

# Reach for the stars

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Principal

Over the past year, I have been listening to the University community, to distil a statement of our collective purpose. One formulation seems to have been widely accepted. It is that we “aim to create and sustain a university that will, for the benefit of both Australia and the wider world, maximise the potential of the brightest researchers and the most promising students, whatever their social or cultural background.”

That may all sound rather generic, but in fact it makes a number of important claims.

First, it positions us as a high-end research institution, a home to the brightest researchers. Second, it assumes that the particular type of social contribution that we have to make is that which can only be made by “the brightest researchers and most promising students” and not by others. Third, it is agnostic about the nationalities of our researchers and students, looking for the greatest talent wherever it is to be found. Finally, as regards students, it is inclusivist in its assessment of intellectual ability, focusing on their promise at the point of entry, and not merely on their track record of performance.

If we are to achieve this purpose, there are a number of obstacles that we will have to overcome, especially those that staff have identified in our recent survey. We need to release resources away from bureaucratic administration, and into salaries and infrastructure. We need to find ways of better facilitating the cooperation of our academic units. We need to make it easier for external organisations to deal with the University. We need to take more strategic control of its size and shape. We need to find ways of identifying students of promise and of improving the student experience both inside and outside the classroom. Finally, we need to find a small

opinion

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number of large scale, flagship, inter-disciplinary projects – projects that can harness the energies of the University in collaborative endeavour.

The University is travelling well and I have been heartened by our improvement in the recent international rankings, but if we are to achieve the ambitious statement of purpose that is informing our strategic planning process, it is clear that we will need to do even better in at least these areas of our life together. Do send a message via the

email: [vccontact@usyd.edu.au](mailto:vccontact@usyd.edu.au) if you have any views about these issues.

We are currently consulting widely as we prepare a strategy green paper for discussion in the first part of next year. Sydney is a great institution and by harvesting the collective wisdom of the University around our statement of purpose and the challenges that we face, I am convinced that we can make it even greater. **SAM**