

# Charting the future together

By Dr Michael Spence, Vice-Chancellor and Principal

Talk of a “mission statement” in a university and many of our colleagues will roll their eyes. Others will hardly be so polite. But however difficult it may be to articulate the primary purpose of an institution so complex and diverse as ours, the process can be very helpful. It helps to know our goals, and while they may never be fully realised, and measurement is difficult, to know how well we are doing in achieving them. What kind of university do we want to be? How closely does the university that currently exists resemble the university of our aspirations?

These are questions that can be answered at many levels of generality. But at the highest level, I have found considerable agreement across the University about our collective purpose. We are committed, as a community, to creating and sustaining a university that will, for the benefit of both Australia and the wider world, maximise the potential of the brightest researchers and most promising students, whatever their social or cultural background. It seems to me that if we take that core purpose as axiomatic, then much else follows.

Importantly, this formulation of our purpose begins with our talented people and puts their flourishing at its centre. It resists the temptation to engage in activities, no matter how worthy, that would distract us from a focus on their academic achievement. It focuses our attention on that which our recent branding exercise has recognised as the heart of the University: the truly remarkable people who constitute our heritage and our community.

In the second semester of this year, we will begin to write our next strategic plan, a plan for the period commencing in 2011, a plan towards the implementation of which we will need to be working in 2010. I propose that the planning process should begin with this formulation of our core purpose.

The plan will then address a number of consequent issues. It will address the direction that the size



and shape of the University should take over time. It will identify areas in which our research can realistically meet our highest aspirations and appropriate ways of supporting them. It will include strategies for ensuring that our students have an experience here that fully stretches their abilities both inside and outside the classroom.

Many of the projects currently on the Vice-Chancellor's Workslate ([http://www.usyd.edu.au/vice-chancellor/staff/work\\_slate.shtml](http://www.usyd.edu.au/vice-chancellor/staff/work_slate.shtml)) are directed towards addressing these issues as a prelude to the planning process. The results of that process will also need to be coordinated with work around the 2020 Masterplan to ensure that our capital investments reflect our academic priorities.

The planning process will begin with a program of consultation

around some key issues, to allow individual members of the University and academic units to help shape the plan. It will be coordinated from my office, but will involve the whole leadership team, including the newly formed Senior Executive Group. It will be supported by the new Director, Strategic Planning, Stefan Wisniowski. We will also look to alumni for their feedback and input. As past students at Sydney, we have an important stake in the future direction of our alma mater. The goal is that a new plan should be agreed by Senate in the autumn of 2010. I look forward to working with the whole University community on setting the agenda for the next period in this great University's life, working together to create a place in which our potential is fully realised. **SAM**

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