

Vice-Chancellor's review



In 2007 the University continued to grow numerically, academically, physically and reputationally.

It achieved highly significant formal recognition nationally from the positive outcomes of the Australian Universities Quality Agency (AUQA) audit report, and internationally from its being chosen by the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) to be part of their studies of fourteen regions and their universities around the world.

AUQA commented on USC's "remarkable progress", and the OECD featured USC in its publication *Higher Education and Regions*, released in Valencia in September.

From 1994 USC has pioneered an unswerving focus of its academic and innovation programs on engagement with and advancement of the region, and this commitment has been reflected in USC's mission statement. That focus is annually being vindicated, as the impact of the University in the region becomes more demonstrable quantitatively and qualitatively.

For example, the AUQA audit was a rigorous process which delivered 11 commendations for significant achievement. The University's commitment to the Sunshine Coast, and to the provision of innovative programs that enhance student experience, were among those achievements given special mention. The University continues to work on further improvements to meet community needs.

Our strong performance was further confirmed this year by the receipt of a series of national competitive grants. USC ranked first among Queensland's seven universities with a \$1.5 million grant from

the Federal Government's Learning and Teaching Performance Fund. The University was also successful in the 2007 round of the Collaboration and Structural Reform (CASR) grants. The University is involved in three CASR projects, with overall funding of \$1.8 million. With only 11 grants awarded nationally, this outcome demonstrates the University's exceptional success.

The University's focus on conducting research in areas of regional importance was this year made explicit in the formation of two research groups. The GeneCology Research Group operates in the areas of genetics, ecology, genomics and physiology, while the Regional Sustainability Research Group focuses on sustainable communities and environments. The establishment of an online research repository makes the research output of the University accessible on local, national and international levels, maximising impact for USC researchers.

Accompanying these initiatives were professional appointments to provide world-class leadership in the defined areas of academic focus.

From the outset, USC has had a deep concern with both economic and environmental sustainability of the region, as well as the quality of life for residents.

The University has invested heavily in its Innovation Centre in order to provide an enhanced level of support for small start-up businesses through its Incubator. In 2007 the University negotiated a \$1 million grant and a \$2.6 million interest-bearing loan package from the State Government to support a second-stage development of that economic strategy: an 'Accelerator', for larger, more mature businesses. The University also worked closely with Maroochy Shire Council to finalise the Sippy Downs Town Plan which accommodates a technology precinct, which is a third stage of the sustainable economic strategy for the region.

An 'Enterprisers' program, presented by USC in partnership with the University of Cambridge and the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, was delivered by the Innovation Centre for the first time. The program encourages the development of entrepreneurial skills among students and their ability to add to and advance the growth of a local knowledge economy. It is the first of its kind in Australia.

A further sustainable economic dimension is USC's focus on career placement and employer connections, providing skilled staff for local employers, and building graduate career opportunities, mainly on the Sunshine Coast but also overseas. The University's capacity to facilitate international experience was acknowledged when the USC Global Opportunities (GO) Program won a major Queensland Government award for promoting internationalisation.

Sustainability is also a recurring theme in the physical development of a campus that is deeply reflective of its environmental location, and the fragility of that environment.

On-campus developments in 2007 included the completion of a \$10 million indoor sports stadium. The Chancellery (Building C), was nominated for the Master Builders Sustainable Development Award. The University reaffirmed its position as a regional exemplar and national leader in sustainable campus development when it became one of only five Australian universities (among 49 surveyed) awarded best practice ratings in the Australasian Tertiary Education Facilities Management Association's annual benchmarking report.

Also consistent with the sustainability theme was the completion of a 'Kangaroo Study', the commencement of a report on traffic management, and reconfirmation of USC as a signatory to the Talloires Declaration amongst the world's universities committed to sustainability practices.

The University's reputation continues to grow and parallel the growth and complexity of the University's academic pursuits, and its community engagement strategies. The momentum and the positive outcomes continue unabated and provide a secure platform for further development across this century.

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Paul Thomas". The signature is written in a cursive style and is positioned above a horizontal line.

Professor Paul Thomas AM
Vice-Chancellor
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