

Vice-Chancellor's review



2008 commenced with a new Federal Labor Government committed to an 'education revolution'. There was much speculation on what this would mean for universities, especially following announcements about a 2020 Summit, as well as major reviews on higher education, research and innovation, and the impact of voluntary student unionism.

At year-end the Summit and the Reports had been finalised but large-scale changes to the sector were unlikely before 2010 at the earliest, and the global financial crisis will significantly influence final outcomes.

For USC it was another year of growth and development, despite the sectoral downturn in demand for higher education.

Enrolments at Census 1 totalled 5,833, an 11 percent increase on 2007. Postgraduate enrolments were 6 percent higher than 2007, almost doubling since 2003. New teaching areas were developed or delivered for the first time, such as occupational therapy, paramedic science, nutrition and psychology in allied health, as well as engineering.

Two new areas of research concentration were developed in Genecology and Regional Sustainability. There have been a number of major funding announcements during the second half of 2008 associated with these groups. Total grant income to USC of over \$4m is expected over the coming three years, which will positively impact research income and should see the trend of an annual increase in total research income continue.

Outstanding contributions to student learning were recognised at a national level and two staff were joint winners of the prestigious ALTC (formerly Carrick) Citations.

International on campus enrolments increased by 27.9 percent. As a consequence, international on-campus students grew from 12.4 percent to 13.5 percent of total on-campus enrolments, from 2007 to 2008. The increase is in the context of the strong growth in domestic enrolments. International fee income increased from \$6.9 million to \$8.9 million.

The 'Global Opportunities' (GO) program continues to facilitate overseas study

opportunities for students. The proportion of graduates who had undertaken part of their undergraduate program overseas increased from 6.6 percent in 2007 to 7.5 percent in 2008.

The 2009 'Good Universities Guide' acknowledged the progress of USC by awarding five-star ratings in four categories (staff qualifications, teaching quality, and graduate satisfaction (2 measures)). No other public Queensland university achieved that number of five-star ratings.

There were major changes in budgeting, planning, and regular reporting of progress against quantifiable KPIs. These actions have resulted in greater transparency and predictability for financial planning, both at the University and cost centre levels.

The University's AUQA Audit Action Plan was completed, and a six-year schedule for evaluative reviews across all areas of the University has been approved by Council, following University-wide consultation. The Quality Unit also began developing a program accreditation database to help track, manage and record program activity.

The University continues to take its wider regional and community roles as a deep commitment, and as major driving forces for the advancement of the Sunshine Coast. For example, the completion of the Health and Sport Centre to complement the Stadium signals not only heightened academic activity around health and sport, but also increased leisure opportunities for the wider community.

On economic engagement, the Innovation Centre continued its success and the 'Accelerator' was opened by Queensland Minister Desley Boyle in August. The planning approvals for the Sippy Downs Town Centre

have now been approved by State and local governments, so that marketing and specific private developments can progress, with an emphasis on the creation of new job opportunities in a unique University township.

The Sippy Downs area generally was made more accessible as a result of the State Government's \$66 million road upgrade, thus facilitating the status of Sippy Downs as a major activity centre of sub-regional significance within the South East Queensland Regional Plan.

The Queensland Health Minister, Stephen Robertson, announced that the proposed \$1.2 billion public hospital to open in 2014 would be called the Sunshine Coast University Hospital, thus valuably reinforcing its tertiary status and increasing the opportunities for students, staff, health professionals, teaching and learning programs and research.

Another important milestone was the completion of the University's first major fundraising campaign. In less than three years, \$5 million had been raised, making it the most successful campaign of its kind ever undertaken on the Sunshine Coast.

These are just some of the many achievements by USC staff in 2008, as the University continues to grow and achieve some needed economies of scale that affect gradual re-evaluation of financial redistributions that, in turn, influence its continued academic advancement.

The University remains focussed on its 'Mission' and 'Values', and an independently conducted Climate Survey in 2008 showed exceptional support and loyalty from staff of USC, in driving this mission.

If the recommendations of the various 2008 national reviews are implemented, even in part, the funding environment for USC will further improve in the years ahead. In that environment USC will continue to realise its potential as one of Australia's strongest regional universities of the 21st century.

Professor Paul Thomas AM
Vice-Chancellor and President
March 2009