU will bolster partnership development and relationship management capability and processes. This could be underpinned by an outcome-focused Define-Map-Discover-Build approach:

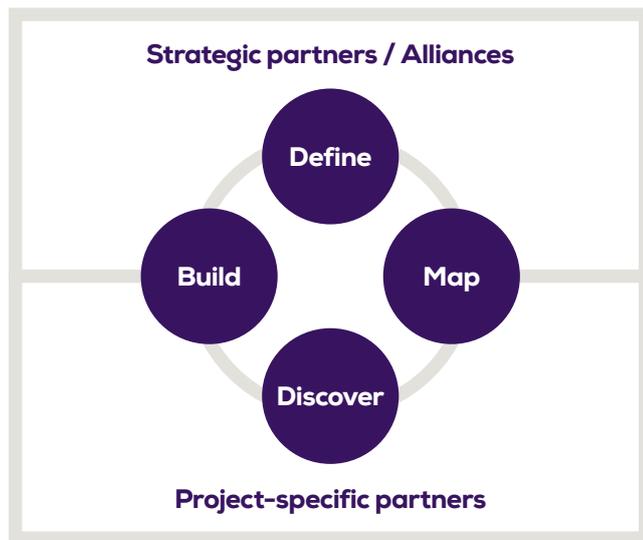
- Define target issues
- Map potential partners
- Discover shared goals
- Build impact-focused, joint programs of work

Much of ACU's current engagement is tactical and project-based, rather than thematic or programmatic. The focus on research partnerships and co-creation, as part of ACU Vision 2033 and a method like Define-Map-Discover-Build, will see the organisation move towards a more programmatic, collaborative research agenda.

The Industry Engagement unit can support this work, but more importantly it will require a research culture with an external focus, and new competency frameworks, training programs and KPIs will need to be developed. Rewards for staff will come from more-impactful work, funding for research, student pipelines, and enriched career paths.



Towards the development of immersive partnerships



In the first phase of ACU Vision 2033 consultations, one of the key themes that emerged was the need for ACU to become a 'connected global partner'. Many of ACU's greatest strengths, relationship opportunities, and potential for mission-related impact lie in Australia. However, select global partnerships should be targeted where they align to key areas of opportunity and need, focused on complementary capabilities. This could include student twinning programs and joint institutes, to create a pipeline of students and researchers that are globally connected and can secure international funding. The key will be to partner in areas where the collaboration can yield high-quality solutions to problems that ACU itself cannot tackle, thereby attracting the best student and researcher talent.

Serving our communities with distinction

With its distinctive footprint, ACU has a unique opportunity to amplify its mission over the next decade by co-creating transformative futures with the communities we serve. Advancing the common good by generating tangible and meaningful impact on our communities sits at the core of our purpose as a Catholic university. Expanding and scaling our community impact requires taking a holistic approach to community engagement—one which weaves through ACU's core streams, including curriculum development (pathways, UG, PG, HDR), research and scholarship, First Peoples and student engagement, outreach programs, immersive/service learning, community-building projects, and campus/space utilisation.

Examples of impactful initiatives could include the co-design and co-delivery of tailored short-courses and micro-credentials to address specific community needs and gaps; the revitalisation and re-envisioning of ACU campuses as 'community spaces' and/or 'anchor institutions' of the local community; establishing social incubator/accelerator programs; amongst others. An interconnected and dynamic ecosystem of community partners would enable the university to contribute to the strengthening of democratic and civic responsibility values, as well as enhance its social license in local, regional, and national socio-geographic contexts. Achieving value-driven community engagement will entail aligning institutional efforts across portfolios and building capability and capacity in the context of community-university partnerships.

Discussion questions

Q1: How can ACU maximise its community engagement and mission-driven impact over the next decade?

Q2: What initiatives would enable ACU to foster communities of collaboration and knowledge-creation?



A thriving institution

By 2033, we will have

- Oriented the student experience and support services to serve a more diverse student body
 - Reinvigorated campus life
 - Stabilised and grown our finances, delivering sustained surpluses at or above the Senate target of 6%
-

ACU as an institution relies on:

Our students

At the heart of ACU's mission and reputation and the source of the vast majority of ACU's funding.

Our people

Talented academics and professionals who bring our mission to life.

Our communities

The driving force of our mission. It is with and for our communities that we seek to be global change-makers.

Our campuses

Physical and virtual spaces where the mission comes to life, and the locus for much of ACU's community engagement.

Our students will form a much more diverse profile over the next decade. In addition to school-leavers, ACU will focus on mature age, postgraduate, non-award, First Peoples and equity group students, and a larger, more diverse pool of international students. ACU's faculties and operational support teams will need to orient systems and processes to serve the needs of this diverse student body and to grow student retention well beyond current levels. Marketing and student recruitment teams will need new ways of reaching diverse student groups and providing a seamless journey from enquiry to enrolment.

Our people are our core strength. We will need to attract and retain excellent staff. Our career paths, work environment and culture will develop, and reward committed, talented academics and professional staff. At the same time, we will need to shift staff costs down through a new operational blueprint and maintain them at a lower level over the course of ACU Vision 2033. Our people costs have been among the

highest in the sector as a proportion of income – this is not sustainable. The new blueprint will include strengthening the role staff have in supporting revenue growth.

Our communities are broad and diverse. We establish and nourish networks of reciprocal collaboration to co-create sustainable, fair, and prosperous futures for all. As part of ACU Vision 2033, the university could seek to build on current strengths yet play a greater and more prominent role in our local and international communities. Forming and nourishing a holistic, inclusive, and dynamic ecosystem of community partners will be an essential element in amplifying our mission.

Our campuses and those across the sector weathered major disruptions during the Covid-19 pandemic. Many of those disruptions are now coalescing into permanent features of university life: staff and students alike have voted with their feet for hybrid models of work/study. Physical campuses still have a vital role to play in the experience of many students. This is likely to be a combination of attending campus for some or all of their education program, social activities, community engagement, and securing experiences with industry as part of a broader precinct-model. Likewise, most staff will want some form of face-to-face engagement with students, peers, and the broader community as part of their work life.

The challenge for ACU in the years ahead is to orient campus life and the physical spaces to serve these new realities and to reinvigorate campuses accordingly. Virtual campuses and work-from-home should be integrated into new models of student and staff life,

including specific forms of engagement tailored to online students and staff. The organisation will need to develop new measures of campus vibrancy and asset utilisation. Priority should go to re-purposing and maximising the use of under-utilised existing facilities before investing in new ones.

ACU will also need to evolve the culture of the institution. As part of strategy consultations, the ACU community called for innovation and agility as key elements for ACU to foster cross-functional collaboration and a ‘test and learn’ mindset. Consistent growth of a stable core, primarily in health and education, was a feature of ACU in the decade prior to the pandemic. ACU’s student, course, research and funding profile will be much more diverse and fluid in the decade ahead. The institution will need a more dynamic culture to secure that future. That may be uncomfortable at times, but will also generate excitement and opportunity.

Discussion questions

Q1: How can ACU create additional transformative experiences for our students, people, and communities?

Q2: How can ACU embed further sustainability initiatives into campus optimisation actions?

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Let's continue the conversation

Your input, feedback and questions are encouraged to enrich our new ten-year strategy, as we approach its final drafting stage.

Submit your ideas through the online form or via email by Friday, 5 May 2023.

Email:
ACUVision2033@acu.edu.au

Further discussion questions

Q1: Are there additional strategic opportunities that the university could consider as part of ACU Vision 2033?

Q2: Which of the ideas presented in *Our Future* resonates most with you? Do any of these require revision and/or change?

