

# Zayed University Strategy

February 2023



Future generations will be living in a world that is very different from that to which we are accustomed.

“It is essential that we prepare ourselves and our children for that new world.”



## Why Zayed University introduced a new strategy?

Since its foundation 25 years ago, Zayed University has played an important role in educating the nation, graduating more than 20,000 graduates over the last two decades.

The University proudly carries the Founding Father's name. Sheikh Zayed was both an innovator and a pioneer, and as an institution, this University has always sought to build on the best of the nation's traditions. As our Prime Minister HH Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid al Maktoum said, "The UAE is the nation it is today because of Sheikh Zayed's vision."

The story of Zayed University's strategy is a story of renewal, founded in equal measure in innovation and tradition, embodying Sheikh Zayed's spirit.

Today the world is changing faster than ever.

Globally, universities operate in a more competitive market than ever, with this growth set to continue for the foreseeable future.<sup>1</sup> Competition requires new and innovative business models.<sup>2</sup> This includes new teaching models, emerging research, funding models, partnerships, digitization and shorter courses.

The demands of employers around the world are also changing. Technological innovation has made some jobs redundant, and new jobs are emerging and will continue to emerge. The OECD forecasts that 1.1 billion jobs are liable to be radically transformed by technology over the next decade.<sup>3</sup> Students enrolling in their degree programs today cannot be certain how the labor market will look when they graduate. The only certainty is that it will be very different from today. It will be a new world.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.globenewswire.com/news-release/2022/02/08/2380875/0/en/Worldwide-Higher-Education-Market-is-Expected-to-Grow-at-a-CAGR-of-10-3-Between-2022-and-2028-by-Fortune-Business-Insights.html>

<sup>2</sup> [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/283200035\\_Rethinking\\_Business\\_Models\\_for\\_21st\\_Century\\_Higher\\_Education\\_A\\_European\\_Perspective](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/283200035_Rethinking_Business_Models_for_21st_Century_Higher_Education_A_European_Perspective)

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.oecd.org/employment/employment-outlook-2019-highlight-en.pdf>



Identifying the skills required to satisfy the transforming labor market need is a global challenge.<sup>4</sup> The World Economic Forum's Future Jobs Report seeks to identify the skills employers believe are most vital. Critical thinking and problem-solving consistently top the list, but new skills in self-management such as self-active learning, resilience, stress tolerance and flexibility, also feature increasingly.<sup>5</sup>

The clear trend here is the demand for transferrable rather than unidimensional skills.

The role of universities in a changing labor market is to adapt and focus on developing students with the means to succeed in a market in flux. Experience shows that the most successful employees are problem solvers, good communicators, and critical thinkers. They are resilient and able to embrace challenges and integrate complex ideas. They embrace curiosity and take charge of their continued learning and growth. Educational experiences must focus on more than single disciplines and the simple acquisition of facts.

In addition, the expectations of students are changing. Well-being services and life on campus are prominent factors in student decisions, in a way which they may not have been previously. Students also expect a hybrid learning environment and seamless experience where data is utilized effectively, and bureaucratic requirements are low.<sup>6</sup> Operational and administrative systems need to keep pace with these expectations. New systems also have the added benefit of driving more efficient operations and better decision-making.

When a student graduates it is only reasonable for them to expect that their University has provided them with a foundation for their careers. Yet data shows neither the students' nor employers' needs are being met by higher education.

A study by Bloomberg found that 65% of employers believe graduates are ill-prepared in some way when they enter the labor market.<sup>7</sup> Likewise a survey by InternsME shows that 52% of respondents felt their University did not focus enough on employability.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> <https://www.nfer.ac.uk/key-topics-expertise/education-to-employment/the-skills-imperative-2035/>

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2020/10/top-10-work-skills-of-tomorrow-how-long-it-takes-to-learn-them/>

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.timeshighereducation.com/campus/how-universities-can-meet-growing-expectations-students>

<sup>7</sup> <https://luminare.prospects.ac.uk/taking-responsibility-for-the-graduate-skills-gap>

<sup>8</sup> [https://www.cipd.ae/Images/workforce-insights-middle-east-perspective-report\\_tcm22-27018.pdf](https://www.cipd.ae/Images/workforce-insights-middle-east-perspective-report_tcm22-27018.pdf)



Students want to learn how to learn (meta-learning) in the realization that their career will see them change sectors and industries. "Meta-learning" is the foundation of unlocking the ability to pursue lifelong learning opportunities, outlined in SDG goal 4 'quality education' as a necessity for all.<sup>9</sup> Experiential learning experiences are also advantageous as they provide students with a greater understanding of the opportunities and expectations which may greet them when they graduate<sup>10</sup>.

In the UAE the leadership has outlined a new vision for the future. The Government's 2071 Centennial Plan places a great responsibility on education institutions to meet the future where it is heading.<sup>11</sup> It outlines the need to develop a "first-rate" education system and transform the current educational systems and teaching pedagogies. It also states that "educational institutions are encouraged to be incubators of entrepreneurship and innovation and act as international research centres." Zayed University must therefore be relentless in this mission.

The plan also emphasizes the role of the private sector in the employment of Emirati youth. Since the founding of the nation, Emiratis have preferred the public sector, while most expatriates have worked in the less pay-competitive and more demanding private sector. The NAFIS program, launched by the government, is a comprehensive federal program that includes reforms and financial incentives to drive work opportunities for both young and experienced Emiratis in the private sector. Under NAFIS, the UAE will spend up to AED 24 billion (USD 6.53 billion) to employ 75,000 Emiratis in the private sector over 2021-2025. It aims for Emiratis to hold 10 percent of the UAE's private sector jobs by 2025.<sup>12</sup> Alignment between the private sector and education is therefore vital if these targets are to be met.

Technology, which has had an ever-increasing role in education, became even more essential during the pandemic.<sup>13</sup> These changes, brought about through necessity have now become permanent and faculty and students believe there is a lot more they can gain from embracing technology.

This move to greater digitization creates opportunity. If students can study remotely for their degree programs then they can theoretically apply to any institution in the world. In this environment only those who innovate, focusing on the quality of learning whilst developing a unique offering, can thrive.

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<sup>9</sup> <https://sdgs.un.org/goals/goal4>

<sup>10</sup> <https://uaecabinet.ae/en/uae-centennial-plan-2071>

<sup>11</sup> <https://uaecabinet.ae/en/uae-centennial-plan-2071>

<sup>12</sup> <https://nafis.gov.ae>

<sup>13</sup> <https://www.mckinsey.com/industries/education/our-insights/how-technology-is-shaping-learning-in-higher-education>



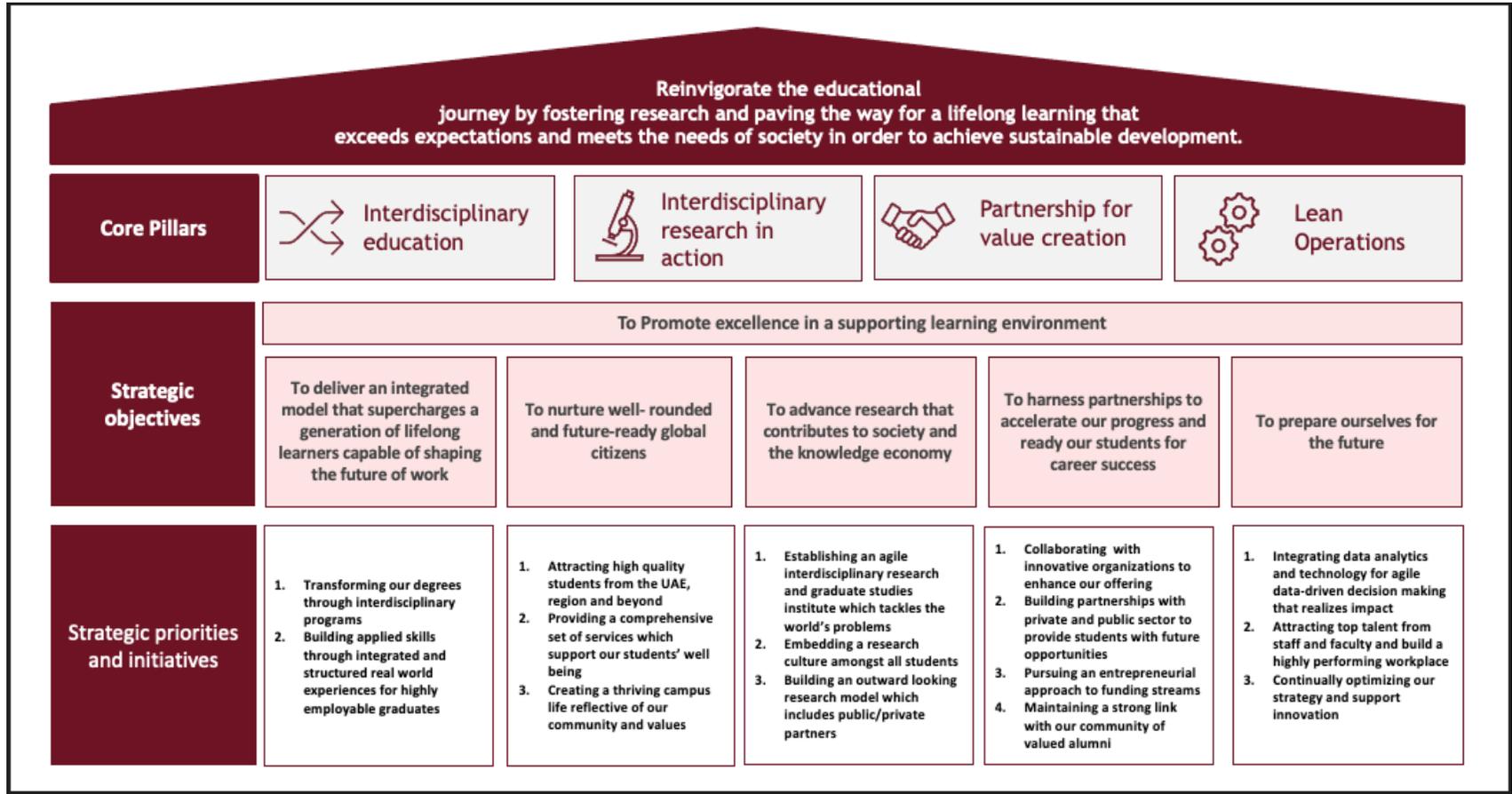
A further consideration lies in the fact that the UAE has an increasing number of world-class universities, both among traditional players and new market entrants. All of these aim to deliver the government's ambitious program whilst seeking to attract the highest quality students.

Against this competitive global and local backdrop, a new model of education was a necessity. A quality model that builds a generation that is globally and nationally competitive and able to shape the future. For Zayed University to stand out in the crowd and continue to attract ambitious students, a transformation was vital. Standing still was not an option.

That transformation manifested itself in our new strategy, which was launched in 2021. It is a strategy that was designed with a number of factors in mind but in particular it was created to ensure Zayed University continued in its lifelong mission of honoring the Founding Father's legacy.

The way we can best do this is to continue to contribute to the development of a diversified knowledge economy by providing a pathway from education to employment, and a home for pioneering research.

**Our strategy is grounded in 4 core pillars  
and translated into 6 strategic objectives  
and 14 strategic initiatives  
to guide the University's transformation  
until 2026.**



## ZAYED UNIVERSITY VISION

To enable leaders capable of shaping the future, passionate about knowledge and innovation, keen on self-development and ready to anticipate future challenges as inspired by Sheikh Zayed's timeless legacy.

## ZAYED UNIVERSITY MISSION

Zayed University aims to reinvigorate the educational journey by fostering research and paving the way for a lifelong learning that exceeds expectations and meets the needs of society to achieve sustainable development.

## ZAYED UNIVERSITY VALUES



**Pioneering**



**Passion for knowledge**



**Innovation**



**Competitiveness**



**Tolerance**



**Institutional Reputation**

## Our Strategic Pillars

Our ambition is to graduate the future leaders of their industry; the doers who build the nation; the thinkers who inspire a generation. These graduates will be critical thinkers, they will innovate, they will be problem solvers. They will make impact.

And to do this while continuing to build and ready our institution for the future; an institution that delivers excellence in education and impact and service in research; an institution that is an active partner in its community, agile and dynamic in its ability to predict the future and embrace complexity.

**Our strategy is rooted in 4 guiding pillars.** These pillars will shape all that we do at the University over the coming years.

1

### Interdisciplinary Education

We need to prepare our students for a changing work environment, where hard and soft skills will be in demand, and the most successful employees and entrepreneurs are those who can transfer knowledge to new disciplines and unscripted scenarios. Thriving in an increasingly connected and changing world requires continued innovation and mindsets that embrace complexity which demands interdisciplinary knowledge. The world is not split into disciplines, so nor should we be.

By providing interdisciplinary education, our students will be more likely to develop: effective cognitive skills; reading, writing, speaking, and thinking skills; higher curiosity for learning; more creativity and originality in thought processes; and an ability to integrate traditional ideas with current ideas and apply knowledge to the highly complex problems we face today.

2

### Interdisciplinary research in action

Developing a knowledge base has been a core mission of universities since their inception. Research is a foundation for innovation. When aligned with national agendas and priorities, research can solve problems and unlock new economic sectors and industries. Nations that have strong human capital and strong research practices are leaders set on a path of sustainable growth. Research at universities often holds the key.

By creating interdisciplinary research opportunities which bring our strong disciplinary heritage together and connect the brightest minds within our community and beyond, we will produce impact-driven scientific solutions that address societal needs and contribute to sustainable development agendas.

3

### **Partnership for Value Creation**

As we embrace a more interdisciplinary approach to education, it is only natural to look at creating as many connections as we can with others to enrich our offerings, our knowledge, and our capability. With an intentional focus on strategic partnerships that create value, we can access more resources for greater ambition, we can diversify perspectives for better solutions, and we can bring the University closer to the community it serves.

Our partners are not just academic institutions but also the companies that will employ our students, the institutions that shape the country's strategy and policies, and the entities that look to make an impact. Most importantly, our partners are our alumni, the community that shared our journey and carry our legacy.

Partnerships can multiply our impact and deliver progress at greater speed.

4

### **Lean Operations (Operational Excellence)**

Rapid technological advancements, especially in data science, bring with them a multitude of opportunities for optimization and better decision-making processes. Many organizations have commenced transformative journeys, effectively integrating technology into their business and improving the services they offer to their stakeholders and communities.

By keeping organizational and operational excellence at the core of how we do our work, we can attract, retain and grow strong talent. Freeing our teams to focus on building memorable experiences for our students and our staff and building the capability to predict future trends and respond effectively.



## Our 6 Strategic Objectives

To bring to life our core guiding pillars and meet our ambitious vision and mission, we have identified six strategic objectives underpinned by priorities and initiatives.

### Strategic objective 1

To deliver an integrated model that supercharges a generation of graduates capable of shaping the future of work

Our newly redesigned degrees are pioneering and unique. They fuse the best of interdisciplinary learning, state-of-the-art interactive teaching, and real-world experience, and in doing so provide students with the skills, they require to succeed in the changing workplace. Our students are taught to think for themselves, push boundaries and learn new skills. This creates graduates with agile minds who are able to transfer knowledge across disciplines and solve problems.

We will continue to need world-class faculty to help us create the thinkers, doers, and leaders of the future. Retaining and attracting faculty is a key enabler of the student's success and will also drive our research enhancements over the coming years.

Alongside their degrees, students work on projects with industry partners via the Partner Challenges. This experiential experience allows students to turn the theory they learn in a classroom into practice in a working environment. Unlike typical offerings, these experiences are integrated within their educational experience and scaffolded carefully to help them develop behavioral and professional competency.

### Strategic priorities

#### 1.1 Transforming our degrees through interdisciplinary programs

- ✓ We will introduce innovative interdisciplinary degrees that build on our current strengths and create differentiated niches for the University.
- ✓ We will utilize technology and hybrid learning models and employ active learning in our degrees and teaching.
- ✓ We will build a new General Education program that is unique and robust, bridging the gap between K-12 and university-level courses and building critical thinking and analytical skills.

#### 1.2 Building applied skills through real-world experiences

- ✓ We will introduce unique, structured, and integrated experiences for our students to interact with organizations and mentors from the start of their degrees.
- ✓ We will build bridges with private sector organizations to empower our students with strong and meaningful networks.



## **Strategic objective 2**

### **To nurture well-rounded and future-ready global citizens**

Managing a challenging workload, meeting new people, and experiencing a new environment means the students will require support on their educational journey. A degree is about more than just academic study and assessment; we will ensure we have the network and services in place to enable our students' success.

The new programs require rigor, creativity, and willingness to stretch possibilities. This means we need to select students that show potential and affinity for these qualities. In the new strategy, ZU will be taking steps towards becoming a more selective university, attracting students who have the potential to thrive in its programs and that are inspired by its vision and promise.

As an institution named after the Founding Father, the late Sheikh Zayed bin Sultan Al Nahyan (may God have mercy upon him), the community we serve has always been and continues to be at the heart of our approach at Zayed University. Across our two modern campuses in Dubai and Abu Dhabi that welcome both national and international students, our faculty and staff deliver the duty held by Zayed University to inspire the promise and potential of the future generation.

Our role is to nurture our students to better themselves and shine brightly. It is why our degrees must be an assured sign of quality and our students' ambassadors for our legacy. Whilst remaining true to our history and values, we must also embrace the future. Our student body will evolve to be reflective of society itself. This shift will create new dynamism on campus, becoming an incubator of ideas.

## **Strategic priorities**

### **2.1 Attracting high-quality students from the UAE, region, and beyond**

- ✓ We will design admission criteria that ensure that our students are not only assessed on academic achievement but, most importantly, on potential, character, and mindset.
- ✓ We will employ a new application process and technology system that is digitized and human, which provides our students with smooth formative experiences and our staff with the data to make good decisions.
- ✓ We will conduct comprehensive awareness and outreach campaigns that communicate our new vision and direction and help students and their parents make conscious and thoughtful choices about their future.
- ✓ We will put emphasis and effort into attracting international students to diversify the student body and create an environment that mimics the real workplace.



## 2.2 Providing a holistic set of services that support our student's wellbeing

- ✓ We will transform our offerings, focusing on strong engagement and student leadership programs to nurture our students as contributing members in their community.
- ✓ We will reinvigorate our well-being services and streamline our student-life experience for an equitable but differentiated offering that serves the needs of all of our programs.
- ✓ We will reform our policies to support our coeducational model and move towards a more diverse student body and an independent mindset among our students.
- ✓ We will create a strong Academic Excellence Hub that builds on our existing exceptional learning support services and aligns with the need of our rigorous and demanding programs.

## 2.3 Creating a thriving campus life reflective of our community and values

- ✓ We will create opportunities for congregation and connections that support the newly introduced coeducational experiences while respecting traditional values.
- ✓ We will work on revitalizing our services and connecting the University to the community beyond its walls.

### Strategic objective 3

## To advance research that contributes to society and the knowledge economy

Society benefits from advances in knowledge. Therefore, our research must deliver relevance beyond our campus and contribute to national, regional, and international agendas. To facilitate this, we will establish a new world-class research institute that will incubate interdisciplinary research aligned with the universities distinct strategic niches. Our postgraduate degrees will also be aligned with our main strategic pillars, the centers, and labs within the institute will work on challenging projects and bring together Zayed University faculty, visiting faculty, industry partners, and Ph.D. students.

A new environment that promotes research must permeate across all corners of the University. Future Ph.D. students and faculty will be integral to the success of our offering, but undergraduates, too will have the invaluable opportunity to contribute also. There will be no monopoly on knowledge: those with an idea will be encouraged. Our focus will be cutting-edge, interdisciplinary, applied research, and where advantageous, we will work with partners in the public sector and in the private sector to solve problems and drive forward research and development of mutual benefit.

## Strategic priorities

### 3.1 Establishing an agile interdisciplinary research and graduate studies institute that tackles the world's problems

- ✓ We will build an ecosystem that incubates and supports research aligned with our strategic niches and our priorities.
- ✓ We will build an institute focused on creating solutions to current problems.
- ✓ We will introduce flexible centers that focus on specific interdisciplinary themes and provide a multi-year focus.

### 3.2 Embedding a research culture amongst all students

- ✓ We will create and introduce postgraduate-level programs that are focused on research.
- ✓ We will create structured pathways for our undergraduate students to advance and develop their research skills and ignite their interest in academia.

### 3.3 Building an outward-looking research model which includes public/private partners

- ✓ We will pursue public and private sector partnerships and work collaboratively on research that is relevant and impactful.
- ✓ We will seek to expand our research funding through sponsorships and grants.

## Strategic objective 4:

### To harness partnerships to accelerate our progress and ready our students for career success

Our communities are stronger when united. We must embed a culture of cocreation across the University. By identifying partners who bring with them best-in-class innovation and share our values, we can deliver our strategy at speed and with greater agility. By cocreating, we can combine pioneering expertise with our heritage and ambition, creating something truly unique for Zayed University. And we will ask more from our partners and be more ambitious in our scope of engagement and in the service of our students.

The transformation of our funding sources through diversification, such as a greater focus on endowments and partnerships, will create a sustainable foundation for the continued growth and expansion of the University in line with our ambitions. Furthermore, we can develop new funding sources by embracing imagination and creativity, opening the door to new affiliations and partners.

Since our foundation 25 years ago, more than 20,000 students have graduated from Zayed University. These alumni know well the spirit of the institution and its mission. Our alumni are an invaluable resource both as a knowledge source and in enhancing opportunities for our students. We must focus on building lifelong partnerships, and we must enhance our relationships, one of our greatest strengths: our alumni community.

## Strategic priorities

### 4.1 Collaborating with innovative organizations to enhance our offering

- ✓ We will seek academic and industry partners to launch new offerings and programs and create an agile ecosystem that predicts and responds to future trends in a timely manner.
- ✓ We will build capability and resources in the University to build a partnership framework and develop impactful partnerships.
- ✓ We will build technology platforms that enhance our capacity and capability to engage deeply and build long-term relationships with our partners.

### 4.2 Building partnerships with the private and public sectors to provide students with future opportunities

- ✓ We will build partnerships with leading organizations and onboard industry mentors to give our students exposure and opportunities to experience real-world challenges from the onset of their programs
- ✓ We will foster two-way dialogue with our private sector partners to change mindsets on the inclusion of Emiratis in the private sector workforce for the mutual benefit of our students and our partners

### 4.3 Pursuing an entrepreneurial approach to identifying new funding streams

- ✓ We will explore and pursue ways to diversify our funding aligned with our strategic priorities such as via campus revitalization and research.

### 4.4 Maintaining a strong link with our community of valued alumni

- ✓ We will reshape and deepen our relationship with our alumni as mentors, partners, advisors, and ambassadors.

## Strategic objective 5:

### To prepare ourselves for the future

A strong emphasis on attracting top talent and embedding technology and innovation practices are key enablers for all government organizations in the UAE, including ZU.

In fact, to deliver this ambitious transformation, the University recognizes the need to reassess the way it teaches, the way it organizes itself, and the way it runs as fundamental blocks to preparing ourselves for the future.

We can enhance the lives of everyone on campus through digital transformation and a determined focus on evidence-based decision-making. Our systems and processes will only be enhanced through a greater capacity for data analysis. This capacity will inform and drive better and more efficient operations.

Retaining or attracting high-performing and committed staff is the key enabler of the success of our transformation. To do this, we must ensure that Zayed University is an environment where employees feel valued and a part of our future.

But crucially, our strategy cannot stand still; we must continually reassess, and we cannot remain static. Where we see the opportunity to improve, we must be bold in embracing it. Innovation and optimization are a necessity.

**The momentum of innovation drives progress.**

## **Strategic priorities**

### **5.1 Integrating data analytics and technology for agile data-driven decision-making that realizes impact**

- ✓ We will put in place future-forward data analytic systems to provide accurate and on-demand information to our community that enables pre-emptive agile, and sound data-driven decision-making.
- ✓ We will digitize our repetitive services in line with the latest technology to give our staff more time to focus on the pursuit of excellence in service.

### **5.2 Attracting top talent from staff and faculty and building a high-performing workplace**

- ✓ We will reorganize ourselves and the way we work to match the needs of the new strategy and new vision and mission and prepare us for the future.
- ✓ We will analyze and relook at our services, putting our students, faculty, and staff at the center of everything we do.
- ✓ We will transform our policies and processes to allow us to attract, retain and grow the right talent for the organization and its renewed journey.
- ✓ We will continue to attract excellent faculty and staff that are passionate about the potential that interdisciplinary education and research bring to the world.

### **5.3 Continually optimizing our strategy and supporting innovation**

- ✓ We will put in place sound and agile reporting mechanisms to allow us to optimize the implementation of our strategy in line with our resources and the most current context.
- ✓ We will embed iterative cycles in the way we work and adopt continuous improvement and innovation.



## Strategic Objective 6

### Promote excellence in a supportive learning environment

Excellence can be a driver for continued innovation and enhancement. It demands continual reflection and the adoption of a learning mindset. What we aim to build in our students is continuous learning, curiosity, and critical thinking; we should aim to build across the institution.

Pursuing excellence in a learning environment means that we will actively encourage reflection and self-examination, compare ourselves with our peers and assess our context. It is a cross-cutting strategic objective that permeates everything we do.

This means that we commit to building our programs, processes, and way of work in line with best practices and accreditation standards. We will adopt and build a quality and innovation framework that includes frequent reflection cycles, so we grow continually. And we will encourage piloting new ideas and learning from failures as well as successes.

**We will embody the principles of lifelong learning.**