

La Trobe Asia 3-year plan (2021-2023)

La Trobe Asia was established in 2014 with the aim of strengthening and deepening the University's academic engagement with Asia and providing leadership and capacity to help the University better achieve its core missions of research, teaching and engagement. This was a unique effort by the University to embed Asia in our activities and develop a whole-of-university perspective on Asia engagement. To date, La Trobe Asia has contributed to making the University 'hard wired' to flourish in a crowded and contested environment.

While the central purpose of La Trobe Asia - to make Asia better known at La Trobe and La Trobe better known in Asia – remains unchanged, COVID-19 has posed unprecedented challenges to University operations. La Trobe's 2020-2030 strategic plan envisages a university that is leaner, efficient and more focused while remaining internationalised in everything that we do. The likely downturn in revenue over the next 3-years presents La Trobe Asia with an opportunity to reconsider how it can more efficiently fulfil its purpose.

This planning document outlines how La Trobe Asia will focus its activities to continue to fulfil its central aims over the next three years:

- Supporting La Trobe to enhance its brand and reputation for excellence in Asian-focused research and scholarship
- Supporting the Research 2030 strategy by working with leaders to promote Asian-focused research and engagement within and across La Trobe's new Research Themes
- Supporting academic and central divisions responsible for international engagement and reputational management in Asian related issues
- Prioritising relationships with key external government and non-government stakeholders
- Increasing our financial sustainability by pursuing external funding opportunities.

La Trobe Asia 3-year plan



Mission:

Strengthen and deepen La Trobe University's academic engagement with Asia

Brand and Reputation

We will support La Trobe to enhance its brand and reputation for excellence in Asia-focused research and scholarship.

Priorities:

- Public events
- Publications
- Podcasts
- Website and social media

Research and Scholarship

We will support Asia-focused research and engagement across La Trobe's Research 2030 themes.

Priorities:

- Collaborate with Theme Leaders and other divisions
- Provide services and information for researchers
- Renew focus on regional campuses
- Assist in fulfilling regulatory obligations

Partnerships

We will support existing and new partnerships in Asia.

Priorities:

- Identify opportunities for new partnerships in Asia
- Pursue external funding opportunities
- Deepen relationships with governmental agencies
- Develop Fellowship program

Impact

We will contribute to demonstrating and enhancing the real-world impact of Asia-focused research & engagement.

Priorities:

- Policy briefs
- Stories
- 'Research in Focus' seminar series
- Fostering communities of practice
- Internship program

Organisational context

La Trobe Asia's operating context is changing. There are several new initiatives that prompt the need to develop a sharper strategic focus on our activities, including the:

- University Transformation Program
- Research 2030 – a research and industry engagement strategy reset
- Internationalisation reset strategy
- Creation of a Global Research portfolio

Asia matters for La Trobe University. It remains an important market for student recruitment. In the figures from 2018, 8945 students were from Asian countries, representing 86 per cent of La Trobe's international student cohort. The Asian international student market is set to become more important for post-COVID 19 recovery planning. Brand recognition and a reputation for research excellence in Asia remains particularly important for the University.

Research 2030 is a five-year plan to build on the University's achievements in its areas of strength, and societal and environmental need. La Trobe's five new interdisciplinary research themes address issues of local and international importance, including in the Asian region which is home to around 60 per cent of the world's population. Research 2030 outlines La Trobe Asia's contribution to developing 'clear, coordinated internal and external messages about our research, researchers and supervisory capacity'.

The Themes – Key Goals

1. *Production of high-quality foods and medicines for improved health, reduced environmental impact and enhanced economies*
2. *Protection and restoration of vulnerable ecosystems and community resilience in the face of environmental and climate threat*
3. *A healthy, safe and equitable life course for everyone*
4. *Applying discoveries in the fundamental sciences and developments in technology to understand and prevent disease – especially at the intersection of cancer, immunity, cardiovascular and infectious disease research.*
5. *More just and equitable societies*



Slide 8 | Version 2

Research 2030 and the international reset strategy commit that we will be internationalised in everything we do. This includes the development of a small number of deep research partnerships with select global institutions which connect our researchers and students to other cultures, perspectives, and experiences to address the questions facing society and enable our research outcomes to have global impact. Activities will focus on our strengths and will seek to provide a better return on investment.

Supporting La Trobe's brand and reputation

La Trobe Asia's external communications are central to achieving its core aim of increasing La Trobe's brand and reputation for research excellence in Asia and beyond. Our goals in this space are to ensure that La Trobe is a central player in Asia-focused public debates and discussions within Asia, to maintain and grow our national and international reputation as one of Australia's most visible centres of Asia-focused public engagement, and to promote the University's Asia-focused teaching and research.

COVID 19 forced a rapid re-evaluation and revision of our existing communications strategy and a new model emerged allowing us to capitalise on the opportunities presented by restricted travel and increased

use of communication technologies. New initiatives included online webinars and live recorded podcasts which garnered far greater audience numbers than the face-to-face events in Melbourne. Interest in our online activities saw our mailing list increase from 4000 to over 6200 individuals in 2020. In a 'post'-COVID environment, we will maintain a strong focus on high-quality online events and communications but envisage also providing some hybrid events that combine face-to-face and online components.

In 2020, La Trobe Asia developed a new internship program for La Trobe journalism students who were trained and mentored by La Trobe Asia staff to produce content showcasing La Trobe's global research for our website and other publications. Following this successful pilot – and positive feedback from the students – we will grow the internship program in 2021 and beyond.

Over the next three years, La Trobe Asia will prioritise:

- Leading public events aimed at increasing public knowledge and awareness of Asia-focused issues and events
- La Trobe Asia policy briefs, with contributors within and beyond La Trobe Asia seeking to explain and 'fix' policy issues
- The *Asia Rising* publication, showcasing diverse academic research from across the University in an accessible style, and the well-regarded *Asia Rising* podcast, featuring interviews with experts from within and beyond La Trobe (over 120,000 unique listens in 2020)
- La Trobe Asia website, featuring stories, promoting research, and home to extensive information on our Asia engagements, including country briefs
- La Trobe Asia twitter, the central component of our social media engagement

Supporting La Trobe's research and scholarship activities

La Trobe Asia is well positioned to contribute to the Research 2030 strategy by working with Research Theme Directors to promote Asian-related research and supporting researchers and graduate researchers to engage in research within or about Asia in the five thematic areas.

La Trobe Asia will continue to play an important role as an academic service provider. During 2020 we have focused on restoring and enhancing La Trobe Asia's internal visibility, primarily by visiting department and division meetings and sharing information about our purpose and the support we can provide to researchers. The La Trobe Asia program acts as a valuable conduit for information about Asia-related grant opportunities, activities and events, including through maintaining up-to-date information in the 26 country briefs. Over the next three years, retaining and growing this visibility to build on the relationships formed remains a priority.

La Trobe Asia will continue to play a role in lowering barriers to collaboration. Knowledge exchange and interdisciplinary events that bring together experts from across the University will support collaboration across schools, colleges and campuses. In a time of increasing political and regulatory uncertainty we will support the work of the senior leadership group to navigate its obligations under the Foreign Interference Transparency Scheme and the Foreign Relations Bill. We will work with the Risk Office and RED team to support the development of training resources that inform academics of their obligations and the risks involved in pursuing research collaborations internationally.

Over the next three years, La Trobe Asia will prioritise:

- Supporting the Research Theme Directors to promote Asia-related research activities within the five thematic areas
- Supporting the development of a strong community of practice in the changing international regulatory environment
- Renewed focus on engagement with researchers, particularly those based at regional campuses

Supporting the development of partnerships in Asia

Research 2030 will expand the impact of our research and engage more effectively in partnerships with industry, government, think-tanks, community and not-for-profit organisations. While we will continue to encourage academic staff to collaborate extensively through international linkages, our efforts centrally will be focused on establishing a small number of deep, strategic research partnerships with select global institutions that bring tangible benefits to a critical mass of the La Trobe community.

During the last year, La Trobe Asia has played a central role in supporting the formation of the Asian Smart Cities Research and Innovation Network, which includes the establishment of the IIT Kanpur – La Trobe University Research Academy based in Kanpur, India. It is strategic relationships on this scale - involving close to 100 staff and up to 50 PhD candidates working on important global issues aligned to La Trobe's thematic areas - that will be a focus of our attention. La Trobe Asia will continue to support the broader team in the Graduate and Global Research portfolio, Colleges and La Trobe International to expand other important and prospective partnerships, such as with Kyushu University, BITS Pilani and Zhejiang University.

To support these partnership activities, we have also created the La Trobe Asia adjunct Professorship program, with Professor Vivian Lin, the Executive Associate Dean of LKS Faculty of Medicine and Chair of Public Health at Hong Kong University, our first appointee in 2021 for a three-year term. Professor Lin has expertise across three of the Research 2030 themes and has extensive links with international organisations such as the World Health Organization and the World Bank. Professor Lin will represent and champion La Trobe's research profile and credentials across the region and advise and support the La Trobe community engaged in Asia-related research and collaboration in the critical field of public health. Through the appointment, we will explore opportunities for a deeper formal relationship between La Trobe and Hong Kong University, one of the highest-ranked universities in Asia (25 in QS 2019 rankings).

The University Strategic plan makes it clear that our partnerships with industry - including governments, NGOs and the private sector – will be more important than ever in the 'post'-COVID environment. One of La Trobe Asia's strengths is its visibility in the public policy space. We are committed to developing and deepening industry relationships, and to connecting academics with policy networks across Australia and Asia. The goal is to connect with external stakeholders through policy-relevant research and facilitate unique opportunities for researchers to engage with government departments within and beyond Australia and Asia.

There are also funding opportunities for dialogues and academic 'soft power' diplomacy projects through Track 1.5 and Track 2 dialogues, and collaborations with external organisations. In the past, La Trobe Asia has only minimally capitalised on these opportunities, achieving one Category 2 grant (worth \$15,000) from two funding applications since 2014. In light of the University's reset strategy, La Trobe Asia has committed to developing Category 2 grant applications and improving relations with governmental agencies. This has paid off: in 2020, La Trobe Asia was successful in securing external funding for three projects totalling nearly \$270,000.

Over the next three years, La Trobe Asia will prioritise:

- Supporting the development of new, high-profile research partnerships in Asia, including through the identification and recruitment of outstanding honorary La Trobe fellows
- Growing our reputation as a reliable partner-of-choice for dialogues
- Building long term partnerships with relevant agencies
- Growing La Trobe University's reputation in foreign policy spaces
- Continuing to develop and create new partnerships for joint applications for domestic and international grant opportunities.