

Vice-Chancellor's message

A year of transition



Southern Cross University (SCU) commenced operations as an autonomous institution in 1994, so the year 2004 presented an opportunity to celebrate the University's tenth anniversary. The celebrations included an ecumenical service and an evening concert at which the University awarded an Honorary Doctorate to the NSW Governor Professor Marie Bashir. The high level of community support for the University demonstrated by the attendance and participation in the celebrations was especially gratifying.

The progressive implementation in 2004 of the provisions of the Higher Education Support Act 2003 enabled the University to bid for additional Commonwealth supported places to meet burgeoning student demand, especially at the Coffs Harbour and Tweed Gold Coast campuses. The bid was successful, with an additional 295 student places allocated in 2005. The relatively late notification of these new places necessitated a major marketing thrust, which augmented the University's regular marketing strategy. The continued growth in enrolments of both Australian and international students at the Tweed Gold Coast Campus was higher than expected, and the University submitted a bid for funding in 2007 from the Capital Development Pool. An initial allocation of \$2m was notified late in the year, which enabled the University to proceed to detailed planning.

The significant administrative changes required to meet the new Australian Government funding requirements were made in a timely fashion, and the University formally signed the 2005 Funding Agreement with the Commonwealth in October. The Agreement includes a detailed specification of the student load required to be delivered in twelve defined funding clusters, which is a level of enrolment precision not previously imposed on universities.

The University takes a significant proportion of its students from regions of low socio-economic standing, and in May

2004, Council determined that it would not impose any surcharge on students' Higher Education Contribution for 2005.

Research took another leap forward with the announcement of funding for three new Cooperative Research Centres in which the University is a core participant. In two cases, the CRC for National Plant Biosecurity and the CRC for Contamination Assessment and Remediation of the Environment, the University is the Education Program Leader in addition to its role as a research provider.

The University also established the Aged Services Learning and Research Centre, based at the Coffs Harbour campus, to focus on the needs of a coastal region experiencing an influx of retirees. Given that the sea-change phenomenon is worldwide, the Centre's work will have wide application.

The University's offshore academic programs have continued to expand. This is particularly pleasing in light of the appreciating Australian dollar and the increasing or new recruitment activities of countries in our region.

A number of new initiatives occurred in 2004 which will have long term implications. Following widespread consultation in 2003 the Leadership and Management Development Strategy was endorsed by Executive. The program addresses the needs of staff at all levels in the University. An external review of the functionality of the University's administrative and support functions was commissioned. And a planning group was established to update the University's ten strategic directions and review the overall priorities in light of the rapid change in the University's external environment. The consultation process associated with this review will occupy the first half of 2005.

During the year the University appointed its third Vice-Chancellor and farewelled the previous incumbent, Professor John Rickard, who took up the position of Vice-Chancellor at Central Queensland University.

Southern Cross University has successfully met all of the challenges asked of it in this year of transition. The University is well placed to seize the opportunities that will arise in 2005 as its standing and recognition continue to grow.



Professor Paul Clark
Vice-Chancellor, Southern Cross University