STRATEGY PLAN
2026–2030

Stellenbosch
UNIVERSITY
IYUNIVESITHI
UNIVERSITEIT

forward together
sonke siya phambili
saam vorentoe

OUR VISION 2040

Stellenbosch University will be Africa's leading research-intensive university, globally recognised as excellent, inclusive and innovative, where we advance knowledge in service of society.

OUR MISSION

Stellenbosch University is a research-intensive university where we attract outstanding students, employ talented staff and provide a world-class environment; a place connected to the world, while enriching and transforming local, continental and global communities.

OUR CORE STRATEGIC THEMES

Core strategic theme 1: A thriving Stellenbosch University

Core strategic theme 2: Collaborative learning and teaching

Core strategic theme 3: Research for impact

Core strategic theme 4: A transformative student experience

Core strategic theme 5: Purposeful partnerships and inclusive networks

Core strategic theme 6: Employer of choice

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FOREWORD BY THE RECTOR AND VICE-CHANCELLOR, PROF DERESH RAMJUGERNATH

Universities are anchors of hope, engines of progress, and catalysts for social change. Nowhere is this truer than on the African continent, where universities are expected to be stepping up with confidence and a vision for the future. The time is now for us as an African university to be bolder, more aspirational, and to affirm our purpose, strengthen our collaborations, and demonstrate the extraordinary potential of higher education to drive progress and serve humanity.

Universities, though primarily focused on the academic project, need to work on significant translation of academic outputs and outcomes to impact society in terms of addressing inequality, economic growth, unemployment, poverty, social cohesion and climate change, viz., the wicked problems and pressing issues of our time. This means that universities need to go beyond simply graduating students, developing human resources, and generating and transferring knowledge. Through an engaged quadruple helix stakeholder model, universities must play a crucial and significant role in contributing to social, economic and environmental development nationally and globally. This requires the University to be truly engaged, innovative and entrepreneurial, while at the same time maintaining an unwavering focus on its own transformation. Successful transformation inherently results in excellence.

At the point of its centenary in 2018, Stellenbosch University (SU) entered a new era, gearing itself for a future with a vision to be Africa's leading research-intensive university, globally recognised as excellent, inclusive and innovative, where we advance knowledge *in the service of society*. These were the bold words in our Vision 2040 and Strategic Framework 2019–2024. An analysis of our performance over the period 2019-2024 has indicated that even though we have generally made great strides, there are strategic goals in which we need significant improvement, and others where we have either plateaued or are in slight decline. It is on this backdrop that the emphasis for the enhancement of the institutional trajectory is based. It is to ensure that the University does not enter an unstable path or gradual decline over the next five years, but rather one of self-reinforcing success.

Since assuming the role of Rector and Vice-Chancellor on 1 April 2025, my vision is to guide the institution on its path to becoming Africa's leading research-intensive university and Africa's first Top 100 global university.

This vision, in the context of our national development plan, is remarkably aligned with the current vision and strategy of SU. It is also my belief that transformation needs to be embraced as crucial for the pursuit of SU's Vision 2040. Therefore, SU's current vision and strategic framework (Vision 2040 and Strategic Framework) continue to provide long-term stability for the University while simultaneously enabling the institution to enhance its trajectory.

The intention of maintaining Vision 2040 and the strategic framework is to enable continuity, but with a stronger focus on enhancement. We also realise that new opportunities emerge as higher education in Africa and the rest of the world evolves almost daily. Our Vision 2040 remains firm as we consider the impact of the future world of higher education on it. With the change in leadership at SU in 2025, it is now an opportune time for us to develop a strategy that ensures we remain future-focused. Our Strategy Plan 2026–2030, as well as the Strategy Implementation Plan (SIP) emanating from this, will guide us towards Vision 2040. Our six core strategic themes remain unchanged, but we have revisited our institutional goals and objectives to leverage the three foci the University seeks to advance: **(1) academic excellence, (2) people, processes and culture, and (3) partnerships and sustainability**. These provide an additional strategic focal lens for holistic institutional transformation that amplifies our existing strategic themes.

Academic excellence remains the cornerstone of SU's ambition to lead on the African continent. By investing in cutting-edge research, strengthening postgraduate education, and crafting innovative and future-focused curricula, we position ourselves to generate knowledge that not only advances global scholarship and learning but also responds to Africa's most pressing challenges. Comprehensive excellence, however, goes beyond immediate high performance; it requires an environment that supports creativity, embeds ethical inquiry, and nurtures emerging scholars. Through renewed focus on quality enhancement, world-class infrastructure, and determined interdisciplinary collaboration, we aim to elevate SU's academic standing and gear up our contributions to society.

People, processes and culture lie at the heart of a thriving university community. To sustain our upward trajectory, SU will embody an institutional culture that is inclusive, respectful, transparent, enabling and that advances performance. This means cultivating workplaces where all staff and students feel valued and empowered, and where diversity is recognised as foundational to excellence. Strengthening institutional processes through digital transformation, streamlined governance, and data-informed decision making will enhance our efficiency and agility. Together, these shifts will help build a culture of belonging and accountability, ensuring that our people can perform at their full potential while actively shaping the SU of the future.

Partnerships and sustainability are essential to our long-term impact and global relevance. As an African university, SU's success depends on deep and meaningful collaborations, locally, across the continent and internationally. By strengthening relationships with government, industry, civil society, alumni and global academic networks, we unlock new opportunities for research, innovation and student development. Sustainability, in turn, demands a responsible stewardship of financial, environmental and social resources. Through resilient systems, sustainable practices and shared value partnerships, SU positions itself not only to thrive but to contribute to a more inclusive and sustainable future for all.

These three foci seamlessly enhance our Strategy Plan by channelling the institution's priorities and accelerating our progress toward Vision 2040. The foci also provide a coherent roadmap for elevating our academic reputation, modernising our institutional environment, and expanding our influence through purposeful partnerships. By focusing on academic excellence, nurturing our people, and ensuring long-term sustainability, SU strengthens its foundations to compete globally and to fulfil its aspirations.

As we enter this new strategic cycle, the three foci for enhancement will catapult the University community forward, together, and with renewed energy towards achieving Vision 2040.

The measure of success for SU with regard to the Strategy Plan 2026–2030 would be *Stellenbosch University becoming a sustainably strengthened world-class research-intensive university, in and for Africa. Through its innovation, entrepreneurial spirit and engagement with sectoral stakeholders, it will be a model of academic excellence that stands in the service of society. It will be Africa's leading research-intensive university, on the path to becoming Africa's first Top 100 global university*.

Prof Deresh Ramjugernath

1. INTRODUCTION

Vision 2040 and Strategic Framework articulate the positioning of Stellenbosch University (SU) as a leading research-intensive South African university in Africa, with a global reach. The strategic framework builds on the excellent work that followed from the Strategic Framework for the turn of the Century and Beyond (2000), Vision 2030, the Institutional Intent and Strategy (IIS) 2013–2018, and Vision 2040 and the Strategic Framework 2019-2024. At the same time, it has given us the opportunity to reflect on the way forward and our response to the challenges in higher education in South Africa and beyond.

For the next strategic phase, **Vision 2040 and the Strategic Framework** still guide SU, direct our strategy and illustrate where and how the University is positioned. The essence of our vision and mission, namely to be in service of society, is therefore embedded in all six core strategic themes. These themes, of which 'a thriving Stellenbosch University' is the overarching theme, provide the framework for further planning, with the foci adding a unique lens through which we enhance our impact trajectory.

Our institutional goals and objectives are captured in our **Strategy Plan 2026-2030** and provide the framework for our annual planning cycles, as well as all implementation plans to follow. The plan also provides outcomes with additional outcomes to be determined by the implementation plans for each year. Our indicators to measure progress towards achieving our vision will be in a separate document, to allow for the multilevel nature of these indicators within the complex university environment.

APPROACH TO THE STRATEGY PROCESS

2. APPROACH TO THE STRATEGY PROCESS

The transition from the 2019-2024 strategy cycle to the 2026-2030 period represents both continuity and enhancement. While our foundational Vision 2040 (vision, mission, values, attributes and enablers) and Strategic Framework (six core strategic themes) remain unchanged, the comprehensive strategic planning process undertaken since May 2025 has produced a refined **Strategy Plan 2026–2030**, which forms the basis for the annual **Strategy Implementation Plan (SIP)** and **Institutional Plan (IP).**

The process followed a structured approach through four parallel yet interconnected projects. This involved evaluating progress from 2019-2024, while simultaneously developing new institutional goals and objectives. This foundational work encompassed evidence-based document analysis, goal and objective mapping, gap identification, strategic foci integration and SMART alignment to ensure measurable outcomes, as well as a complete review of institutional indicators, the latter still ongoing. All institutional strategy-related documents were also aligned with **Strategy Plan 2026–2030**. (See Figure 1 for a visualisation of the interaction between the projects.)

Extensive stakeholder engagement formed the cornerstone of the process, ensuring both responsive adaptation and comprehensive input from across the institution. This iterative approach enabled continuous refinement and ensured message consistency throughout the planning cycle. The resulting **Strategy Plan 2026-2030** emphasises operational simplicity, despite comprehensive analysis, and ensures accessibility and implementation across all institutional levels.
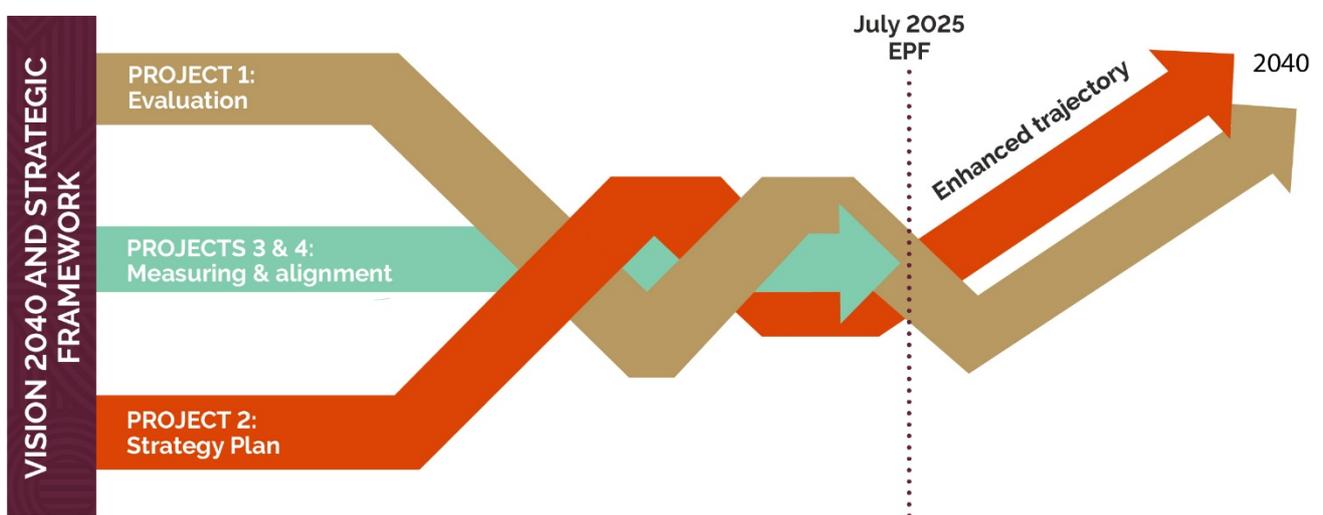

Figure 1: A visualisation of the interaction between the projects

Our three-tier approach to strategy planning

The visualisation in Figure 2 below illustrates SU's three-tier strategy process as well as the relationship between the different strategic documents.

TOP TIER

Vision 2040 and Strategic Framework remain in place and guide us towards our long-term strategic aspirations. They provide continuity and enable **enhancement** of the strategy.

SECOND TIER

The **Strategy Plan** provides **structural integrity**. The new institutional goals and objectives are focused to form a 'new' future through deliberate forward-thinking decisions.

FOUNDATION TIER

The **Strategy Implementation Plan (SIP)** indicates how every environment in SU **aligns and contributes** to the achievement of the strategy through their action.

I
Vision 2040 & Strategic Framework

II
The Strategy Plan

III
The Strategy Implementation Plan

15+ Years

5 Years

Annually

Figure 2: Visualisation of SU's three-tier strategy process

In short:

- **Vision 2040 and the Strategic Framework**, at the top of the strategy planning tiers, guide us towards our long-term strategic aspirations and is our source document.

- The **Strategy Plan 2026–2030**, on the second tier, provides institutional goals and objectives for a five-year timeframe. Outcomes are also indicated.

- The **Strategy Implementation Plan** (SIP), the foundational tier, focuses on operational alignment **on an annual basis**. It also provides the final outcomes for a particular year, as determined by the actions.

The strategy process was guided by the following principles:

1 Continuity and enhancement
Vision 2040 and Strategic Framework remain in place

2 Structural integrity
The six core strategic themes remain as the foundational organising structure

3 Strategic integration
The Rector's three foci provide an additional strategic lens

4 Evidence-based approach
Data-driven decision making

5 Measurable outcomes
Ensure accountability and trackable progress

6 Clear communication
Message consistency and shared language

7 Adaptive excellence
SU operates as a learning organisation

8 Inclusive engagement
Stakeholder input incorporated

9 Strategic and operational simplicity
Focused and comprehensible

10 Iterative refinement
Continuous improvement

Of these principles, the strategic integration of three foci, as illustrated in Figure 3 below, provides an additional lens through which the strategy is enhanced. These foci are academic excellence, partnerships and sustainability, and people, processes and culture. Together these represent holistic transformation and are embedded in all six themes, as well as the institutional goals and objectives.
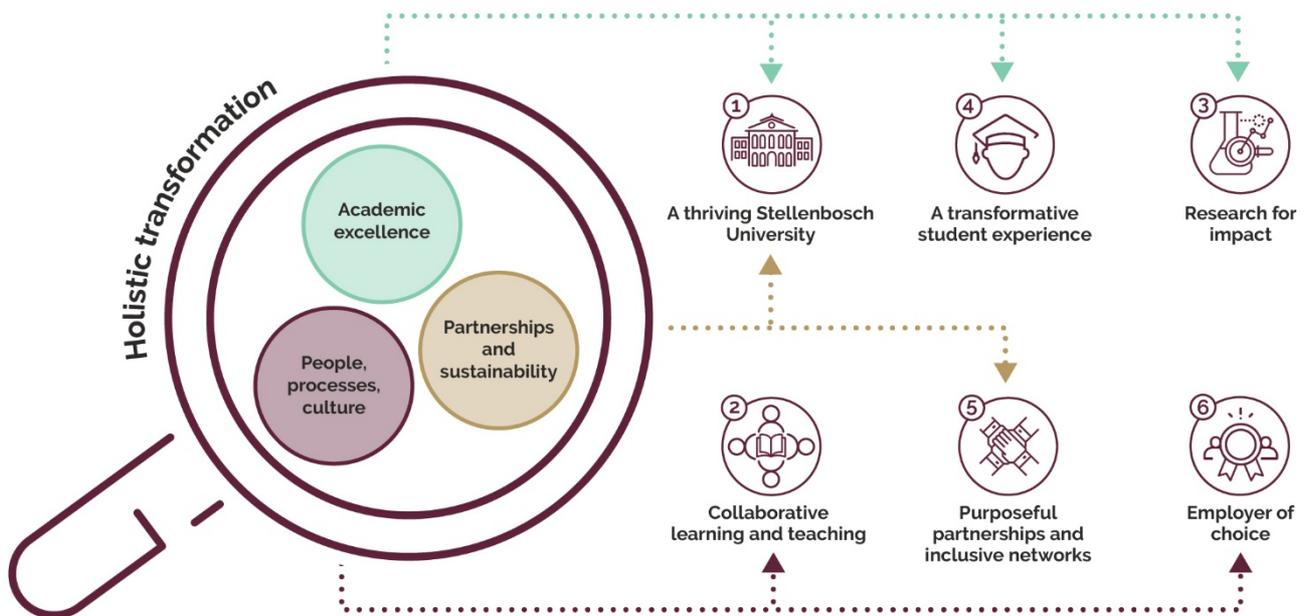

Figure 3: Strategic integration of the three foci

Moving forward, the University intends to focus on strategy alignment through integrated planning and execution, and streamlining structures, processes and policies to bridge the gap between formulation and implementation. Continuous monitoring based on measurement indicators will enable an agile, adaptable organisation prepared for future challenges.

Through this coordinated approach we ensure that every aspect of our University operations contribute meaningfully to our journey towards Vision 2040.

VISION 2040 AND STRATEGIC FRAMEWORK

3. VISION 2040 AND STRATEGIC FRAMEWORK

Stellenbosch University's vision and strategy, *Vision 2040 and Strategic Framework,* consist of two components:

Vision 2040 encapsulates SU's vision statement, mission statement, values, attributes and enablers, whilst the **Strategic Framework** addresses the six core strategic themes encompassing SU's core business and key stakeholders.

These components are supported by **SU's Restitution Statement (2018)** and **Code 2040**, SU's integrated code of ethics and code of conduct, which was approved by Council on 28 November 2022.

3.1 Our vision

In response to all the challenges and opportunities, our vision guides us in our endeavours to achieve our future aims. Our vision defines what we want to become by 2040 and is an aspirational description of what we would like to achieve in the long term. Our vision is that, by 2040:

> *Stellenbosch University will be Africa's leading research-intensive university, globally recognised as excellent, inclusive and innovative, where we advance knowledge in service of society.*

SU's aspirations for the realisation of *Vision 2040*

- An impeccable reputation as a proud African knowledge hub that serves the continent through research, innovation and education.
- A transformed and integrated academic community that celebrates critical thinking, promotes debate and is committed to democracy, human rights and social justice with an outward, international and future focus.
- Having an all-encompassing impact on the social, financial and environmental wellbeing of the town, region, country and continent, with a global reach.
- A systemically sustainable institution in economic, social and environmental terms, as a national asset that serves the diverse needs of our communities.

3.2 Our mission

Our mission supports what we strive to achieve and how we intend to do it. It defines us as a university, why we exist and our reason for being. To achieve our vision, the mission is as follows:

> *Stellenbosch University is a research-intensive university where we attract outstanding students, employ talented staff and provide a world-class environment; a place connected to the world, while enriching and transforming local, continental and global communities.*

To achieve our mission, we:

- strengthen interdisciplinary and multidisciplinary research to advance, deepen, transfer and implement knowledge;
- are innovative and share our innovations with the world;
- nurture close relationships with our stakeholders through engagement, collaboration and mutually beneficial partnerships;
- share our knowledge offering through collaborative learning and teaching;
- build an academic community of shared values; and influence and change the world around us, while being responsive and embracing change ourselves.

3.3 Our Values

Our shared **values** relate to the beliefs and attitudes that guide our behaviour ('our action guides'). The values are equally important, are interconnected and inform SU's code of ethics and conduct (**Code 2040**).
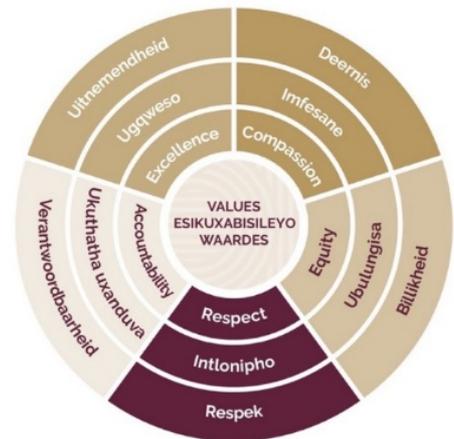
3.4 Attributes

Our attributes define the qualities and characteristics of the University. The following eight attributes embody what we stand for.

- All-encompassing impact
- Agile, adaptable and responsive
- Collaborative nature and approach
- Organisational culture built on shared values
- Professionalism
- Systemic sustainability
- Strategic focus with a shared vision
- Entrepreneurial mindset

3.5 Enablers

Enablers are the elements that make everything possible. They describe the capabilities, forces and resources that contribute to SU's success. Achieving our vision and mission and implementing our Strategic Framework will not be possible without the enablers of:

- People (staff and students)
- Purpose
- Technology
- Infrastructure
- Sound finance
- Good governance
- Good communication

3.6   Restitution Statement

Looking forward, we strive to be a relevant University that will play a key role in the development of our nation and our continent. We are committed to contributing to a society of dignity, healing, justice, freedom and equality for all. We also acknowledge and demonstrate an awareness that the past 100 years included great injustices to many in our country.

This is formally recorded in our Restitution Statement (2018) below:

> *Stellenbosch University (SU) acknowledges its inextricable connection with generations past, present and future. In the 2018 Centenary Year, SU celebrates its many successes and achievements. SU simultaneously acknowledges its contribution towards the injustices of the past. For this we have deep regret. We apologise unreservedly to the communities and individuals who were excluded from the historical privileges that SU enjoyed and we honour the critical Matie voices of the time who would not be silenced. In responsibility towards the present and future generations, SU commits itself unconditionally to the ideal of an inclusive world-class university in and for Africa.*

3.7   Code 2040 and our pledge

(SU) Code 2040 provides a mechanism to guide and manage organisational integrity and ethical culture at SU, and promotes and maintains ethical behaviour in the conduct of SU's business with its stakeholders.

In recognition of the principles outlined in Code 2040, Stellenbosch University pledges itself to ethical behaviour at all times, specifically relating to excellence in our work, respect and compassion in our interaction with others, and accountability for our actions.

Code 2040 pledge

As stakeholders of Stellenbosch University, we pledge:
a) to conduct our work in a manner that demonstrates excellence,
b) to always treat others equitably, and with respect and compassion, and
c) to be accountable for the execution and consequences of all our actions.

STRATEGIC FRAMEWORK

4.   STRATEGIC FRAMEWORK

The Strategic Framework articulates our vision, mission and strategic priorities, establishing a comprehensive structure that positions the University as a leading research-intensive institution. It emphasises the systematic evaluation of our approaches to research, learning and teaching, social impact, and the institutional processes required to achieve our institutional goals and objectives. The Strategy Plan 2026-2030 recognises areas of current performance plateau and commits to developing specific interventions through annual Strategy Implementation Plans.

The 2025 strategy enhancement process provided an opportunity to comprehensively review our strategic direction – reaffirming core elements, adjusting priorities, strengthening alignment, targeting focal areas for accelerated progress and improving coherence across all strategic components.

Core strategic enhancements include:

1. **Repositioned strategic themes** reflecting institutional priorities. Their positions are now as follows:

    o   Theme 1 'A thriving Stellenbosch University' remains our overarching theme, embodying our ultimate aspiration to achieve a flourishing institution.

    o   Themes 2 and 3 'Collaborative learning and teaching' and 'Research for impact' represent our core academic functions. These primary drivers focus on strengthening internal processes essential to our mission.

    o   Themes 4 and 5 recognise our stakeholder communities as vital partners. Theme 4 'A transformative student experience' focuses on our largest internal stakeholder group, and Theme 5 'Purposeful partnerships and inclusive networks' engages our external stakeholders.

    o   Theme 6 'Employer of choice' acknowledges our staff as a critical enabler and as fundamental to institutional success.

2. **Updated institutional goals and objectives** for each theme, while preserving original Vision 2040 goals as historical benchmarks in the source document.
3. **Refined theme statements** that articulate new goals, while maintaining clear connections to Vision 2040.
4. **Removal of timeframe constraints** from the vision and framework to emphasise continuity and foundational strength.
5. **Highlighting the three foci** to be advanced by using the following colour key:

Foci Key	Academic excellence	People, processes and culture	Partnerships and sustainability

STRATEGY PLAN 2026-2030

5. STRATEGY PLAN 2026–2030

① Core strategic theme 1: A thriving Stellenbosch University

A thriving Stellenbosch University is not merely an aspiration but an enabling ecosystem from which we advance knowledge in service of society, ensuring our relevance and impact for generations to come.

A thriving institution is the foundation for institutional excellence across all strategic themes and creates the conditions for all other strategic priorities to flourish. This is achieved by enhancing our reputation as a leading research-intensive and entrepreneurial institution in Africa; providing world-class learning and teaching; building a humanising culture that is grounded in our values; and ensuring robust holistic sustainability, including financial sustainability and operational efficiency.

No	Institutional goal		Aligned objective(s)	Outcomes (Additional outcomes may be added to the annual Strategy Implementation Plans (SIP), if and when required)
1.1	To establish Stellenbosch University as Africa's leading research-intensive and entrepreneurial university	1.1.1	To improve the impact of SU research output	Increase in research output in leading journals in all scientific fields
				Improved national and international visibility (impact) of SU's research output
				Enhanced postgraduate research pipeline and talent attraction
				Increased research translation into societal and economic impact through IP and commercialisation
				Increased innovation-driven revenue and entrepreneurial ecosystem development
1.2	To enhance SU's reputation in learning, teaching and assessment	1.2.1	To sustain and strengthen enabling learning and teaching environments	Staff and students experience high levels of satisfaction with learning and teaching support services
		1.2.2	To enable multilingualism at institutional and functional level	University functions effectively serve diverse linguistic communities
				Multilingualism-based needs in the learning and operational environments are effectively supported
1.3	To establish a humanising, inclusive institutional culture	1.3.1	To improve regular and relevant climate and culture	Established climate measurement systems with regular data collection and action frameworks

	grounded in the institutional values		measurements to produce information that supports action	Evidence-based interventions implemented based on climate and culture assessments
				Institutional policies and digital platforms enabling culture measurement and responsive action
		1.3.2	To implement integrated initiatives to improve staff and student wellbeing	Staff are empowered to improve their wellbeing and development opportunities
1.4	To strengthen SU's financial sustainability through diversified revenue generation	1.4.1	To establish strategic investment partnerships	Strategic investment fund generates sustainable revenue from diversified sources
		1.4.2	To expand and diversify fourth-income streams	Increased income secured from foreign and domestic funders (foundations, trusts) and alumni
		1.4.3	To expand sustainable fifth-income streams	Increased income generated from IP and commercial assets
1.5	To optimise integrated structures, processes, systems and governance frameworks	1.5.1	To optimise institutional frameworks and business processes for operational efficiency, including digital transformation	Comprehensive institutional framework designed and implemented
				Improved, aligned and efficient business processes
				Effective implementation of technology, integration and digitalisation, where appropriate
				Enhanced data quality, accuracy and consistency to establish a single source of truth and improve decision making and collaboration
				Regulatory compliance maintained
				Data-driven insights/informed decision making enabled
				Operational efficiency boosted
				Improved data privacy and security
				Improved collaboration
		1.5.2	To pursue holistic sustainability	University demonstrates holistic sustainability (economic, social, environment and management)
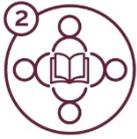
Core strategic theme 2: Collaborative learning and teaching

SU's institutional commitment to the scholarship of learning and teaching elevates pedagogical excellence to a core priority. We advance learning environments where academic rigour and workplace relevance complement each other, and where technology enhances rather than replaces human connection.

Learning and teaching at SU is part of a dynamic network that adapts fluidly to advances in disciplinary knowledge and shifting professional requirements. Through curricula and programmes that integrate discovery and practical implementation, we cultivate collaborative spaces where students, academics, and industry partners jointly generate knowledge and forge solutions. These alliances produce graduates characterised by critical citizenship, their ability to navigate complexity with confidence, and merging conceptual depth with applied competence.

No	Institutional goal		Aligned objective(s)	Outcomes (Additional outcomes may be added to annual Strategy Implementation Plans (SIP), if and when required)
2.1	To offer programmes that respond to changes in knowledge (Excellence in Learning and Teaching)	2.1.1	To ensure that the curricula offered are aligned and correspond with the latest scholarship in the disciplines	Increased integration of various disciplinary approaches in academic programmes Specific focus areas, e.g. entrepreneurship, are addressed in the curricula
2.2	To offer programmes that respond to changes in the world of work (changing practices in specific professions)	2.2.1	To ensure that the curricula offered respond to the changes in professions and other work-related developments	Increased number of SU graduates find relevant employment aligned with their degrees
		2.2.2	To provide problem-based education and/or include work-integrated learning (WIL) opportunities in academic programmes	Attract industry to our spaces so that students are exposed to cutting-edge technology
2.3	To advance the scholarship of learning and teaching	2.3.1	To support the implementation of inter-disciplinary learning and teaching in undergraduate and postgraduate areas	Undergraduate research excellence supported
		2.3.2	To support the professional	More teaching staff actively participate in continuous

			development of academics as scholars	professional development (to enhance skills and competencies)
		2.3.3	To appropriately recognise and reward the practice of the scholarship of teaching and learning (SOTL)	Teaching excellence receives recognition comparable to research achievements

Core strategic theme 3: Research for impact

SU pursues research excellence that transcends disciplinary boundaries, addressing complex global, regional and local challenges. This reflects our ambition to optimise the scholarly, scientific, economic, social and cultural contributions of our research, advancing knowledge in service of society.

Together we build capacity for impactful research by investing in people, strengthening infrastructure, embedding a collegial and inclusive research culture, and driving knowledge exchange, innovation and entrepreneurship.

We are deeply committed to addressing the most pressing challenges of our time. Locally, this means contributing solutions to inequality, poverty and unemployment. Continentally and globally, this includes tackling climate change, health resilience, social justice and technological innovation.

Through these efforts, Stellenbosch University reaffirms its role as a world-class, Africa-rooted research-intensive institution – driving societal transformation and shaping sustainable futures.

No	Institutional goal		Aligned objective(s)	Outcomes (Additional outcomes may be added to annual Strategy Implementation Plans (SIP), if and when required)
3.1	To pursue excellence in all forms of research (inter-, intra-, multi-, cross- and transdisciplinary) (research excellence)	3.1.1	To enable inter-, multi-, cross- and transdisciplinary approaches that amplify existing disciplinary strengths and new strategic areas	Translational research Research that addresses societal challenges Research culture supports collaboration, integrity, inclusivity and global engagement
3.2	To attract and retain the best research talent (research capacity)	3.2.1	To prioritise and enhance research excellence by growing the contribution of researchers	High-calibre researchers choose and remain at the University Attract high-impact research fellows and extraordinary appointments
		3.2.2	To increase the number of postdoctoral fellows at SU (research/knowledge productive capacity)	Postdoctoral programmes attract South African and international talent and enhance research Increased co-investment in postdoctoral programme
		3.2.3	To increase the proportion of academic staff with doctoral qualifications (researcher quality)	Increased proportion of academic staff with doctoral degrees
		3.2.4	To expand and enhance SU programmes that support and accelerate early career academics and future professors	Increased participation in capacity-building programmes and initiatives Accelerated academic career development due to participation

			(research capacity and diversity)	in capacity-building programmes and initiatives
3.3	To provide world-class research infrastructure, facilities and capabilities (research infrastructure)	3.3.1	To increase and maintain high-quality and appropriate research infrastructure	Research funding provides long-term sustainability and growth for research infrastructure, i.e. hardware, software licence costs, human resources, facilities Research infrastructure and facilities meet world-class standards and support excellence
3.4	To increase SU's research publication quality and output (research output)	3.4.1	To increase quality research output	Increase in number and quality of research publications (books, chapters, conference proceedings, articles, creative output)
3.5	To increase the contribution of postgraduate students to research outputs (research output)	3.5.1	To support and invest in postgraduate student scholarships and Consolidoc programmes	PhD programmes attract an increased number of quality candidates Increase in research output from postgraduate candidates
3.6	To achieve optimal scientific impact	3.6.1	To develop more and diverse knowledge dissemination strategies (science translation and communication)	Research knowledge transfers effectively to practical applications
3.7	To achieve optimal societal impact	3.7.1	To establish strategic trans-disciplinary research projects to enhance the relevance, and societal and economic impact of SU research	Trans-disciplinary research projects promote knowledge exchange and societal impact Research produces sustainable commercial revenue streams
		3.7.2	To produce research with policy relevance and impact	Research findings influence policy development and implementation
3.8	To optimise the entrepreneurial and innovative capability in the University	3.8.1	To ensure the protection of intellectual property with commercial potential (including patents)	Intellectual property receives appropriate legal protection
		3.8.2	To establish more spin-off companies to bring new products and services emanating from SU research to society where it can achieve both societal and economic impact	Research innovations create successful, sustainable commercial enterprises
		3.8.3	To enable, foster and strengthen a culture of entrepreneurship	Innovation and entrepreneurship culture is established.

Core strategic theme 4: A transformative student experience

Students at SU receive exceptional academic teaching, learning and supervision through progressive pedagogies and research-led education. Integrated institutional support systems promote student success by addressing academic, personal and socio-economic needs of students, developing well-rounded graduates who embody the institutional values of respect, accountability, excellence, equity and compassion.

Our programmes align directly with changing professional landscapes, ensuring students are thoroughly equipped for diverse career environments. We foster digital competencies and holistic development, preparing graduates to create lasting impact as ethical, enterprising professionals and engaged citizens.

No	Institutional goal		Aligned objective(s)	Outcomes (Additional outcomes may be added to annual Strategy Implementation Plans (SIP), if and when required)
4.1	To increase student access	4.1.1	To increase access for designated groups (e.g. previously disadvantaged students, students with disabilities and other relevant obstacles that could constrain access)	Policies and related documentation support access to designated groups Process barriers to student access are eliminated Underrepresented student groups have increased access to a diverse set of university programmes
4.2	To improve student success	4.2.1	To strengthen comprehensive student support systems	Students have increased access to effective academic support services in a timeous manner Students have increased access to effective wellbeing and support services in a timeous manner Students affected by delayed funding (including NSFAS) receive timely bridging support to prevent academic disruption External factors (e.g. transport, accommodation) that compromise student achievement are mitigated Achievement gaps between socio-economic groups are minimised More students participate in co-curricular activities, and more co-curricular acknowledgement as part of students' portfolios

		4.2.2	To increase the number of students who successfully complete their degrees	Increased number of under- and postgraduates completing their degrees within the minimum time
				Data-driven decision making for student success improvements
				Enhanced retention rates through predictive analytics and timely interventions
		4.2.3	To increase the number of graduates converting to higher levels of qualification	Increased conversion rates from undergraduate degrees to doctoral degrees
4.3	To cultivate digital competencies for enhanced collaborative learning experiences	4.3.1	To enable students to use new digital technologies	Digitally transformed and enhanced teaching and learning experiences
				Enhanced personalised learning experiences and assessment efficiency

Core strategic theme 5: Purposeful partnerships and inclusive networks

SU builds strategic partnerships with academic institutions, business, industry and civil society to amplify our research impact and drive innovation. By fostering intentional partnerships within local, continental and global networks, we collaborate to address societal challenges and create tangible benefits for communities

These mutually beneficial partnerships attract investment, accelerate technology transfer, and position us as Africa's preferred partner for transformative higher education initiatives. By connecting academic excellence with practical solutions, and engaging our stakeholder communities, we ensure that our research remains relevant and responsive while strengthening our reputation as a leading research-intensive university.

No	Institutional goal		Aligned objective(s)	Outcomes (Additional outcomes may be added to annual Strategy Implementation Plans (SIP), if and when required)
5.1	To establish Stellenbosch University as the preferred partner in higher education development	5.1.1	To build strategic academic and research partnerships, both domestically and internationally	New active or focused academic partnerships are established New joint research initiatives with African institutions are established New joint research chairs are established New exchange opportunities for students and staff have been created Increased number of effective international teaching alliances Increased number of effective academic collaborations
		5.1.2	To increase collaboration with local and international business and industry partners	Increased number of industry collaboration projects Increase in revenue generated from new and existing networks
		5.1.3	To strengthen employer partnerships and opportunities for internships and apprenticeships	Students gain practical experience through structured work placements in partnership with external stakeholders
5.2	To develop meaningful global partnerships, including emerging regions	5.2.1	To establish strategic partnerships in Asia-Pacific and other emerging global market regions	Increased market access to, and collaboration opportunities with, Asia-Pacific countries

5.3	To build engaged stakeholder communities	5.3.1	To increase engagement with diverse stakeholder groups, including alumni, funders and decision-makers	More relevant stakeholder groups actively participate in and contribute financially to university partnerships Increased number of alumni across especially targeted regions maintain strong connections and contribute to university development
		5.3.2	To focus on co-design with community and relevant SU stakeholders	SU research is more engaged and embedded to exchange knowledge in service of society

Core strategic theme 6: Employer of choice

SU recognises that our people are the key drivers of our success. By implementing progressive attraction and retention strategies, competitive recognition systems, and comprehensive development opportunities, we create an environment where exceptional people across all staff categories choose to build their careers.

Our investment in leadership capacity-building and staff wellbeing cultivates a humanising culture where connection and belonging are nurtured, and every individual can contribute meaningfully to our collective mission and systemic societal change through their expertise.

No	Institutional goal		Aligned objective(s)	Outcomes (Additional outcomes may be added to annual Strategy Implementation Plans (SIP), if and when required)
6.1	To attract the best staff in all categories to SU	6.1.1	To develop and implement talent attraction strategies	Appropriate management systems and processes to attract staff (attract, develop, retain and reward talent)
		6.1.2	To recruit international academic staff, where relevant and appropriate	Increased number of the best domestic and foreign staff are appointed at SU
6.2	To ensure that the best and most productive staff at SU are retained	6.2.1	To develop and implement talent retention strategies	Strategic approaches effectively retain talent
		6.2.2	To implement competitive recognition and reward systems	Remuneration attracts and retains quality staff at all levels within the sector
		6.2.3	To develop and provide comprehensive training and development opportunities for all staff	More staff benefit from professional development opportunities
		6.2.4	To support personal and positional leadership development capabilities	Leaders at SU have the capability to support a humanising culture Deliberate platforms across the institution for staff to actively engage and participate in decision making
		6.2.5	To increase productive staff exchange opportunities	Staff exchanges provide professional development and networking opportunities

NAVIGATING RISK AND EMBRACING OPPORTUNITY: THE PATH FORWARD

6. NAVIGATING RISK AND EMBRACING OPPORTUNITY: THE PATH FORWARD

The transition from the Strategy Plan 2019–2024 to the Strategy Plan 2026–2030 reflects both continuity and critical evolution in Stellenbosch University's strategic intent. Informed by a comprehensive SOAR (strengths, opportunities, aspirations, results) analysis, the institution acknowledges that although SU successfully navigated the disruptive pandemic period and preserved operational stability, we have now reached a **performance plateau** that necessitates a recalibrated risk appetite. This includes a more deliberate tolerance for innovation-driven risk and a reduced tolerance for unmanaged financial exposure. The shift occurs within an environment characterised by **unprecedented funding volatility** in South African higher education. Four of the institution's top five risks directly threaten our financial sustainability: the state regulation of tuition fees, the sustained decline of state subsidies in real terms, instability in the national student financial aid scheme (NSFAS), and the reduction and volatility of international research income, particularly the contraction of US federal research funding. The additional downward pressure on philanthropic giving, coupled with global donor fatigue, further intensifies our vulnerability.

Against this backdrop, the University must adopt a measured but assertive risk appetite, one that is prudent in the face of structural funding shocks, yet bold in pursuing diversified income opportunities. Incremental adjustments are no longer sufficient; instead, these converging pressures demand a fundamental reimagining of our financial model and a deliberate shift toward diversified revenue portfolios across third-, fourth- and fifth-stream income.

Financial risks: Recalibrating the institutional risk appetite (partnerships and sustainability)

The Strategy Plan 2026–2030 directly addresses systemic funding pressures through the focus of Goal 1.4 on holistic financial sustainability. This includes:

- targeted growth in contract research, industry-facing consultancy, and innovation services;
- the expansion of professional development programmes to create cost-recovering and revenue-generating teaching pathways;
- the scaling of commercialisation activities, including intellectual property pipelines, spin-outs, and market-aligned technology platforms; and
- the intentional pursuit of strategic partnerships locally and globally that open new funding instruments.

The University's risk appetite in this domain shifts towards greater acceptance of entrepreneurial, partnership-based income generation, while maintaining a low tolerance for compliance, liquidity and solvency risk. Diversification is thus not an optional strategy but a necessary institutional risk response.

A cohesive, risk-aligned institutional response

The Strategy Plan 2026–2030 is not a collection of isolated initiatives but an integrated institutional risk management response. Digital transformation supports operational resilience; purposeful partnerships generate new income streams; investment in people and culture (themes 3 and 6) sustains talent through periods of compensation pressure; and the pivot to sustainable learning and teaching enhances long-term financial viability.

Learning and teaching: Market relevance, affordability and sustainability (academic excellence)

Within learning and teaching, the risk appetite framework acknowledges that programme portfolios must become more agile, market-responsive and financially viable. The Strategy Plan emphasises:

- refining the academic offering to meet evolving labour-market needs;

- diversifying modes of delivery, including digital and blended pathways;

- improving cost-effectiveness without compromising quality.

These interventions reduce risk exposure related to enrolment stagnation, affordability challenges, and over-dependence on state-regulated fee income. Meanwhile, digital transformation (Goal 1.5) mitigates systems and cyber security risks by strengthening data integrity, improving student-facing services, and enabling integrated planning and forecasting.

Research, innovation and commercialisation: Responding to global funding contraction (academic excellence)

The contraction of US federal research funds and other international research income streams requires SU to adopt a higher innovation risk appetite paired with reduced dependency risk. The plan's integrated research and innovation objectives aim to:

- expand high-impact research partnerships across Africa and the Global South;

- grow contract research and science industry collaborations;

- strengthen commercialisable research outputs and entrepreneurial ecosystems; and

- build resilient research funding portfolios that reduce dependence on a narrow cluster of external agencies.

In doing so, SU positions itself to mitigate external funding shocks while leveraging research-intensive growth as a strategic differentiator.

Internationalisation: Strategic alliances as a risk-mitigation and growth lever (partnerships and sustainability)

Internationalisation framed as purposeful, ethical and mutually beneficial serves as both a buffer against domestic funding instability and a catalyst for new revenue. Under Theme 5 (purposeful partnerships and inclusive networks), the University expands its risk appetite for strategic international alliances, while maintaining a conservative stance on partnerships that could expose SU to reputational, political or financial harm. The focus on diversified global collaborations opens pathways for:

- joint degrees and collaborative teaching models;

- multi-institutional research programmes;

- philanthropy and alumni engagement across new geographies; and

- mobility pathways that enhance SU's attractiveness to international students.

Steering SU toward opportunity amid structural risk

As SU embarks on this strategic trajectory, the institution does so with full recognition of both its inherent strengths and the magnitude of change required. Moving from a high-performing university to Africa's leading research-intensive institution demands courage, particularly in making difficult decisions on resource allocation, programme prioritisation and institutional focus. Our governance structures, informed by a refined risk appetite, offer the oversight required to balance ambition with responsibility. Through the three strategic foci of academic excellence, people, processes and culture, and partnerships and sustainability, SU is positioned not only to withstand future disruptions but to transform them into opportunities.