

RESEARCH PLAN 2013-2017

A modern, vibrant research culture

We will be known for our modern, vibrant research culture – a culture that values academic freedom; a culture that attracts and retains exceptional staff and outstanding students; a culture that cuts across traditional disciplinary boundaries to address global problems; a culture that fosters the very best research and attracts game-changing partnerships; a culture that engages with the local community in Northern Melbourne, in regional Victoria, in Australia and internationally. Our research will make a positive difference to the communities we serve and we will assess the impact of our research by a variety of measures.

By focusing on support and infrastructure that assists staff to build and maintain their research careers, the University will attract, retain and support academic staff who conduct world-class research contributing to local and national innovation.

The University will continue to largely ‘grow its own’ research leaders by hiring promising Early Career Researchers (ECRs) and nurturing their careers so that they can fully achieve their potential. As in many things, a great start is critical and we will ensure that we maximise the opportunities for research staff to make their most effective contributions. There will be an expectation that research staff will build their ability to attract research funding to establish their independent research careers. We will ensure that academic staff (teaching-and-research and research-only) can be effective and productive in research while, equally importantly, being effective in teaching and curriculum development. ‘Teaching’ and ‘Research’ will remain as dual missions of the University and individual workloads for teaching and research staff need to be managed to allow time for both.

In focusing our efforts we have initially identified five cross-disciplinary Research Focus Areas (RFAs) that build on our existing and potential strengths and address some of the most pressing questions affecting the future of human societies and their environments. Cross-disciplinary research as undertaken within RFAs will, over time, become ‘business as usual’ for our University and will ensure that research across the whole institution is strengthened. We will identify and meet niche markets, both on- and off-shore, for Higher Degree by Research students in these focus areas.

RFAs will be led by strong research leaders responsible for engaging researchers across disciplinary boundaries. The critical mass of an RFA will broaden the opportunities for collaboration and game-changing partnerships. Researchers will work together on key research questions and have the potential to significantly increase research income for the University.

The Research Plan aligns with *Future Ready: Strategic Plan 2013-2017* (referred to as *Future Ready*) to ensure that we are known for our excellence, creativity and innovation in relation to the big issues of our time and we are known for providing the enthusiastic leadership needed to make a difference. Research is important in developing our reputation as a university committed to solving global problems and improving the welfare of human societies.

The *Research Plan 2013-2017* provides more detail on the goals in the *Strategic Plan* whilst also providing a framework for the Faculty Research Operational Plans – mandating some directions, actions and measurements in the Plans. It will enable the Plans to evolve as opportunities arise or external circumstances demand institutional change.

La Trobe aims to be one of the world's pre-eminent research universities within ten years. The current Research Plan provides details of the goals and strategies aimed at nurturing our research and increasing its impact.

Keith Nugent

Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Research)

Research Plan Objectives

La Trobe has six key objectives for strengthening research to 2017:

- Improve research quality and impact
- Identify, develop and implement strategically important research partnerships
- Increase cross-disciplinary research collaborations
- Double total research income (from 2010 level), a high proportion of which will come from RFAs
- Improve the Higher Degree by Research (HDR) student experience and distinctiveness
- Improve La Trobe's international research-based institutional ranking.

Progress will be measured against the performance indicators set out in *Future Ready*. We will know we have been successful when La Trobe is known internationally for its modern, vibrant research culture.

Our Strengths

We are committed to developing our existing research strengths and our underutilised potential to raise the quality, impact and volume of research activity; to increase research income and further enhance the international reputation of the University. We will do this primarily through Research Focus Areas (RFAs) and Disciplinary Research Programs (DRPs).

RFAs are a reflection of our existing strengths and build directly on those strengths. La Trobe's strengths are widely known and have been reinforced over many years through traditional research measures - awards, community, industry and government acknowledgement and grant success.

The Excellence in Research for Australia (ERA) 2012 results are the most recent confirmation of the quality of our research.

The University has nine fields of research rated 'well above' world standard (Excellence in Research for Australia (ERA) 2012 rating of '5') – this is equal eleventh in the country. La Trobe is also ranked third in Victoria for research, when assessed on the number of fields of research (FoRs) rating '5', the number at world standard and above (3-5) and the number of four-digit fields (FoRs) of research assessed.

ERA 2012 results confirm our position as the top ranked institution in Australia in Microbiology, and equal top with one other university in Biochemistry and Cell Biology and in Veterinary Science.

Historical Studies and Archaeology were both rated at ERA '5', highlighting the University's renowned strengths in humanities. Other disciplines to receive a '5' rating were Analytical Chemistry, Nursing, Other Medical and Health Sciences, and Human Movement and Sports Sciences.

Research Focus Areas

RFAs are our flagship programs consisting of dynamic multi-disciplinary teams that will address pressing national and global problems; that will develop game-changing, long lasting partnerships and that will enable us to claim a strong competitive research advantage.

- **Securing food, water and the environment**
 - **Sport, exercise and rehabilitation**
 - **Understanding disease**
 - **Building healthy communities**
- **Population movement and human security**

Our Staff

“La Trobe will be recognised for its research environment and culture and will continue to have a reputation as an institution that is not only a research leader, particularly in its fields of research strength, but also as a leader in the support it provides for academic staff in their research.”

All new academic staff, whether they are teaching-and-research staff or research-only, at all levels, will be recruited with a view to how they can demonstrably help to achieve the goals of *Future Ready* through contributions to both research income (by seeking applicants with a demonstrated record of grant success or potential for grant success), to rankings (by authoring high quality papers, reports and monographs) and to collaborative links and networks.

We will continue to provide support and infrastructure to assist staff at all campuses to build and maintain excellent research careers. An essential element of this approach is for RFAs to enable collaboration and tailored support to research groups and individual researchers. To be a member of an RFA, researchers need to be working in a relevant field and part of an RFA research group, around a research theme or question. A key aim of each RFA is to be inclusive across the regions in the relevant fields.

RFAs have a clear mandate to support ECRs. Researchers who wish to be involved in an RFA but who do not bring a clear research track record and strength, should attempt to align themselves with a research group within the RFA.

We expect staff to balance teaching and research and for workload discussions for teaching-and-research and research-only academic staff and plans to reflect this discussion. Any decisions about teaching relief will be for the staff member in the RFA to agree in consultation with their supervisor or Head of School.

The University will support individual researchers who are outstanding when measured against recognised performance measures, including success in attracting substantial external research funding, irrespective of whether they are members of an RFA or DRP.

The research and research funding environments will not alter for staff outside RFAs or DRPs. We intend to provide appropriate support for all staff.

To complement RFAs we will maintain and develop the underlying disciplinary strength of existing and emerging high-performing researchers and teams using DRPs.

STRATEGIES UNDERPINNING RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

Research Leadership Retention and Succession Strategy (1.1)

Research Education and Development Strategy (1.6)

Industry Engagement / Partnership Strategy (2.1)

Precincts Strategy (2.3)

Research Budgeting and Resourcing Plan (4.2)

HDR Student Recruitment and Marketing Strategy (5.8)

University Rankings Strategy (6)

Research Promotion Strategy (6.6)

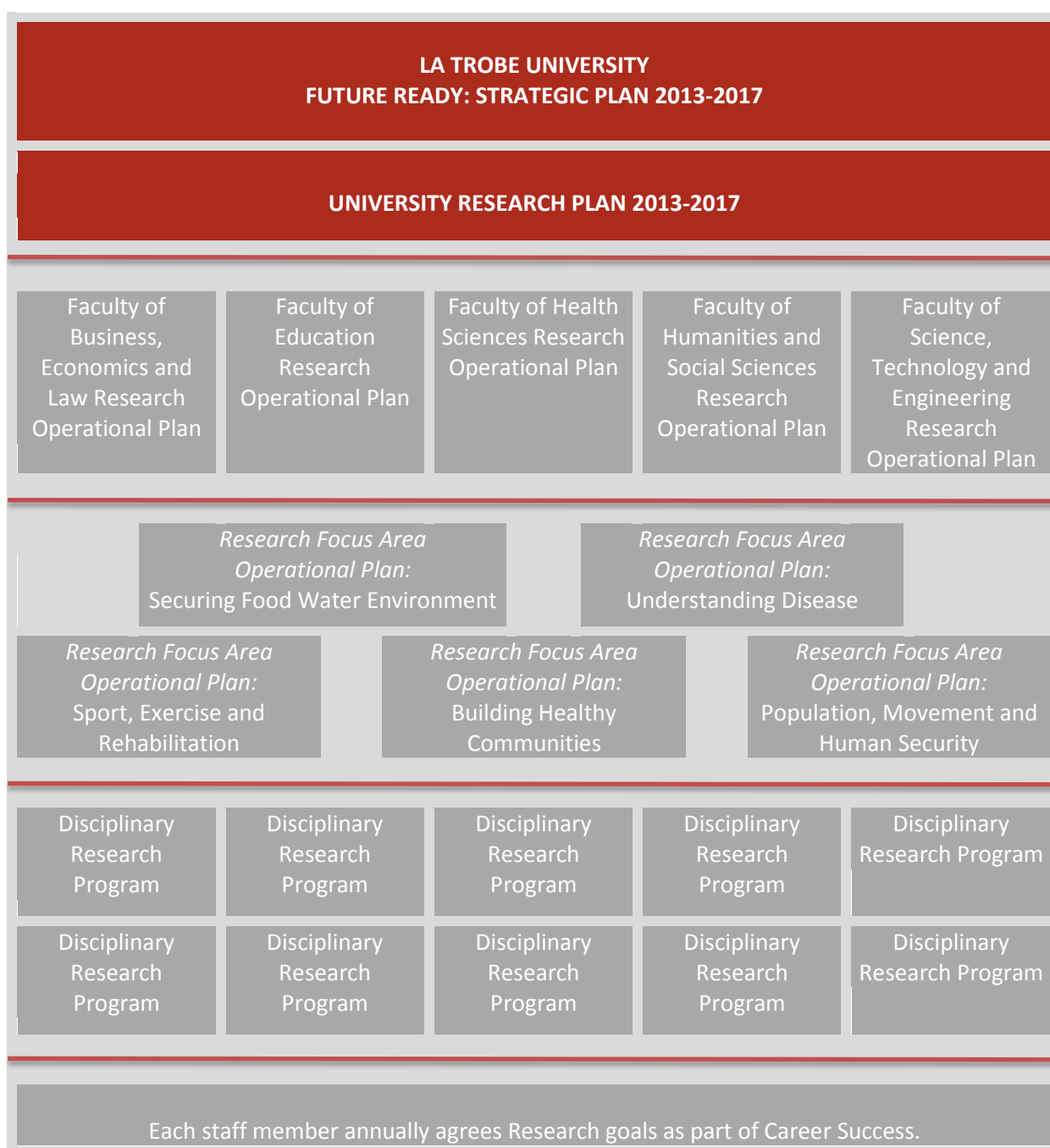
Knowledge Transfer and Commercialisation Strategy (1.11)

Research Infrastructure Plan (4.11)

Implementing the Plan

The *Research Plan 2013-2017* builds on and implements *Future Ready: Strategic Plan 2013-2017*. The Plan signals a number of key strategies underpinning our research objectives. Some of these strategies will be informed and determined by current Collective Agreement negotiations including consideration of research-continuing positions and workloads.

Implementation of the University *Research Plan* will address the six key goals outlined below. Faculty research operational planning will develop strategy and actions to maintain and improve research quality, productivity, income and the number and experience of higher degree by research students, in the framework of the RFA and DRP strategic plans. Individual staff workload and performance will be aligned with these strategies.



Future Ready sets out ambitious goals for research. The following strategies are designed to work towards achievement of these goals.

Goal 1: Improve research quality and impact

La Trobe is committed to evaluating and improving the quality and impact of research through all available means.

We will do this by focused investment in our research strengths through RFAs and DRPs to raise the quality, impact and volume of research activity across all campuses; to increase research income and to further enhance the international reputation of the University. We will give maximum possible support to our research staff in the development of their research careers.

The University is also committed to using University Analysis of Research Quality (UARQ) as a measure of the quality of applied research based on impact that it has made on the communities, partnerships, user groups or clients to which it is addressed.

2017 Target

- At least two FoRs at 2 or 4-digit level ranked in the world top 100 measured against the Excellence in Research for Australia (ERA) and University Assessment of Research Quality (UARQ).
- A 50% increase in 4-digit FoRs rated at world standard (3 rating) or above world standard (baseline 2010).

Strategies

1.1 Develop a Research Leadership Retention and Succession Strategy by December 2013 to attract and retain teaching-and-research staff who are outstanding researchers including ECRs.

1.2 Implement at least five Research Focus Areas during 2013 that engage researchers in all campuses in cross-disciplinary research.

1.3 Maintain and develop underlying disciplinary strength of existing and emerging high-performing research teams by creating up to 20 DRPs with two to five Programs implemented in 2013.

1.4 Develop a tailored plan by July 2013 for each assessable FoR to ensure that ERA performance is maintained or improved in the 2015 ERA round.

1.5 Review the criteria for Established Productive Researchers (EPRs) to better align with research expectations of benchmark universities.

1.6 Develop a Research Education and Development Strategy to provide targeted, timely development activities for ECRs, EPRs, non-EPR, research leaders and research teams; with particular support for mid-career researchers to meet EPR expectations.

1.7 Ensure that Hallmark teaching programs are closely aligned and integrated with relevant RFAs and DRPs.

1.8 Build on current faculty practices to create a coordinated, more uniform and better targeted approach to internal grant rounds and Excellence in Research Awards to both support the diversity of needs across all faculties and to place special focus on targeted groups such as ECRs.

1.9 Identify a program of major equipment bids to support RFAs and DRPs that are aligned with the Campus Infrastructure planning.

1.10 Implement a Knowledge Transfer and Commercialisation Strategy in 2013 to focus investment and to maximise returns.

1.11 In line with *Future Ready*, ensure support for excellent researchers, commensurate with their productivity, regardless of research area.

GOAL 2: Identify, develop and implement strategically important research partnerships

La Trobe will develop game-changing partnerships for its RFAs and other programs to broaden the range of avenues for collaboration, funding support and to transform our research scope, scale and capability.

La Trobe will also develop a limited number of partnerships with international institutions that have similar research, teaching and community profiles as La Trobe's for benchmarking and collaboration purposes.

The University will continue to foster and grow collaborations with our existing partners, with a particular focus on engagement with regional Victoria and Melbourne's northern suburbs, including the Northern BioSciences Precinct.

These partnerships will help raise our research efforts to new levels of national and international significance.

2017 Target

- At least 6 new external partnerships to be established, specifically: 3 international partnerships and 3 national partnerships

Strategies

2.1 Develop an Industry Engagement / Partnership Strategy including the appointment of dedicated positions to partnership development and commercialisation roles for each RFA where appropriate.

2.2 Identify partnerships based on aligned values and priorities and potential for joint funding; work with those partners to identify large-scale grant applications and consortia proposals.

2.3 Develop a Precincts Strategy for the Northern BioSciences Precinct and related initiatives that engage with all levels of government, local industry and the community.

2.4 Invest in state of the art information technologies and e-Research infrastructure to support our partnerships including cross-institution research and researcher development activities.

GOAL 3 Increase cross-disciplinary research collaborations

The main mechanism for cross-disciplinary research will be the RFAs. RFAs will address pressing national or global problems and attract game-changing external partners enabling a credible claim of strong competitive research advantage by La Trobe.

Dedicated Strategic Plan Initiative funding will be channelled to support RFA research to complement existing faculty funding for research.

2017 Target

- At least 3 major successful Cooperative Research Centre (CRC) or Centre of Excellence bids led by La Trobe researchers.

Strategies

3.1 Support RFAs through targeted resourcing, including through performance-based funding and targeted HDR scholarships. The University and faculty central budget models will continue to underpin RFA support.

3.2 Annually review governance, leadership and support for each RFA to ensure complementarity with faculty research objectives and to ensure timely and tailored support by administrative and professional functions.

3.3 The RED Unit and faculties will conduct specific education and development initiatives to support and embed cross-disciplinary research, particularly for ECRs across all campuses.

3.4 Engage appropriate internal and external expertise to assist each RFA to lead a CRC or Centre of Excellence bid.

3.5 Attract and retain high-performing staff and higher degree by research students to RFAs.

GOAL 4 Double total research income (all categories)

The University is committed to doubling research income from a baseline (2010) by 2017 with a high proportion of income generated within RFAs.

Faculties with strengths in particular categories of research income will focus on building on these strengths as well as doubling research income overall.

2017 Target

- Doubling income from a baseline (2010) of \$41.73m to \$84m in 2017.

Strategies

4.1 Set clear targets in faculty and RFA Operational Plans for research income growth in line with a doubling of research income by 2017. The Research Income and Expenditure Planning Committee (RIEP) will monitor faculty and RFA income targets ensuring that return on investment over the medium (3-5year) term is maximised.

4.2 Create a coordinated Research Budgeting and Resourcing Plan for the University and faculty-level budget and block grant allocation and management.

4.3 Attract more external applicants into ARC/NHMRC-funded fellowships through timely and strategic support of fellowship grant proposals and provide a framework for such appointments to progress into continuing appointments.

4.4 Ensure that up to 60% of EPRs are located in RFAs to create a strong, confident research culture that will encourage researchers to grow research quality and income across all categories of income.

4.5 Ensure that Faculty Plans include strategies to attract and retain key researchers who have a successful track record in obtaining external grant monies; ensure that faculties manage workloads to enable research goals to be met.

4.6 Leverage opportunities for strengthening foundation and bequest income, philanthropic funding and partnership growth through close collaboration between faculties, Alumni, Marketing and Engagement and Office of the Vice Chancellor; particular focus will be placed on linkages with Alumni to build partnerships.

4.7 Provide timely high quality administrative support through a three-year rolling plan of potential National Competitive Grant applications, accurate recording and reporting on research data for planning and developmental purposes and to celebrate success.

4.8 Provide high quality support including 'near miss' grants to support highly competitive applications to increase future funding opportunities.

4.9 Target up to 15 La Trobe Postgraduate Research Scholarships to the five RFAs and offer them to the highest quality students.

4.10 Manage and monitor workloads through the Workload Planning System, especially for ECRs and staff new to La Trobe, to ensure that researchers are able to establish and develop their research activity. This could include providing time-release and funding opportunities for researchers who have a track record of producing high quality research publications and significant research funding.

4.11 Introduce a Research Infrastructure Plan, that aligns with the University Infrastructure and Campus Plan, and that incorporates e-research strategies.

GOAL 5 Improve the HDR experience to gain distinctiveness

La Trobe is committed to improving the HDR experience and to creating a supportive research culture for ECRs. We will ensure that internal structures and processes are consistent with research training benchmarks and standards that are unequivocally at the highest professional level. La Trobe will provide some of the best facilities and student supervision and administration processes in Australia, particularly in RFAs to ensure the future career success of HDR students. We will evaluate the option of a Graduate School which will allow the University to quickly introduce institution-wide reforms to both improve the provision of central and faculty support and to create a consistently high quality of HDR student experience across the University.

2017 Target

- Top 12 nationally in 'overall student satisfaction' in each Field of Education as measured by PREQ.

Strategies

5.1 Foster a stronger research culture by considering establishment of a Graduate School to streamline and strengthen the administrative and infrastructure support for HDR students across the University. This will include education and training tailored to the needs of HDR candidates, ECRs and supervisors and the development of distinctive coursework-rich higher degrees.

5.2 Recognising the strong growth in HDR numbers (especially in regional campuses), plan and monitor growth to balance supervisor workload with growth in HDR numbers.

5.3 Expand the range of training and support functions to supervisors and ECRs across all campuses with a view to improving participation and completion rates for all HDR candidates.

5.4 Place an upper limit on the number of HDR students that can be supervised by a principal supervisor as part of workload discussions, with a recommendation that a supervisor should not normally supervise more than eight full-time equivalent (FTE) students (or more than 12 individual students in total).

5.5 Continue to ensure high quality supervision by careful selection, professional development and regulation of supervisor load; ensure that each supervisory panel includes an established, productive researcher.

5.6 Review implementation of existing HDR policies and support centrally and across the faculties to ensure appropriate support for HDR candidates.

5.7 Develop a survey instrument to complement the Postgraduate Research Experience Questionnaire (PREQ) and to better inform the University about the HDR student experience.

5.8 Establish an HDR Student Recruitment and Marketing Strategy in liaison with La Trobe International, Marketing and Engagement and Faculties, particularly to broaden the market base for potential students, in line with expanded HDR postgraduate training and alternative PhD modalities (for example, PhD by publication).

5.9 Strengthen HDR load planning and planned scholarship growth to support the *Future Ready* goal to double research income by 2017.

GOAL 6 Improve La Trobe's international research-based institutional ranking

La Trobe's research performance on standard metrics determines our global standing as a university.

There is clear evidence that the growth in universities in the Asian region together with stronger research performance internationally is having an impact on the nature and shape of research globally and importantly, on the rankings of institutions. There is an imperative to develop capability to build on the historically high quality of research and teaching conducted at La Trobe.

2017 Target

- Top 300 in the Academic Ranking of World Universities (468th in 2012).

Strategies

6.1 Implement the University Rankings Strategy.

6.2 Foster an underlying culture of targeting publications towards high quality journals and introduce incentives for highly cited papers and quality books.

6.3 Distribute 80% of block grant funding towards researchers and research teams demonstrating high performance including attracting national competitive grant income and/or producing high quality outputs, as determined by faculties against University-wide criteria.

6.4 Identify two or three international institutional partners with which to develop research, teaching and outreach collaborations; commence negotiations regarding formal institutional level benchmarking partnerships with potential candidates in 2014.

6.5 Maximise La Trobe's visibility by collaborating with high profile institutions and researchers, increasing visibility at international conferences, hosting international conferences and raising the profile of the University on Thomsons, Scopus, Google Scholar and online researcher networks.

6.6 Adopt non-traditional means of promoting research including through social media by adopting a Research Promotion Strategy.

6.7 Encourage international collaboration and research partnership activity in the Asia Pacific region, particularly China and India.

6.8 Encourage international collaborations with high profile international researchers by providing small grants to support these collaborations.

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Focused effort

Future Ready Objectives

Future Ready identifies seven broad objectives for La Trobe for 2017.

- La Trobe will be a university known for its **excellence, creativity and innovation** in relation to the big issues of our time, and for its enthusiasm in providing the leadership needed to make a difference
- **Students** will choose La Trobe University because we are at the centre of important social, economic, environmental, political and scientific developments
- We will make La Trobe University an attractive place for building a career, whether you are an **early career academic**, a professional staff member, or a career changer with exceptional industry knowledge
- By turning outwards to **engage with their communities**, our campuses will provide leadership in the development of Melbourne's north and Victoria's regions
- We will be distinctive for the quality and depth of the **external partnerships** that enrich our work, transform our capacity, advance our partners' objectives
- We will regain our place as **one of Australia's top twelve universities**
- We will continually **enhance our intellectual, physical and financial resources** so that future generations of scholars and students can continue the advancement of knowledge for the public good.