Strategic Plan
The New Southern Cross
2020 – 2026
Our aspiration is to firmly establish Southern Cross University among the top 50 young universities in the world by 2026. This will require new ways of thinking and doing. It will necessitate some bold transformations. And it will see us redefining our university from its foundations — using the talents which we already possess. We are ready.

Professor
Adam Shoemaker
Vice Chancellor
Southern Cross University
Southern Cross University is a multi-campus university on Australia’s east coast, founded in northern New South Wales. We are proud of our reputation as a progressive institution, engaging with the regions we serve to create change that has impact around the world.

Our regional campuses are located at the Gold Coast Airport, Lismore and at Coffs Harbour, where the University’s National Marine Science Centre is also located. The University’s metropolitan campuses are located in Sydney, Melbourne, Brisbane and Perth.

The regions we call home all have unique characteristics as study locations – from cosmopolitan cities, thriving industries and coastal lifestyles to living laboratories of great natural beauty and ecological diversity – all right next door to our campuses.

Our locations have a profound influence on our teaching and academic programs, from business degrees that examine responsible investment and ecological tourism, to marine science that is helping to regenerate the Reef, and engineering that is making our urban environments smarter and more sustainable. We celebrate our cultural diversity with the Fusion Festival every year because it is diversity that makes us bold and pushes us to challenge the status quo.

Southern Cross delivers degrees on campus and online. A rich academic portfolio covers the arts and humanities, law and justice, social sciences, health – including nursing and midwifery, osteopathy, naturopathic medicine and a selection of allied health specialities. From teaching and education to digital health, media and information technology; from tourism to science and engineering as well as marine, forest and environmental science. Indigenous knowledge is an area of strong emphasis, with professional placements a feature of most degrees.

Our research centres have deep connections to the communities we serve and the environment in which we live. Each are committed to producing impactful research with global relevance, be it in biogeochemistry, marine science, organic agriculture, plant science and geoscience, adolescent development or flood mitigation. In the latest Excellence in Research for Australia report, Southern Cross achieved outstanding ratings of ‘at world standard’ or above in 23 research fields. In 14 research fields the University was evaluated at the highest possible classification of ‘well above world standard’.

Southern Cross is ranked in the top 150 Young Universities in the World by the Times Higher Education World University Rankings. We are proud of our achievements to date – but we harbour even greater ambitions for the future.
Southern Cross University is young enough to be quick-footed, excellent enough to be esteemed. Together we can fulfil the institution’s potential and its responsibility: as Australia’s Engaged University – with a proud Indigenous and international heritage that embraces the wider world.

Southern Cross University aims to double its enrolments and research income between 2020 and 2026; achieving a scale that is essential not only to the University’s sustainability, but also to its commitment to creating a better future through research and education.

Excellence in scholarship is a hallmark of the University. Our commitment is to attract great researchers to complement our areas of strength. Our research will embrace regional industries and communities as allies and collaborators; from the Gold Coast Airport to the Byron Writers Festival.

We will pioneer a cooperative approach to higher education. We will focus on research that changes society and the way in which issues are perceived.

Our promise is to deliver the most valued educational experience in Australia. Southern Cross will become the university of choice for students on the basis of its distinctive, high-quality courses, and its ongoing commitment to personalised student support. Professional and academic staff will engage with students as learning peers.

That commitment will result in a growing demand for Southern Cross qualifications from students from across Australia and around the globe.

The University will remain strongly connected to local Elders and First Peoples in the broad arc of our operations. We will forge new connections with other local and national communities – mutually enriching our respective capabilities, capacity and networks.

International partnerships in Japan, China, Indonesia and Papua New Guinea will be particularly significant.

Importantly, the University will maintain its unwavering commitment to justice: social, environmental and Indigenous.

The Southern Cross promise of connectedness, excellence and cooperative research impact will be real and consistent for staff, students and alumni, regardless of which campus they are at, which bus station, lunch room, or library they use to access their online studies, or which career they create.
Our Ethos

For What Matters.

Southern Cross University has a unique point of difference. We stand for what matters: to students, to individuals, to the community and to the world.

This is a point of intense pride as well as of difference. It is why we are a foundation sponsor of the Byron Writers Festival; it is why we are the only Australian University to hold an annual Indigenous Elders – University Council Day. And it is why our Council voted in favour of Marriage Equality in November 2017, and in support of the Uluru ‘Statement from the Heart’ in April 2019.

Our Northern Rivers region is incredibly distinctive. It has the highest per capita number of creative media and industry professionals in regional Australia. It has the greatest number of organic farmers, businesses and producers. It is a region of enterprise and entrepreneurialism – with the highest number of new business formations outside capital cities and one of the highest densities of Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) in Australia. Its people are not afraid to challenge the status quo, nor to fiercely defend the natural environment. It is a mecca for responsible tourism. It is the Australian headquarters for music and performance festivals.

The environment matters; so our researchers are helping to restore the Great Barrier Reef. Our health and education matters; so we are dedicated to training the very best nurses, midwives, teachers and allied health practitioners for the benefit of Australia and the world. Enterprise with integrity matters; so we are creating a network of Enterprise Labs to cultivate the next generation of entrepreneurs and social enterprises to advance society.

Art matters; so we are infusing creativity in everything we do – from digital media, 3D printing, performance, through to guided robotics. And, finally, justice matters; so we are committed – in the strongest possible terms – to producing social welfare and a truly reconciled and prosperous reality together with Indigenous colleagues, communities and Elders.
Our Purpose

To translate the challenges faced in the backyard into solutions for the front yard, as well as for the rest of the world.

The Southern Cross University Act 1993 established that the institution would provide courses of study across a range of fields, and carry out research, to meet the needs of the community. It empowers us to operate across the globe.

Against our legal foundation, we invoke the metaphor of 'from backyard to the world' as our call to action. It is more than geography or proximity. It is about values and actions; of pro bono work; of investment of both time and money. It is a reflection of our absolute need to recognise our people, our region, and our public purpose. It signals our commitment to creating beneficial impact for the communities who sustain our institution, and in doing so, producing value for people elsewhere.

It means embracing local industries in our partnership, service, research and procurement. It means engaging at all levels with the Indigenous community in respecting and reflecting its priorities for our region and our institution, from the Australian Indigenous Mentoring Experience (AIME) program for high school students, to the extensive outreach work of the Gnibi College of Indigenous Australian Peoples.

It entails leveraging our intensive educational and public contribution in the visual arts, music and performance for the benefit of citizens in our region. And it means co-designing research-in-action, in areas as wide-ranging as groundwater research; justice investigations; social welfare projects; health clinics and research enterprises; creative composition and studies of the efficacy of the National Disability Insurance Scheme.

Put simply, our purpose is to serve our communities intellectually, and in doing so provide solutions that have local, national and global application. To own the concept of translation ‘from the backyard to the front yard’ means doing so in both policy and practice. Our special contribution will be one of taking that ‘front yard’ impact anywhere it is required.
Our Goal

To become firmly established among the top 50 young universities in the world by 2026.

By 2026, Southern Cross University will have realised its potential; firmly establishing itself among the top 50 young universities in the world. Our institution will have a total size of 20 000 Equivalent Full-Time Student Enrolments (EFTSL); proudly integrating a 60:40 mix of Australian and international students. We do not seek this growth for its own sake; but in recognition that sustainable growth enables us to deliver our purpose with greater impact.

By 2026, we will derive more than $500 million in annual revenue, across Lismore, Coffs Harbour, Gold Coast, Sydney, Melbourne, Brisbane, Adelaide and online campuses. We will reinvest any surpluses into research with application and impact; in new student amenities and accommodation, and in developing the careers of our colleagues.

Each of Lismore, Coffs Harbour and Gold Coast campuses will enjoy premium on-site student accommodation and support – with the Gold Coast campus operating on both sides of the Gold Coast Highway. In partnership with a mix of high-quality Japanese, Chinese, Indonesian and Papua New Guinean education institutions, we will be delivering our curriculum overseas to around 1000 full-time equivalent students.

We will have consciously maintained an effective student to staff ratio of 25:1 – in part through better utilising enhanced digital pedagogies – employing more than 630 full-time academics and 500 professional colleagues.

Internationally, we will be recognised as research and application leaders in biogeochemistry, naturopathic medicine; Indigenous knowledge; marine science; flood mitigation and response; tourism research; regenerative agriculture; and responsible enterprise. In the backyard, we will still be renowned for the excellent teachers, nurses, midwives, lawyers, accountants, artists and entrepreneurs we cultivate. Indigenous Elders will have guided us every step of the way and – we pledge that – together we will work to shape a truly reconciled reality.

In recognition of our research excellence we will be receiving $40 million in research income and $10 million from industry annually. Our researchers will be increasingly cited the world over and acclaimed locally for the innovations they introduce.

And we will have done all of this consistent with our values of integrity, collegiality, and belonging – proud of our regional roots but equally at home anywhere.
Our Distinction

We will be known as the university of the subtropics, transitions, and caring for country.

Southern Cross is a progressive, young and ambitious university. We recognise the power of bringing together all members of the Southern Cross family to achieve more in tandem and in collaboration. After careful consideration, the University community has settled on three special horizontal themes to shape our activities over the next seven years of this plan. In each of these three cases we aim to lead Australia in the field, to continuously break new ground, and to render our achievements ever better.
1. Subtropical Australia

There has been particularly strong support for the theme of the Subtropical – especially as it relates to Environmental Science, but also in relation to Health and Allied Health, Forest Science, Marine Science, the Visual Arts and Music, Social Science, Law, and many others. Colleagues believe that this theme cross-cuts a huge amount of our research and learning, and that it will sharpen the sense of close connection which we have with the Coffs Coast, the Northern Rivers and Southeast Queensland. It will appeal to international and interstate students alike. It will act as a drawcard for eminent research academics. And it will emphasise the sense of place to which our Engagement programs are committed.

We will work hard to make this happen at the highest standard of research and teaching excellence and to honour the amazing region in which we live. At the same time, we will seek to become known as one of the top Subtropical Universities.
2. Transitions

A very high proportion of colleagues support the theme of aspiring to lead in the area of Transitions. This relates to our aspiration to be the go-to regional university in Australia for the highest quality and most effective pathways into – and back into – degree study at any age and any stage of life. As many would be aware, Southern Cross has successfully enrolled students as young as 16 and as old as 96.

But Transitions also embraces another clear distinction – the University’s Pathway Programs, symbolised by SCU College, are by any measure among the finest in the nation. At the same time, the Transitions theme centres on the fact that many young people fail at transitions hurdles in schools (the onset of adolescence; the commencement of high school; or the completion of Year 10). We see these as being crucial national issues of wellness, education, the enhancement of mental health and of capacity-building.

Therefore, we have identified that – especially in the area of teaching pedagogy and education – we can contribute an enormous amount to our undergraduate teacher preparation; our research and our engagement. This applies just as strongly to students who prefer the online mode of study and to international students whose transition to Australian life and culture forms a key element of their success.
3. Caring for Country

The third key theme is that of Caring for Country. We have already held in-depth meetings to discuss this proposal with the Elders of the different Indigenous nations which underpin our Queensland and NSW campus operations – from the Yugambeh in the Tweed-Gold Coast region to the land of the Bundjalung to the proud territory of the Gumbaynggirr in Coffs Harbour.

Based upon all of these soundings, we are proposing that the theme of Caring for Country should be foundational to our vision and mission. It connects disciplines in all schools; people in all areas of the University – and all students and staff. It is as relevant to the Centre for Organics Research as it is to the teaching program in Social Welfare. It applies to the School of Law and Justice thoroughly and potently. It embraces almost all disciplines in the School of Environment, Science and Engineering. It connects those in health, in Naturopathic Medicine and in Plant Science. It evokes the Arts, Music and Performance.

Naturally, the theme is born alongside the concept of Indigenous Knowledge and is inspired by the scholars in the Gnibi College of Indigenous Australian Peoples. Most importantly, it is generated through productive and ongoing discussions with, and the guidance of, the Elders. We will continue to have further respectful talks about how to go forward in this area in partnership with them. This will be an ongoing marker of pride, of difference and of distinctive engagement for every member of the Southern Cross community.
Our Responsibility and Accountability

The Vice Chancellor is accountable to University Council for implementing the Strategic Plan.

To ensure functional and accountable governance, University work units are organised around seven Executive leads for key thematic areas of operations: Research, Academic, Students, Engagement, Global, Finance, and Operations. Each has a portfolio work plan to align with the objectives, and ultimately deliver the strategic goal.
Our Strategies

Research

Transformational Research
R1: Create a culture of sustainable research excellence
R2: Apply resources for global impact
R3: Incentivise quality publication and productive output
R4: Integrate teaching with research
R5: Build research capacity and income

Academic

Outstanding Teaching
A1: Achieve curriculum reform for distinction and uplift
A2: Optimise academic governance for quality, speed and clarity
A3: Grow our educational collaborations
A4: Incentivise teaching excellence
A5: Introduce a uniquely strong academic year

Student

Inspired Experience
S1: Ensure safe and inclusive campuses and accommodation
S3: Deliver a distinctive and positive student experience
S4: Give students a real voice in running the University
S5: Support students to their potential

Finance

Prudent Management
F1: Plan for financial growth
F2: Distill the financial implications of Southern Cross’s choices
F3: Provide real-time reporting of our strategic progress
F4: Enable the delivery of new infrastructure

Engagement

Amplified Partnership
E1: Cultivate healthy partnerships for impact
E2: Promote our distinctiveness throughout Australia and the world
E3: Strategically grow our reputation and celebrate our excellence
E4: Align our graduates with our ongoing impact journey
E5: Create a culture of giving, activating our mission

Global

World Connection
G1: Promote our distinctive offerings internationally
G2: Provide Australia’s best international student support
G3: Connect our staff with overseas institutions and scholars
G4: Confidently take our students abroad

Operations

Optimised Service
O1: Optimise our digital operations
O2: Simplify our administrative processes
O3: Masterplan all of our campuses – including online
O4: Ensure the highest level of safety and respect
O5: Plan and build the infrastructure our growth requires
Our Progress

We will measure our performance in 2026 against the following key institutional indicators:

**Employability**
75% of undergraduates and 86% of postgraduates in full-time employment within four months of completing their course.

**Enrolment**
20,000 total EFTSL.

**Experience**
Retention rate of 75% of all commencing Bachelor degree students.

**Finance**
Achievement of a 6% Base Operating Margin.

**Governance**
Unconditional University TEQSA registration obtained for the period 2022 – 2029.

**Internationalisation**
The highest level of student mobility of any university in regional Australia.

**Operations**
Increased staff and student satisfaction with service provision in key areas: website, information technology, student administration, human resources, and facilities.

**Philanthropy**
$10 million in philanthropic donations received during the 2019 – 2026 period.

**Recruitment**
Increased market share of school leavers in Southern Cross Campus Regions.

**Research**
Systematic uplift in Research and Citations measured by the Times Higher Education World Rankings.

**Teaching**
Top quartile in Quality Indicators for Teaching and Learning (QILT) – Overall quality of educational experience.