Monash University: The next ten years
Monash University was established in Melbourne, Australia in 1958. We are named after Sir John Monash, a famous Australian who contributed to almost every level of Australian life.

Sir John had a simple philosophy: “...equip yourself for life, not merely for your own benefit, but for the benefit of the whole community.”
In 2005, following extensive consultation across the Monash family, Monash University published *Monash Directions 2025*. That document was visionary in its scope and ambition, it has served the University well for almost a decade, and its general principles continue to animate us. But the pace of change in the university world, not fully anticipated when 2025 was written, means it needs replacing. A twenty-year plan is no longer appropriate.

This document draws upon the thinking in *Monash Directions 2025* and extensive consultation from across the Monash community to lay out a top-level plan for the next ten years.

It is designed to be the ‘light on the hill’: to describe where we would like to be in 2022 and to sketch out what we need to do to get there. It is not a detailed roadmap. The specifics of how we will move forward are the province of the operational and strategic plans.
Context

Global
The pace of change is greater now than at any time since the middle ages. The information revolution, though still in its infancy, has dramatically changed how we access and use information. The rise of Asia may end a five-hundred-year era of European domination that encompassed the enlightenment and the Agrarian and Industrial Revolutions. A student entering university today has a one-in-three chance of living to a hundred. Most will have several careers before retiring in their seventies, with extended periods of retraining and study. An open knowledge economy in a single world market will mean that excellence in tertiary education and research is judged in an international context.

Australian
For millennia, Indigenous peoples have lived in Australia, in intricate societies with complex traditions. The late 1700s saw us become a British outpost and then an independent nation aligned with the United States. We are now entering a new phase, as the geopolitics of the Asia-Pacific shift around us. The rise of China, India and South-East Asia presents huge opportunities for Australia. We have the chance to prove that we are more than our minerals, to be a clever nation that collaborates with Asia. Our graduates must be prepared for a knowledge-based economy, which means building upon our thriving higher education provision, not just in quantity, but in quality. In a global market, we cannot compete on price. We must do so on excellence.

The future of the higher education sector
From the clerical origins of Oxford and Bologna, to the German research university model, to the American model born in the Truman years, universities have always evolved. At each stage, there has been a huge advantage to those who saw the future and embraced it early.

Today’s world faces huge challenges around creating economic and environmental sustainability and social and cultural equity. Institutions that aspire to greatness will contribute substantially to overcoming those challenges, both by educating the students who will tackle them and by developing blue sky and applied knowledge themselves. They will cultivate a deep knowledge of the local education and research priorities of the communities in which they operate. They will develop relationships between countries through the cultivation of intellectual links. And they will provide even more learning and research opportunities than they do today, embracing the possibilities offered by new technologies that will dramatically change the way we teach and learn.

In Australia, the university system is changing rapidly. A failed attempt to create a homogenous sector is being replaced by a model that encourages each university to play to its own strengths. We now face the challenges of uncapping of places but not – at least initially – of domestic fees. International markets grow ever-more competitive. We cannot tread water. We must continually improve, measured against others and ourselves.
Monash today

One can make a plausible case that there is no university in the world that has as much opportunity as Monash University does today. There is much that equips us to meet the challenges outlined above.

There is our history. We were born of a desire for equity. When Monash was being planned in the 1950s, the university sector in all western countries was small and elite – less that 5% of young people had the opportunity for university study. Part of Monash’s brief was to make that opportunity available to a broader section of the community. We have always been a comprehensive university, offering students the full range of disciplines. This broad base remains today as a key strength and puts Monash at the forefront of interdisciplinary possibilities in teaching and research. And right from our inception, we have had a history of academic excellence.

There is also our geography. We have had an international focus for some time. We were one of the first institutions to admit large numbers of international students. We realised early, in a way leading US universities are only doing decades later, that a truly international vision required campuses in other countries. It was always implicit that as overseas campuses grew they would become very significant players in the university scene in their own countries. Their contribution to nation building was clear from the outset, traditionally, we have been seen as an outlier in the Australian environment, distinguished by size, geographic footprint and complexity from all others. But it is increasingly more accurate to see us as an exemplar of a large, multi-campus university serving different regions, a type of institution of which there are many around the world.

But there is still much to do.
Key principles 2012 – 2022

Values

From the brief history laid out above, from Monash Futures and from other vision statements, four key themes emerge. Taken together, they articulate what we stand for, carving a distinctive identity in the global higher education market.

1. Our students come first.
   That is not to say we are guided exclusively by focus groups and student demands. We understand our students’ aspirations and societal demands but also have a profound, constantly evolving understanding of what should be taught and how. We aim to prepare young people for a life where they may have many careers. We are flexible and attuned to the needs of mature students. Monash graduates will be sought after by employers around the world.

2. We are committed to absolute excellence.
   We pursue absolute excellence in the education of students, in the development of knowledge that improves the human condition, in leading a culture of respect, fairness and equity for all within and outside our walls, in running our university as well as we possibly can and in providing opportunities and encouraging our staff to excel. We value innovation in all that we do. These principles apply wherever we operate around the world.
   We aim for excellence in all we do. We do not define this in a narrow or even a traditional university way. We aim to offer superb education that meets societal needs and fits students for successful careers, instilling them with lifelong learning ambitions. We aim to conduct a broad range of breakthrough research that improves life in communities around us and impacts around the world.

3. We are hungry.
   We are competitive but largely with ourselves. We want to be the best university we can be and have a global impact. We are willing to do things differently from the university norm. We are constantly looking for new opportunities and new ways of doing things that allow us to do our job better.

4. We are young.
   Like all good youthful institutions, we are passionate about fairness and social equity, a passion that defines how we see ourselves. We are flexible and vigorous yet maintain rigor and discipline. We are renowned for our ‘can-do’ attitude. We want to change the world!

We are constantly looking for new opportunities and new ways of doing things that allow us to do our job better.
Goals

By 2022, we will be:

1. **The best university within the Asia Pacific.**
   Not one of the best – the very best. We have a real chance because we are already a university of and for the Asia Pacific. No inward-looking Australian university can aspire to that goal in the years ahead. For our students, a Monash degree will be without peer in the region.

2. **A truly global university, both physically and intellectually.**
   This will be a key selling point to both students and research funders. Our international campuses and our wide network of research and teaching collaborations are a promising start, but they are not enough. The new depth alliance with Warwick University, a leading UK institution, is central to this ambition. Joint planning and resource allocation in strategic areas with Warwick will give us a head start over all other Asia-Pacific universities. This will result in attractiveness to elite students, new research and research funding opportunities and global partnerships with industry and governments.

3. **Among the strongest research universities in the world.**
   We will create critical mass in areas where we are or will become world-renowned and in areas relevant to the grand challenges the world faces, particularly areas at the intersections of disciplines. We will focus on research that has a high impact on the world, engaging with local communities and industry to ensure we are meeting the challenges they face.
Strategies
We will meet our goals by:

1 Embracing the distinct identities of each of our campuses and developing the competitive advantages that diversity offers.

We must turn our identity as a globally networked university with multiple campuses and graduate academies into a major strategic advantage. For this to happen, we need to work together. Our structures need to ensure both that leaders retain the autonomy necessary to effectively deliver outcomes and that there is a clear strategic framework for them to operate in.

Embracing and leveraging this model has two key aspects. First, the things that are common to all facets of Monash must be clearly understood and defined. Some of these are expressed in the values above. Others, of huge practical importance, relate to faculty and academic board oversight of academic quality across all Monash campuses and programs.

Second, local visions must be developed and supported by teaching and research programs that optimise the opportunities of local geography. This may entail creating better processes to understand and support local initiatives.

Thus far, we have failed to translate the promise of our non-inner Melbourne campuses into academic or financial competitive advantage. This must change and change now. Massive effort over 20 years has gone into these campuses and they are part of the Monash journey. Changes in mindset at campus and central university level will be essential to ensuring success.

Our outer south-east campuses must provide superb education to the new population centres they serve. Our Malaysian campus must be the best teaching and research university in Malaysia. And our South African campus must contribute significantly to nation building in sub-Saharan Africa. In time, with recognition of contribution, all these campuses will add to Monash University’s lustre.

Monash has thrived with great authority at faculty level and this will continue. However, it is crucial that we take advantage of massive strategic opportunities that align with our forward plans if we are to excel as we can and should.

Not all faculties will take part in every project, but a careful examination of opportunity is essential. In China, India and the Warwick alliance, we currently have probably the three greatest opportunities that Monash has had in its history. It is a key part of faculty leadership’s responsibility to understand the opportunities provided by these initiatives.
Increasing our focus on Asia.

Until recently, Australia was an outer province of an American-European dominated academic world. With the ever-accelerating rise of Asia, we are now equi-poise geographically and culturally between the old and the new at a tipping point in history. What opportunity! In the past, Australia has punched above its weight because we have lateral thinkers who challenge accepted norms.

This is no longer enough. We must access larger talent pools for outstanding staff and students. This sits at the heart of the next phase of our Asia strategy. The development of our joint academy with IITB in Mumbai will build up to 350 PhD students in science and engineering. Our new joint graduate school and research academy with South East University is arguably the most exciting university project in all of China and offers unique masters, PhD and research opportunities for all Monash faculties. It is crucial that they are taken up.

Revolutionising student learning.

We will be a leader in providing education that is appropriate for the new era. Amongst other things, we will ensure that students have the ability to locate and use good quality information in a highly complex and overloaded information environment. The environment we teach in will draw on the best information, including open ware, and encompass state-of-the-art learning spaces and blended approaches, conscious development of character and soft skills, and opening students’ minds to international opportunities. We will resource necessary investment in educational infrastructure, in part through partnerships.

Continuing to strengthen academically.

We will continue the academic strengthening program embraced by the university community, where all research-active academics are required to meet minimum research criteria and are aware of stretch criteria relevant in career building. We must recruit new talent and continue to grow our own. New talent is in huge demand worldwide so we need to show clear advantages to attract top-quality recruits.

One such advantage is our long-nurtured ‘can do’ reputation. Initiatives such as the Warwick partnership and our new research developments in India and China also provide appeal. We must be entrepreneurial in engaging with industry and developing new income sources, and efficient in managing core operations so we can support ambitious research planning.

We will be a leader in providing education that is appropriate for the new era.
5 Giving optimal attention to each campus.

Most of Monash’s academic mass is centred on our three inner-Melbourne campuses. It is these campuses from which our charge to become one of the world’s top research universities will be led. Yet much if not most management attention over the last decade has gone to the diaspora rather than the home base. Going ahead, we must pay appropriate attention to both in our management structures.

6 Continually improving our systems.

Resource is tight and people’s time precious. We must continue to eliminate red tape. In some areas we may have become uncharacteristically risk averse and adopted unduly tight management protocols. We cannot afford inefficient or suboptimal support processes. Considerable progress has been made under Monash Futures in consolidating our operations where appropriate and we must keep looking for sensible efficiencies.

A state-of-the-art IT system will be essential to delivering the ambitions outlined in this paper, so we must continually improve the management and delivery of IT solutions. We will create systems and structures that draw the best out of our professional staff and engage them in delivering on our institutional goals.
Conclusion

The principles, initiatives and structural changes laid out above are top-level strategic directions. The details of how we will implement them and how we will measure our success are the province of the research and educational plans recently developed as part of Monash Futures.

These plans are ambitious, but we are working from a strong base and have already made substantial progress in accomplishing many of them. For these reasons, I strongly believe that everything within this paper is achievable.

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