

# School of Arts and Humanities Plan: 2024-2029

## Purpose, Principles, Ambition and Strategic Directions

---

### Introduction

The complex and contested figure of ‘the human’ stands at the centre of the School of Arts and Humanities, and the daily life of our scholarly community. Each of us looks upon, understands, and values the human in different ways. We inhabit our own humanity with similar differences and uncertainties. At times some will see the empty space left, at the centre, when we consider the potential of post-humanism, reflect on non-human agency, or contemplate the consequences for our natural world of the Anthropocene era. And, fundamentally, we realise that the human is both individual and collective all at once, neither without the other.

Our scholarly community thrives because we welcome this epistemological plurality; our methods of research and learning are equally diverse. Moreover, the humans that we are, that we study and about whom we help others to learn exist within overlapping environments: political and social, natural and artificial, material and digital. Who we are, what we might achieve, even the very possibility of being human is dependent on forces and structures beyond our individual existence. Yet the places and communities these environments form, and within which we live, are made as much *by* humans as much as they make us. Our scholarship therefore is always conscious of the dialogic relations of self and other, individual and collective, human and non-human. Each of us will take something different from this dialogue, will speak it with different words and emphases: but we are all part of that conversation. From this foundational focus on the challenges and opportunities of being and knowing ‘the human’, how can the School of Arts and Humanities fulfil Edith Cowan University’s fundamental mission to transform lives and enrich society?

### Purpose

The School of Arts and Humanities exists to advance social justice in the world and to improve the quality of life for all. We seek to achieve more equal and positive social relations; to foster the realisation of individual human potential; and to enable diverse creative expression. Working together, students and staff will increase the stores of human, social, and cultural capital as a foundation for progress towards a more just and inclusive society. We will do this work with clear recognition that humans must respect, and sustain ourselves within, the natural environment.

The School places equal emphasis on teaching and research: together, they are how we discover, develop, share, apply, and extend the knowledge we generate from scholarship for the wider community of which we are a part. Our work is always interwoven with *the creative and caring professions* whose interests we serve, whose members we help produce, and who we guide in their future development.

We will listen to and tell the important stories of the world, stories that speak to the potential for and necessity of positive change to transform lives and enrich society. In this way, we will contribute to achieving the University’s strategic goals.

In doing so, the school aims to help people:

- be informed and empowered in their lives;
- navigate their way successfully in a complex and global world;
- solve the intersectional problems which confront individuals and communities; and
- be engaged and ethical in their acquisition, application, and advancement of knowledge.

### Principles

Our pursuit of this purpose is guided by the values of ECU: integrity, respect, rational inquiry, personal excellence, and courage. The School has a central operating principle, reflecting these values, in that we *put people first* and thereby form a community in which we can achieve harmony between individual and collective expectations and needs. This principle requires us to:

- build a culture of inclusion;
- enable everyone’s safe and meaningful participation;
- use our resources for the common good of a sustainable school;
- embrace and pursue considered change to meet new requirements and take opportunities; and
- uphold our obligations to ECU as we also enjoy the privileges and freedoms of being within ECU.

*The School acknowledges the Traditional Owners of the lands on which we work and pays its respects to Elders past, present, and emerging. We commit always to working with and learning from First Nations’ Peoples*

## Ambition

Guided by our principles, we can afford to be ambitious. Looking ahead, the School will be a leader in teaching and research to sustain and transform the creative and caring professions fundamental to a just, inclusive, and enriched society. We will be known for the quality and positive impact in the world of our students, as graduates from innovative, effective, learner-centred courses. Our research, rigorous and tested against world standards, will be seen to create new and more positive conditions for human achievement and social change. We will engage closely with industry and community and be recognised as a preferred partner able to deliver outstanding results with and for collaborators. We will be a leader in the partnerships we build with First Nations' Peoples.

And in achieving this ambition, we want to be a school in which all of us can experience *the moments of unexpected, joyful discovery* that inspire our efforts to create a better world, and always value such moments for what they bring to a life of scholarship.

## Strategic Directions

### Priority Concerns

The School of Arts and Humanities will respond to the world it inhabits and seeks to influence, by focusing on and being guided in its work by seven priority concerns.

- ❖ **Care:** a wellspring of potential for positive transformation in social and cultural life to improve wellbeing, sustain resilience, and enable human fulfillment; our understanding of care is grounded in the social and extends to include empathy, kindness, and love as key aspects of the richness of human existence.
- ❖ **Climate change:** this global emergency has profound and widespread social and political consequences; it requires us to consider the emergence of new sites for injustices and trauma and reflect on the difficult and dangerous relationships humanity has forged with the natural world.
- ❖ **Decolonisation:** our commitment to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples and all Indigenous Peoples; we will actively engage in learning and unlearning, guided by Indigenous ways of being, knowing and doing, to address injustices and barriers to inclusion, and build respectful and reciprocal relationships.
- ❖ **Digital futures:** they include the presumed advances of generative artificial intelligence, new forms of extended reality, and the pervasiveness of mediated presence; we need to look both critically and with optimism at these futures, if we wish to shape them towards human advantage.
- ❖ **Global transformation:** we inhabit a political and economic environment that is unstable, with emerging reorganisations of power and privilege that create new centres of global authority and new threats to freedoms, and yet also provide opportunities for positive achievement in an intrinsically transnational world.
- ❖ **Intersectional inclusion:** a primary means for analysing and improving the human condition and addressing injustices; it recognises the multi-dimensional nature of barriers to self and social development and strengthens our ability to learn from, and ground our efforts in, the diverse lived experiences of those with whom we work.
- ❖ **Storytelling:** whether in private or public venues, through all forms of caring and creative expression; our work elevates transformational storytelling to a fundamental method and outcome that is based in creativity, applicable to all endeavours, and a source of positive change through the stories we listen to, tell and curate.

Each of us will find the best, most productive ways to bring emphasis to, and outcomes from, scholarship addressing these seven concerns. Moreover, our focus on them is not exclusionary of other interests or perspectives and we will find additional important topics on which to contribute and perspectives on what matters. The diversity of interpretation we bring to these concerns – what they mean, how might they guide us, and what responses they demand – will continue to enrich our plurality and diversity. However, by focusing on these concerns we will make better use of our limited time and resources and develop a greater commonality of approach across the School. Each of these concerns articulates 'the human', in different ways, as emerging from both individual and systemic epistemologies, but always aligned with a quest for social justice.

## Priority Enablers

The School of Arts and Humanities will concentrate its operational development on four priority concerns that will enable us to achieve our ambition.

- ❖ **Engagement** beyond the University will be a priority: we will add external engagement to teaching and research as a third key area of achievement. Engagement enhances teaching and research performance, and we also recognise it has *its own value* in achieving our purpose. Our school will exist as much outside university as it does within it and enable us to bring benefits to where they are needed: urban, regional, or remote; within Australia or overseas.
- ❖ **Leadership** holds us together and is a most important enabler. Leadership is not the work of a few identified individuals. Leadership is a mindset we will share; it is an *outcome* of how each of us works for the school – being accountable for our actions, caring for those around us, having the courage to be the first to act, seeking to be informed, and aligning what we do with the values and directions we set together. We will invest in our school's leadership capability to develop and empower ethical leaders capable of effecting meaningful change throughout the school and beyond.
- ❖ **Partnerships** will be at the forefront of our work; these partnerships will involve collaborating with the many different external stakeholders whose work parallels our own in external places, communities, and industries. We will base our partnerships on reciprocal respect and for mutual benefit beyond simple transactional deals. Partnerships bring the external world *inside* the university and thus complements our commitment to enhanced engagement.
- ❖ **Solidarity** as a school is essential, and we will work to implement coordinated approaches, common processes, and collective decisions that concentrate our efforts for shared success and combine and distribute resources for common benefit. A unified school, working together, will value its distinct histories and locations and then expand beyond them to take up the challenges and opportunities available at all the sites where we operate.

Just as our priority concerns do not exclude other key topics, there are other enablers that will need to be developed as we pursue our ambition. However, engagement, leadership, partnerships, and solidarity will be our points of emphasis in the next six years; our resources will be directed preferentially to initiatives and actions that support them. The priority given to these enablers will be reflected at all levels of the School and we will have a shared responsibility for them.

---