Reimagine Engineering and Computer Science

Strategic Intent 2021-2025
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Our fundamental purpose

Australia today remains in transition. We face economic and societal change, and international instability. Government, industry and social institutions all face challenges to their legitimacy and longevity. In response, ANU must innovate in research, teaching and learning, and elevate our understanding of contemporary Australia and our world.

This is the fundamental purpose of the national university, which we will remain as long as we continue to serve Australia with distinction. Our unique place in the nation is inseparably linked to this contribution.

It is my hope that The Australian National University’s research, education and contributions to public policy-making will change Australia and change the world. To this end, we are also committed to identifying emerging areas of need for the nation and provide research and education that will equip Australia to cope with challenges not yet imagined.

Nowhere is this more evident than in our commitment to the ANU College of Engineering and Computer Science. In 2018, the University agreed to make the most significant investment since its foundation in that College to accelerate its vision to fundamentally change engineering and computing for Australia and the world. Our university seeks to become one of the most influential and progressive voices for engineering, computing and the use of technology in the world. The Reimagine investment is a 15-year, multi-hundreds of millions of dollars’ commitment to capability and capacity building. I am incredibly excited about the ways in which the College will reinvent itself, and in so doing, reimagine Engineering and Computer Science for the twenty-first century. It is a bold plan, and an important one, and has the University’s complete backing.

Our ambition for the future of ANU is as great as the ambition of our founders. Our Reimagine investment in conjunction with the broader ANU Strategic Plan will ensure that this unique and remarkable institution is able to meet its contemporary mission as Australia’s national university, and one of the world’s greatest.

Professor Brian Schmidt AC FAA FRS
Vice-Chancellor and President
The Australian National University

We acknowledge and celebrate the First Australians on whose traditional lands we meet, and pay our respect to the elders past and present.
ANU was founded in 1946, with a suite of disciplines and a set of tasks that reflected the global context in which Australia found itself at the time. Three quarters of a century later those foundational activities remain central to the place of ANU in the world, but the national and global context has changed. Our enduring mission remains unchanged: to create capability for a nation seeking its place in the world.

Australia today faces rapid economic and societal change that evolves in complex interplay with advances in technology. Countries, economies, companies and other institutions are changing their macro-settings as they orient to this new strategic environment. Universities too must adapt. Our traditional place as a trusted societal institution is being eroded by non-traditional competitors who are willing to experiment with new ideas about education; others who can do research at a pace and scale previously not seen; and some who are more willing to be collaborative across sectoral boundaries.

I believe our world needs people who think deeply about how to design and operate highly heterogeneous and interconnected systems of physical, environmental, biological and computational objects, data and people—at scale. We will need to reimagine our disciplines. We will need to bring together expertise in social, technical, ecological and scientific systems to build a new approach. The University’s commitment, through the Reimagine investment in the College, allows us to do exactly that.

In the College of Engineering and Computer Science, we will draw on our disciplinary foundations to find and solve problems of global importance. We will build on our traditional, world-class expertise and take it in creative, unconventional directions. We will inspire a new generation to develop and use engineering and computing skills. We will give them transformational experiences with a distinctive focus on technological problem formulation, with expertise drawn from the humanities, social, natural and life sciences. We will build world-class facilities that attract and inspire.

We will also invest heavily in the renewal of the College culture, in line with the University’s focus on collegiality and engagement. Our people will explicitly connect to disciplines across ANU; we will become more engaged with business and industry; and we will redefine the way that we engage with society. We will increase the diversity of our staff and students to better reflect the society we serve. We will always act with integrity and we will measure our successes by the difference we make in the world around us. In short, we will have the strength and courage to be intellectual and cultural leaders.

I am proud to be the Dean of this College. I am proud of our staff, students, alumni and critical friends. We inherit the legacy of generations of adventurous engineers and computer scientists before us. With the Reimagine investment, we have the privilege and the responsibility to build a new legacy for the University, the country and even the world. I know we can do this—it is our future.

Professor Elanor Huntington  
Dean, ANU College of Engineering and Computer Science
Our history and context

Our College has a layered history with many antecedent organisations, and signal events. The first courses in Computer Science were taught in 1971. The University appointed the first Professor of Computer Science in 1978 and the first Professor of Engineering in 1981. The first stand-alone Engineering and Computer Science entities appeared in the 1980s. The Research School of Information Sciences and Engineering was created in the 1990s and was run in parallel to the Faculty of Engineering and Information Technology. Both entities were finally merged into an Engineering and Information Sciences Institute briefly in 2004 before assuming our current name in 2005.

Today, the ANU College of Engineering and Computer Science (CECS) is comprised of three schools: the School of Computing; School of Cybernetics; and School of Engineering – supported by the Professional Services Group (PSG). We are a vibrant and diverse community of more than three thousand students, staff, and visitors.

Our alumni can be found in all corners of the world, and in all walks of life; their accomplishments and impact are an important measure of our work here. We can claim with justifiable pride our traditions of excellence in research, creativity in quality education, being at the intellectual forefront of whatever we do, and taking a progressive and forward-leaning view of our disciplines.

The world around us has continued to evolve and change. The best universities in the world are being astute in their response and not only looking to scale, but also to reorient engineering and computing. In 2018 alone, at least four world-class universities committed more than $1 billion each to activities that impact on engineering, computing, and the use of technology in the world. A proactive approach to creating a future we all want to be part of, builds on university strengths and potential, whilst breaking down old disciplinary and sectoral boundaries.

The Reimagine investment approved by ANU Council in December 2018 represents a 15-year, multi-hundreds of millions of dollars’ commitment to the bold vision for renewal of the ANU College of Engineering and Computer Science. It came at a time when the College had already embarked on a significant set of transformative activities – having created three new Innovation Institutes and a new curriculum in Applied Cybernetics, including a named Masters qualification with industry sponsorship, and an attached research program. We made significant investments in our facilities and environment. The Hanna Neumann building was completed and officially opened in 2019, signalling new facilities for collaboration as it brought together the Mathematical Sciences Institute with the School of Computing, whilst also housing a collaboration with the Australian Signals Directorate (ASD): the ANU-ASD Co-Lab. The repurposed Birch building joins the Hanna Neumann building as a flagship strategic asset to enable the ANU strategic vision for CECS. The Birch building will support Cybernetics, Engineering and partner activities, also adding new learning, research and collaboration spaces.

Since the commencement of the Reimagine investment and the first iteration of the College Strategic Intent, there have been many external changes, ranging from the economic fallout of the pandemic, closure of borders and national changes to university funding models. However, the ANU still seeks to become one of the most influential and progressive voices for engineering, computing, and the use of technology in the world. That objective lies at the core of the mission of the College, but how we achieve the objectives set out will need to change.

The new ANU 2025 Strategic Plan – underpinned by the ANU Recovery Plan 2020 and the CECS Change Implementation Plan – form the framework from which we seek to rebuild in 2021 and beyond. We have scaled back on expansion plans; consolidated our organisational structures and focused our strategic priorities on activities and priorities identified in the ANU Recovery Plan, allowing the College to thrive in the new world.

The Reimagine Project remains very much alive and this refreshed College Strategic Intent is a key part of the process of redefining what our goals and future will look like as we move towards a post-pandemic world.

“The Reimagine project is in time for the new wave of science paradigm brought by AI, data and computing power, and unprecedented speed at which research innovations are translated into market growth. Reimagine will strengthen the world-leading position of CECS in this era of change, and impact society even more”.

Dr Ting Cao
Senior Researcher, Microsoft, ANU Computing alum
Our values

We are committed to being open and inclusive, enabling us to be creative and bold, so that we can achieve meaningful impact.

“First Peoples have always designed our futures with sustainability, ingenuity, agency and autonomy. The School of Cybernetics allowed my community and I to unpack systemic inequalities that have moulded our present while finally having an equal role in designing the systems we always imagined for our futures. This is just the beginning of a revolution of the world’s oldest cultures working together with the world’s newest cultures to reimagine a future that puts our nura (Country), languages and laws back at the centre of everything we do. I encourage every First Nations person to get involved”.

Mikaela Jade
Founder and CEO, Indigital, ANU Cybernetics alum

Be creative and bold
We will foster intellectual and cultural leadership. We will compare ourselves against the best, set high aspirations, and promote a culture that is not averse to risk. We will seek creative solutions for the great challenges of our age. We will be bold in tackling complexity and uncertainty to shape our collective future. We will learn from our failures and successes.

Be open and inclusive
We value a diverse and inclusive community; one that acknowledges, respects, and welcomes differences in expertise, experience, perspective, and access to power. We celebrate the richness diversity brings to creative disciplines and we will be a community that is open to — and representative of — the best of the world around us.

Be meaningfully impactful
We will serve society through our teaching, research, and engagement. Our work affects how people live — shaping societies, governments, and technologies. We will measure our achievements by the positive difference they make in the world.
The enduring pillars of the ANU College of Engineering and Computer Science are to: conduct the research that underpins the creation and use of technologies twenty, thirty, and even forty, years from now; educate the technological leaders who will flourish over that timescale; and make a positive difference to the way that Australia and the world engage with technology—societally, economically and culturally. To achieve this, the time for action is now.

None of this is possible without the initiative and engagement of the community of staff, students, alumni and critical friends that make up our College.

Over the next five years, we will focus on:

- Strong community
- Transformative educational experiences
- High-impact research
- Meaningful engagement
- Post COVID-19: A resilient organisation

“... The reimagine work is leading engineering from a place of detached comfort and into a new scale of place, people, purpose and culture. There is a clear vision for a greater role in the shaping a future where engineers no longer create things for us, but rather they engineer the systems that will become us.”

Honorary Professor Glenn Dickens
Principle Architect of Convergence, Dolby
ANU Engineering alum
Strong community

Our people will have the strength and courage to be intellectual and cultural leaders and will sharpen their skills throughout their lives. Over the course of this plan, we will change the human face of our College, growing in number and diversity, whilst fostering an inclusive culture. We expect many faculty to hold joint appointments across multiple academic units within the College, across ANU, and beyond. We will target demographic representational parity in our admissions processes and as we hire. Our learning environment will allow our learners (including students, tutors, lecturers, and conveners) to thrive. We will recognise the entrepreneurship of our professional and academic staff and their careers will be enhanced through the implementation of a broad range of professional development opportunities and resources, as well as training that targets their supervisors. Our professional support services and recruitment practice will be exemplars of best practice. We will invest in our alumni and build a vibrant and extended community of allies, supporters, and champions. As part of our commitment to diversity and in acknowledgment of the special relationship with the traditional owners of the land on which our University is situated, we will actively facilitate participation by Indigenous students and staff in our learning and research. At the core of our plan are higher aspirations, raised expectations, and changes in scale.

Initiatives

We will increase the diversity of our community. Our students – like those in many Engineering, Computing, and Technology student cohorts – are far from representative of the full diversity of the population from which they come and which they will ultimately serve.

We will implement long-term outreach programs and use the new ANU admissions scheme to target underrepresented groups. Our benchmark is demographic representational parity. Initially we will prioritise our imbalance in women and Indigenous students, who are conspicuously underrepresented. We will work alongside changes in the admissions process to greatly diversify our international student cohort.

We will strive for industry best practices in equity of access, inclusion, and success for people living with disability, of international background, and other underrepresented groups in our student cohorts and our workforce. We will also provide a welcoming environment for our many visitors.

We will change our recruitment processes, focusing on active search beyond our existing professional networks. To ensure all staff have clear pathways that allow them to fulfil their true potential, we will provide active support for, and celebrate, multiple pathways into, through, and out of the College.

We will continue on our journey targeting new ways of working and organising ourselves to suit the new structure, scale, and focus of the College. This will include learning how to benefit from the new organising principle of Activity Clusters to benefit academic excellence in education, teaching, research, engagement, and impact. We will additionally develop and maintain strong connections across the College, including communities of practice that span the Activity Clusters.

We will continuously review and update our governance and accountability structures, processes, and practices. This will provide a transparent and inclusive framework for managing and monitoring our activities and their impact to our community, environment, and society both nationally and globally.

Inclusion, adaptation, high aspirations, and a culture of reflecting learning from both failure and success, will be key to retaining our staff. We will develop and deliver a professional development process that honours the skills of our people, with a particular focus on health, safety, and wellbeing education. Enabling long-term career success for diverse pathways will remain a development priority.

Our students will thrive in an inclusive self-sustaining culture and environment, fully supported by complete, at-scale, multi-modal service delivery. In particular, we are targeting improving our diversity metrics and staff to student ratios to ensure appropriate staffing in our education activities.

We have created and will operate the Reimagine Fellows scheme over the life of this plan. The Reimagine Fellows will be selected from staff and students of the University, who will be invited to define and deliver strategic projects. We will support, recognise, and acknowledge their activities and impacts.
Women faculty
Increase percentage of women faculty members to at least 40%

Global representation
Increase global representation among international students, in both degree and non-degree bearing educational experiences

Alumni engagement
Strengthen alumni engagement through accurate and accessible data, tailored communications and partnership programs, promoting participation in College activities

College staffing
100% of staff have active professional development discussions and plan (including an agreed training program) framed against academic performance standards or professional staff competencies

Faculty numbers
Define ‘healthy’ sizes for all Activity Clusters and achieve that

Indigenous representation
Increase by 10 times in Indigenous representation

Strong community
Access to reliable and relevant performance-related data for decision making as measured by the development and use of an informative dashboard
Transformative educational experiences

We will attract and inspire an education community of high-potential creative people who become problem finders, comfortable with ambiguity and complexity as it applies to engineering, computing, and the use of technology in the world. We aspire to be intellectual leaders in education—its rigor, research content, quality of experiences, and learner engagement. We will deliver transformative educational experiences that deliver opportunities for intellectual, social, and emotional growth. We will expand our offerings as our College grows and broadens its intellectual and research foundations. Our educational experiences will be distinguished by learners’ engagement with the breadth of world-class ANU expertise. We will adapt and evolve, as our disciplines change, as the market moves, and as we create opportunities in education. We will foster proactive and mindful professionals.

Initiatives

We will create low-friction pathways for multiple and return educational experiences. We will develop and offer a range of educational experiences, enabling a responsive approach to life-long education and employability.

We will take a long view of education and career pathways, identifying and engaging strategies and partners to achieve the breadth and depth of our profile targets. Furthermore, we will actively work to enhance the employability of our alumni, including through work integrated learning (WIL), and non-degree bearing educational offerings.

We will increase the agility with which we develop, deploy (including at scale), test, iterate, and decommission curriculum. Evolving our curriculum will include adapting our existing qualifications to fold in new disciplines. It will include predicting market conditions and updating pedagogy where it makes sense. We will normalise ‘co-design,’ bringing the College community together with diverse participants including alumni, employers, external partners, and educational experts.

We will maintain a continuous focus on the quality of the educational experiences and learning journey. This includes investing in education scholarship, feedback and benchmarking processes, and collaboration across all educational activities and experiences.

We will actively seek to develop transdisciplinary, while maintaining and developing clear, coherent disciplinary foundations.
“My education at the School of Cybernetics has given me the courage to share more ideas, more boldly- and the knowledge I need to influence the impact of socially and environmentally responsible technologies”.

Eryk Salvaggio
ANU Cybernetics alum

Metrics

Student to staff ratio
Benchmark and optimise student to staff ratios across different programs to ensure sustainable opportunities for engaged mentored learning

Student support
Improve student transitions and experience through student facing support.

Postgraduate students
Establish an environment of interconnectedness between students in undergraduate and postgraduate programs. Target 50% postgraduate coursework and HDR students

Women students
Increase average percentage of commencing women students from 28% to 40%, with a target of at least 25% women students across our Schools and educational portfolio

Active learners
Grow and diversify our vibrant mix of learners (across industry, community and policy) in a diverse portfolio of educational offerings (including degree and non-degree bearing)

Employability
Provide world-leading work integrated learning and employability-enhancing opportunities

Engagement
All our flagship educational activities will actively draw upon our senior faculty and professoriate
High-impact research

We will build an intellectual agenda of lasting impact that advances the state of the art. We will conduct the research that underpins the creation and use of technologies of the second, third, and fourth decades from now. We will recraft disciplinary boundaries through global intellectual leadership. We will achieve national outcomes in bringing important new intellectual agendas to Australia and nurturing them to achieve scale and impact beyond the ANU.

We will renew areas of traditional strength and create new ones through our new activity cluster model. We will follow the strategic direction framed by the ANU 2025 Strategic Plan, and which was set in the ‘re-ordered’ Reimagine investment. We will recruit additional faculty where necessary and build critical mass in cluster areas in ways that align to their strategic plan.

We will maintain Innovation Institutes as discrete clusters in the new Schools and continue to give them strategic priority to achieve their ambitious interdisciplinary agendas on behalf of the University.

We will develop a hiring strategy that actively seeks to work with and integrate into other disciplines, while maintaining a clear identity as a coherent body of expertise as currently manifested in our Activity Clusters.

We will maintain a focus on research with a strategic, inspiring and balanced mix of short, medium and long-term activities.

We will achieve scale, focus and quality by planning and directing resources towards leadership of globally-relevant, multi-institution, multi-disciplinary, multi-sector research programs and alliances – as evidenced by active participation in programs that include Centres of Excellence, Training Hubs, Training Centres and Cooperative Research Centres.

We will seek measurable and meaningful leadership, through the research-led activities in (and across) the Activity Clusters.

We will ensure relevance and broad visibility of our track record, and current and future research agenda. We will benchmark ourselves against our aspirational peers, both domestic and international, to create the practices and research environment that underpin that success.

Metrics

Research income
Increase diversity and scale of research income. Participation in all national-level centre schemes

Meaningful impact
We will develop a metric to track our research impact with a focus on gaining an external point of reference on that engagement

Research scale
Expand research capacity in staff, research infrastructure, and research support, and foster research networks and collaboration across different disciplines, different institutions, and other stakeholders nationally and globally

External recognition
Improve the recognition of the impact and quality of our research both nationally and internationally, which will draw upon the outcomes of published rankings while not resting entirely on them
We are committed to building capability for our community, our nation and the world. We believe our work should deliver on our unique national responsibilities. We will make a positive difference to the ways that Australia and the world engage with technology: societally, economically, and culturally. We will engage broadly, within and beyond the University, with government, industry and other constituents who share our values and want to work together.

We will build on the engagement initiatives identified in the ANU 2025 Strategic Plan. We will seek to engage based on a mutual value proposition to partners, and our community. We will actively establish mutual opportunities for the exchange of ideas and people with our partner organisations.

We will host a series of events over the life of this plan, to bring together people who represent places our students come from and are going to, and people who share our values and want to work collaboratively with us, to develop a shared view about our future.

We will form and maintain genuine long-term relationships with our alumni, staff, and students by fostering transformative experiences while they are with us, such that they are actively advocating on behalf of the College community.

We will actively support our people to be trusted voices in leading discourse relating to technology and its interaction with society. We will actively support our people to be trusted voices in decision-making and policymaking. We will recognise our people for these roles.

We will deepen and diversify our funding sources, ensuring they are strategically aligned to our values. We will develop a larger and more evenly distributed external income base. We will support and expand non-traditional research activities, working with government, industry, and external organisations on a range of activities across education, thought leadership and research.

We will seek to identify, build and sustain partnerships with national institutions.

We will establish and co-design facilities to inspire partners to join us thus creating an inspiring technology precinct on campus.

Meaningful engagement

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Metrics

Visibility
A marquee event per year that manifests College Strategic Intent and spans the College community

Advancement
Develop metrics for engagement, fundraising goals, and volunteer opportunities, resulting in a demonstrable roadmap for successful future advancement campaigns

Reimagine Fellows program
Refresh the Reimagine Fellows program to reflect the College Strategic Intent in a post-COVID world

Industry collaboration
Continued commitment to set aside space (minimum 9% of CECS current physical footprint) for multi-sector collaborations and partnerships, with a minimum of one industry-based residency per annum

Alumni engagement
Develop and report an engagement baseline, whilst also increasing the alumni connection proportion to more than 60%

Recognition
Design a professional development and promotions process that fully gives life to our College Strategic Intent (and how it impacts all staff) including articulation with our Academic Performance Standards
Post COVID-19: A resilient organisation

In March 2020, the World Health Organization declared a global COVID-19 pandemic. The consequences of the pandemic have been far reaching; restructuring the ways we work, learn, educate, and live. The pandemic affords us a significant opportunity to reflect upon who we are, how we are organised, how we occupy our space on campus and make our place in the world. We recognise the need to nimbly adapt, grow, persist, and remain hopeful. To fulfill our core mission, we must become a resilient organisation. First and foremost, a resilient organisation has a shared vision that informs, inspires, motivates, and shapes the whole organisation, including its physical and digital footprints. A resilient organisation also has an orientation to continuous learning and improvement, both individually and collectively. Finally, a resilient organisation has a capacity to think and organise at a systems level. We are committed to developing these three mutually reinforcing building blocks.

Initiatives

We will develop a shared vision for CECS – including this College Strategic Intent document – that builds on our recent changes. It will have a clear commitment to a set of metrics and deliverables and goals, and it will also remain adaptable and capable of evolution and change when circumstances change. Our shared vision – of strong community, transformative educational experiences, high-impact research, and meaningful engagement – will also require consistent messages and communication channels (through our website, newsletters, shared collateral), as well as ongoing touchpoints in the world around us, including our classrooms, offices and the precinct.

To support all the parts of the College, we will develop and implement a digital infrastructure strategy appropriate to a resilient organisation. We will also deliver an underpinning IT strategy to sustain the digital strategy as well as our ongoing research and education. This infrastructure will facilitate the accumulation and analysis of the metrics associated with this College Strategic Intent document and will improve the overall digital experience of our community.

We will continue to develop our ability to engage as a whole-of-College community. We will iteratively implement regular College check-ins, including regular touchpoints with College and School leadership (such as College town halls), that include both whole-of-College and where appropriate other constituencies.

We will treat the College as a complex open system, made up of other complex systems, and be alive to its feedback loops and dynamics. Our experiences of bushfires, hail, and even a global pandemic has taught us that we need to be prepared to handle rapid change – we need to quickly identify, have disciplined analysis and decisions to adapt to changing circumstances. We will develop, maintain, and regularly update a full suite of business continuity plans for the College and Schools, including our facilities, programs, and stakeholders. We will design, implement, and maintain a data collection system to inform better and timely decisions-making. We will develop and maintain a regular schedule to analyse and make decisions on collected data and then share it across CECS. We will also develop and maintain a regular cadence of check-ins regarding the direction of travel of the organisation.

Our orientation to continuous learning and improvement will be built on intelligence gathering to keep track of trends; disciplined analysis and interpretation to identify and solve problems. We will share this collected data, encourage experimentation on new ideas and projects, and share knowledge in systematic and clearly defined ways both internally with a focus on corrective action, and externally with a focus on gaining perspective.

A resilient organisation relies on reflective, engaged, and thoughtful leadership, that both sets an example and creates a safe and welcoming environment where all employees can develop and contribute to the success of the entire organisation. We will develop leadership skills that reinforce our values and spend time on problem identification, knowledge transfer, and reflective learning. We will develop leaders who question and listen to employees in ways that prompt dialogue and debate to find optimal ways forward.

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We will treat the College as a complex open system, made up of other complex systems, and be alive to its feedback loops and dynamics. Our experiences of bushfires, hail, and even a global pandemic has taught us that we need to be prepared to handle rapid change – we need to quickly identify, have disciplined analysis and decisions to adapt to changing circumstances. We will develop, maintain, and regularly update a full suite of business continuity plans for the College and Schools, including our facilities, programs, and stakeholders. We will design, implement, and maintain a data collection system to inform better and timely decision-making. We will develop and maintain a regular schedule to analyse and make decisions on collected data and then share it across CECS. We will also develop and maintain a regular cadence of check-ins regarding the direction of travel of the organisation.

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