The objective of the new strategic plan

In an age of rapid social, economic and technological change, enduring traditions, values and institutions are being challenged around the world every day. The social and environmental systems we rely upon are under stress and call out for fresh thinking and new solutions. Universities cannot afford to be complacent in this dynamic environment and have an opportunity to contribute immensely to individual and collective futures. The time is right for UVic to reflect on our purpose and role in making a vital contribution to a better society.

The following backgrounder is intended to catalyze and support consultations on a new strategic plan for the University of Victoria. This new plan will serve as a strategic framework to help us articulate our priorities and actions as an institution based on our ongoing commitments to dynamic learning, vital impact and an extraordinary academic environment.

Following the 2013-14 Campus Conversations, UVic has finalized and begun the implementation of a range of subsidiary plans: the Strategic Research Plan, the Campus Plan, the International Plan, the Indigenous Plan, the Employment Equity Plan, the Communications + Marketing Plan and the resulting “Edge” initiative. Along with the three-year Planning and Budget Framework, these initiatives have provided tangible operational directions for a wide range of UVic activities.

Given the extensive planning we have completed in the last three years, we will build upon those processes and create a new plan that is less detailed and operational than the existing strategic plan. The new plan will form an ambitious framework of commitments, aspirations and directions that will provide a shared understanding and compass for the next five years. It will answer the questions: What does “being the best” look like for UVic, and how do we get there?

UVic’s existing vision statement provides a strong starting point for the development of the new plan.

Our vision is to be a university of choice for outstanding students, faculty and staff from British Columbia, Canada and the world. We aspire to be the Canadian university that best integrates outstanding scholarship, inspired teaching and real-life involvement. As members of a diverse and dynamic learning community, we challenge one another to become thoughtful, engaged citizens and leaders, prepared to contribute to the betterment of a rapidly changing global society.

Changes and challenges: environmental scan

Recent history has seen significant change to the wider environment for post-secondary education. As we plan for the future of UVic and for our substantial and ongoing role in a global society, we need to consider the themes and trends affecting the day-to-day operation of post-secondary education in Canada and the world.

Growth: There has been explosive growth in both the number of universities and in student participation rates in BC, Canada and worldwide over the last several decades, a trend that started after World War II. This trend, which is sometimes referred to as “massification,” has emerged from the impact of technological and industrial change, the transformation of economies into knowledge-based economies, the growth of the middle class, and the recognition of knowledge and talent development as important contributors to individual and social prosperity. These factors have increased the demand for post-secondary education.

Over the past 30 years in Canada, the percentage of young people who pursue higher education and the number of post-secondary institutions have more than doubled. Around the world, national systems and
individual institutions have become much larger and more complex. Perceptions and expectations have also changed, with universities evolving from “ivory towers” into essential engines of individual and social prosperity. We have the opportunity to respond boldly to the increased public need for higher education and research in the 21st century.

**GLOBAL GROWTH OF UNIVERSITIES OVER 1,000 YEARS**

The increased prominence and impact of universities around the world is a welcome development but also presents challenges. Massification affects institutional organization and governance, as well as relationships with governments, industry and the public. One resulting challenge for UVic is to maintain and enhance quality when demand, scale, complexity, competition and expectations have grown so quickly. How will we achieve this? An additional challenge, given the enormous range of post-secondary choices, is to determine and then communicate the distinctive strengths of our university to prospective and talented students, faculty and staff, as well as to philanthropists, decision-makers and potential partners. With so many universities around the world competing, it can be easy to get lost in the myriad of choices. Indeed, despite continually improving quality in terms of “hard” metrics, our own internal data and the results in some of the international rankings demonstrate lower levels of familiarity with, and accurate knowledge of, UVic. The lesson here is that we must take further steps to both build upon and communicate UVic’s distinctive educational and research strengths and advantages.
Globalization: Globalization has changed our world significantly. It changes what we teach and research, where we study and learn and what students need in order to flourish in the modern world. People and ideas are mobile like never before in history, and economies and institutions are increasingly interconnected and interdependent. Our world’s greatest problems today are international in character, involving human health, peace and security, trade, intercultural understanding, human migration, the environment and climate change. These are problems without borders, and they challenge us to be more ambitious in our research and more conscious of how we prepare our students.

Globalization increases competition and the pace of change in every sector, including our own. It means that in our education, research, governance and operational practices we must not only strive to be locally relevant to our own communities, but also increasingly ensure that what we do is globally significant. Many of the necessary commitments and actions are set out in UVic’s new International Plan; however, we must continue to take steps to understand and respond proactively to the needs of our students and communities in the globalized world.

Technology: Technology (especially heightened processing power, information communication and the prevalence of smart technologies) has transformed the world and our daily lives—from how we communicate, what and how we teach, research and learn, to how we collaborate and organize our institutions and ourselves. Technological change has accelerated the pace of social and economic change, and eroded the predictability of the future for students, teachers and administrators. Technology is an integral part of the organizational infrastructure of our institutions, permitting enhanced internal communications and a more dynamic learning environment for our students on and off campus. Technology is changing the world for our students and our communities, the way in which people learn and the skills we all need. It is changing and challenging the traditional role of the university. Indeed, some view the promises of open access, mass communication and automated instruction as challenging the very ideas of “teaching,” “the degree” and place-based higher education. How will UVic respond to these changes and challenges?
Widened research mandate: Universities have always been places where discovery, creativity and the generation of new knowledge are central. However, the amplification of the research mandate, especially over the past 20 years, has fundamentally reshaped the university. What has changed is the scope and level of activity, organizational focus and culture, and governmental and public expectations. In addition to producing and disseminating new knowledge that is valued for intrinsic reasons, universities are expected to conduct research that responds to the immediate challenges of today, drives innovation, creates partnerships across business, industry and civil society, and nurtures the next generation of talent to respond to the changing world of the future. The pursuit of research funding and support is increasingly competitive and demands that we demonstrate the capacity for world-class quality and impact. We must ensure that the quality and impact of our research is commensurate with the faith that has been entrusted in us and the foundation for further growth and success in our research endeavours.

FEDERAL RESEARCH FUNDING AT UNIVERSITIES AND COLLEGES QUADRUPLES: 1996 TO 2015

While an undoubted social good, the growth of research has not been without challenges. Many faculty members have become increasingly specialized and focused on research, creating heightened demands and tensions. Conducting and administering research has become more complex and costly, due to necessary equipment, processes and administrative structures. The inflow of external research funding torques the use of internal resources. UVic prides itself on being both research intensive and student focused, but this is not always an easy promise to keep as scarce resources (including time) must be allocated to a broader array of functions. We must make smart and strategic choices in relation to research support and directions, and ensure that research and education are increasingly integrated for the benefit of our students and the country.

Rising expectations and the evolving social contract: As higher education becomes more important to both individuals and countries, and as greater public and private investments are made in the sector, it is natural that this will be accompanied by higher expectations and heightened concern for transparency.
and accountability. The way in which these expectations are met will affect the social contract that grants, in return, freedom of inquiry and institutional autonomy. Societal unease about the economy, inequality and the future of work is a lens through which many view the value of post-secondary education. While the correlation between education and economic and social well-being is beyond question, some have suggested that, along with broader access and participation, the social and economic premium of a university education is diminishing. Governments and employers often hold universities accountable for job preparation, labour supply shortages or surpluses and skills mismatches. The question for UVic is how to respond positively and distinctively to the expectations of our students, our partners, our communities and the wider public while also preserving the academic freedom and institutional autonomy that underpin excellence and long-term contributions.

**Quality and resources:** Post-secondary education financing is another factor that has changed. In global terms, Canadian governments provide relatively strong support to the post-secondary sector. However, the impressive growth of education and research in the post-secondary education sector has not been achieved purely through public financing. Particularly since 2008, the level of public financial support for universities—at least measured on inflation-adjusted and per-student measures—has decreased. Simultaneously, costs continue to increase. As a result, there has been a substantial elevation in the reliance on resources from non-traditional sources including partnerships, domestic and international student tuition, and entrepreneurial and philanthropic strategies. At the same time, scarce public resources are under greater pressure to finance the array of social services and there is increased public anxiety about rising levels of tuition and student debt (although evidence suggests that tuition has not impacted access or affordability for the majority of students and debt levels have not increased significantly). To the extent that resource assembly has not kept pace with costs, containment and efficiency strategies have been put in place, arguably with some risk to the quality of our endeavours.

**PROVINCIAL GOVERNMENT GRANT PER UVIC FTE: 2006 TO 2016**

![Graph showing the provincial government grant per UVIC FTE from 2006 to 2016.](image)

**SOURCE**
Full-time equivalent enrolments at BC public post-secondary institutions (Ministry of Advanced Education, Skills and Training - Post-Secondary Finance); Consumer Price Index, by province (monthly) - British Columbia (Statistics Canada)

**NOTE:** Adjusted for inflation
The challenge of financial sustainability and investing for quality is becoming more acute due to demographic and strategic considerations. While public resources have been declining in real terms for some time, the effects have been mitigated (or obscured) by growth—first in domestic students and more recently in international students. However, the growth strategy is likely at an end. Many countries, including Canada, are experiencing an aging population profile that will result in ever greater competition for scarce public resources and a possible lessening in demand for post-secondary education in the medium term (for example, in BC as in many other provinces, there is a projected decline in the traditional university-bound age cohort until approximately 2023). Additionally, for strategic reasons, substantial growth is an unlikely strategy for UVic. As a destination university in a relatively small urban area, we already draw more students from outside our geographical catchment area than almost any other university in Canada. Our relative size is considered a substantial asset—large enough to be research intensive and to have an international profile, yet small enough to afford an experience for students, faculty and staff that is more human scaled. As the direction of travel has shifted from growth to quality the new challenge is to enhance quality in a no-growth or slow-growth environment. The imperative for UVic is to find new ways to assemble and allocate the resources required to enhance quality, to be open to change, and to identify and leverage the advantages we can offer as a result of our relative size and place in the range of Canadian universities.

Opportunities and assets

Global trends and related challenges create opportunities for post-secondary institutions to continually rethink how we deliver on our core mission of research and education. High expectations and intense public scrutiny of universities (even when critical) is confirmation that higher education and research have never been considered more important. Public polling in Canada shows that universities and colleges are
among the most trusted public institutions in society. We need to work hard to keep that trust, which is the foundation of university autonomy, academic freedom and our ability to work for the long-term benefit of our students and society. Increased competition among universities is overall positive as it provokes efforts to ensure the highest quality educational experience for students and the highest quality and impact of teaching and research. To meet the challenges of today it is critical for our university to continue focusing on excellence, building on its differentiating strengths, mobilizing those strengths for the benefit of our students and communities, and communicating the advantages offered by UVic.

The University of Victoria is well placed to take advantage of the opportunities facing post-secondary education today and into the future by building on its strengths and delivering on the commitments these imply. These include:

**Inclusive excellence:** Talented people are the foundation of excellence and this is UVic’s greatest asset. Every staff and faculty member contributes in different ways to our mission and it is important to build upon our strength in people. Importantly, UVic has a longstanding commitment to equity, diversity and inclusion, and an institutional culture of collaboration, collegiality and mutual respect. Diversity of people, respectful and mutual understandings across differences and creation of conditions that allow everyone to reach their potential are foundations of excellence and much-valued characteristics that underlie our claim to an extraordinary academic environment. These commitments, and some of the steps to further achieve them, are set out in the new Employment Equity Plan, the International Plan and the Indigenous Plan—but more can be done to ensure they are fully realized.

**Place:** Place matters and is another asset that characterizes our academic environment. We acknowledge with respect that the university is on the traditional territory of the Lkwungen-speaking peoples, and the Songhees, Esquimalt and WSÁNEĆ communities that have historical relationships with this land that continue to this day. These facts shape our history and our future, and our responsibilities and commitments in this respect are addressed separately below.

Additionally, UVic is located on an island on North America’s west coast, surrounded by ocean and an extraordinary natural environment. It is no coincidence that so many of our programs of research and education reflect a concern for environmental stewardship. An ethic of sustainability underlies the stewardship of our physical campus and its operations.

Our west coast location does not mean that UVic is a regional university. Looking eastward across the country, we develop partnerships and draw our students from the entire country and around the world (about 75 per cent of our students come from outside the immediate region). We have strong relationships westward across the Pacific, especially in the Asia-Pacific region. A sense of place underlies not only our commitment to our region, but also our international outlook and commitment to preparing our students for global citizenship.

While place brings many advantages, it can also pose a challenge as we try to raise our profile, particularly within Canada, and compete with our fellow institutions that are situated closer to government and industry leaders. How can we further take advantage of our extraordinary environment while overcoming the associated challenges?
**Research excellence and impact:** UVic is a research-intensive university. By almost any research metric, we rank in the top 15 of Canadian universities. UVic is committed to research and creative activity that benefits external communities, promotes civic engagement and global citizenship, and has a strong focus on work that contributes to social and environmental well-being—all captured by our dedication to “vital impact.” UVic has a wealth of world-class researchers (along with a large and talented cohort of graduate students) who rank highly on collaboration, international partnerships and research output. We host 15 research centres, most of which are multi-disciplinary, and a number of major research platforms that are utilized by our own students and faculty and by researchers around the world. Across all the faculties, a vibrant research culture is apparent in the hundreds of seminars, symposia, projects and partnerships active throughout the year. UVic stands out in Canada as being both engaged with our local communities and internationally connected. The Strategic Research Plan sets out the goals of building further excellence in research, building on the identified dynamic capabilities, integrating research and education, enhancing partnerships and knowledge mobilization, and providing strong support to faculty to promote research success.

As indicated earlier, the success of our research enterprise and its continued growth is not without challenges. Our relative size, while an advantage in many respects, may also be a limiter. The costs of research (including time and infrastructure) have increased. While we are committed to ensuring robust and high quality research in every area of academic programming, strategic choices will need to be made in relation to future directions to ensure sustainability and increasing excellence.

**Research intensive and student-centred:** UVic is dedicated to providing the highest quality student experience. This results in a deep commitment to excellence in teaching, superior student services and student success in terms of learning and development. We are advantaged by our relative size, favourable student-faculty ratios and class sizes—all of which permit a more personalized experience. Importantly, UVic maintains an institutional ethic that values teaching and teachers, and student engagement, with a strong cohort of teaching-stream faculty and superb teachers within every academic domain and rank. Outside the classroom, non-teaching staff across the university provide outstanding leadership and support for student success and the overall student experience. Not surprisingly, UVic students report very high levels of satisfaction with their classroom learning experience as well as the co-curricular experience.

**Dynamic learning:** UVic offers students an enriched and engaged learning experience which has a number of elements. One distinctive feature of UVic’s strategy to date has been a focus on the integration of research and education. This entails aligning research and educational activities and capabilities as much as possible, as well as defining educational outcomes in terms of the skills and abilities of a researcher (inquiry, analysis, problem solving, communication, etc.). It also means providing substantial research opportunities to graduate and undergraduate students and other measures to ensure that every student benefits from the research activity and culture of the university, as well as the personal growth and career advantages of a UVic education.

Additionally, UVic is a leader in Canada in experiential and hands-on learning. We have the second largest co-operative education program in Canada (per capita) and experiential learning is available to almost 100 per cent of our students through clinical courses, practica, field schools, community-engaged learning and other hands-on opportunities. Experiential learning extends and applies what is learned in the classroom, builds related skills and creates career pathways and opportunities for personal and career success. Experiential learning enables students to work with community members to support projects and provide services that benefit communities. Community partners benefit from students’ hard work, fresh perspectives, knowledge, innovation and skill. The new International Plan sets out goals to enhance student educational experience in a globalized world.
Acknowledging these strengths does not mean there are no tensions or that we cannot do better. Despite very good student feedback, internal data indicate that there is room for improvement in relation to student engagement, learning outcomes and other indicators. Despite a commitment to integration of research and teaching, this is not always easy to achieve, and the modalities and balance of activities will always be a matter for discussion. Finally, each new cohort of students brings to the university new concerns, aspirations and expectations. The strategic planning process is an opportunity to address these matters.

**Indigenous commitments:** UVic has a longstanding and recently reaffirmed commitment to working towards reconciliation with the Indigenous peoples of Canada. Over time, we have attracted one of the strongest cohorts of Indigenous scholars in the country. Through longstanding efforts, we have substantially increased the enrolment of Indigenous students to more than 1000 students and have enhanced their prospects for success. We have built strong relationships with First Nations communities, organizations and governments. Across the faculties, numerous programs can be clustered around themes such as Indigenous languages, cultures and history; social and economic capacity building; and law, governance and leadership. The First Peoples House and strong student support programs have enhanced the rate of student success. While there is much more that can and should be done, the UVic community has embraced the responsibility to contribute to reconciliation with Indigenous and non-Indigenous faculty, scholars and students working shoulder to shoulder, and with Elders and communities to continue to build these important relationships and the scholarship and research that are important to Indigenous peoples.

**Community engagement:** UVic is exceptionally engaged with its communities, whether they be regional, national or international. With a focus on partnerships, reciprocity and positive impact, UVic students and researchers are notably involved in community outreach and collaboration that advance community, cultural, social, technological, economic and environmental benefits. Our community engagement takes many forms, from research projects that address community needs to our co-operative and dynamic learning programs at UVic. UVic is well positioned to contribute to and enhance the potential benefits of the reciprocal shaping of universities and communities through community-engaged research and learning. Through building relationships, UVic strives to share knowledge and resources that will lead to more sustainable, just and healthy communities. The strategic planning process is an opportunity to build on this momentum.
Your opportunity

This is your university and as we launch this strategic planning process, this is your opportunity to influence its direction and its future. Please get involved.

The questions that will shape our conversation are:

Q1. **Our goals**: What current strengths, directions and capabilities can we build on to distinguish UVic in Canada and globally?

Q2. **Our strategies**: What are some key strategies and initiatives that we should pursue to achieve the goals you described in question one?

Q3. **Our challenges and opportunities**: What key issues should our plan address over the next five to ten years?

MORE INFO: uvic.ca/strategicplan | strategicplan@uvic.ca