The national and international reputation of a university is largely dependent on two key performance parameters: the quality of its graduates and staff, and the quality and impact of its research. The increasing importance of world rankings of universities, based largely on their research performance and reputation, and the advent of the Excellence in Research Australia (ERA) assessment exercise in Australia, makes research performance paramount to the university’s profile and standing. This in turn affects student recruitment (especially internationally) and external investment.

Flinders University aspires to be a leading research-intense university and has a history of excellence in research in specific disciplines. It is important to build on this history, to provide focus and take research performance to a new level. The University has a foundation of individual academic groups in the schools and faculties that support a comprehensive range of research and teaching. This base of research-active staff also provides the expertise to support 20 research centres and institutes, enabling them to undertake both thematic and interdisciplinary research.

The University needs to develop a range of investment strategies to develop and maintain its world-leading research. These include:

- Developing a resource allocation and investment model to reward research performance and build areas of research strength.
- Developing stretch targets for research grant income and outputs.
- Managing staff performance and recruiting new, research-active staff.
- Collaborating where possible to create critical mass.

Key Strategy 5 of the Flinders Strategic Plan (2012-2016) has as its theme “focus on those who are or may be research active and on research that is ethical, high quality, targeted, and collaborative, so that we can make a positive contribution to resolving society’s most challenging problems.”

In a University of Flinders’ size and resources it is not possible to excel in all fields. Therefore, our strategy is to focus on our strengths and build internationally competitive areas that will support future growth. To achieve this, we must increase our research activity at all levels and support research leaders who can build productive and collaborative teams.

Our future and the impact of our research in the community will be defined by the foundation that we build today. We must harness the impressive intellectual and collegial strength that lies in the people of Flinders University, build a culture that expects us to achieve at a much greater level, and set a vision to see our University as an important contributor to global inquiry and discovery. Our major aspirational key performance indicators include:

- Increasing research and commercial income by 20% from $53M (2011) to $63M (2016).
• Identifying priority areas and investing in them.
• Having the majority of our disciplines rated as world standard or above.
• Increasing the number of national centres and awards.
• Having 100% of academic staff in balanced portfolio roles research active.

Our 2012 – 2016 Research Plan focuses on five key priorities that will drive our research activity and establish a strong foundation for the growth of Flinders’ research performance:

1. **Focus on priority areas of research excellence**

Flinders will identify and invest in targeted areas of strength and opportunity as a key strategy for achieving excellence, gaining recognition and building momentum. These areas will strengthen the foundation of Flinders’ research. They will become hubs for innovation and development, and will exemplify the focus and quality of research activity that Flinders will expect to achieve across the institution. Priority areas will be supported by all levels of the University through investment in people and activities. Schools, Faculties and Disciplines will recognise and build the capacity of these identified areas with the aim of concentrating research excellence and further enhancing research outcomes.

Key Actions:
- Focus research investment into priority areas that have the potential for research excellence.
- Refine roles and funding of existing research Centres and Institutes to create a higher expectation of research performance.
- Develop and support new Centres and Institutes in high-performing areas.
- Build a strong cohort of national and international RHD students and integrate them with research teams.
- Align new strategic appointments, including external fellows, with priority areas of strength.

2. **Establish a research active culture with high expectation of research performance**

We have set ourselves the challenge of pursuing stretch research targets that can be achieved only through the active and committed contributions of staff. These targets are necessary for Flinders to compete as a research intense University in Australia and globally. We need to make a focused effort towards research, develop skilled research teams and create opportunities to build excellence in sustainable research programs.

Our strategy for achieving this is a focus on culture, expectation and reward of research performance. We are raising the bar in terms of the quantity and quality expected from our research teams, we are developing individuals and teams through programs and support services, and we are investing in projects that will strengthen our position for future research funding. This strategy will build on the strengths of individuals, focus their activity and drive productivity across the organisation.

Key Actions:
- Drive stretch research goals through the development and implementation of a research performance index aligned to funding allocations.
• Measure research performance of all academics and direct into new roles those that are able but don’t engage in research activity.
• Develop a university funding model that rewards research performance.
• Build research proficiency at all levels through targeted development programs, mentoring schemes and research support services.
• Celebrate the success of researchers at all levels through events, communications, awards and prizes.
• Implement innovative communications strategies and technologies to promote research opportunity, encourage research activity and to highlight research strengths and successes.
• Invest in internal funding schemes to support research projects with high potential.
• Maintain internal funding schemes that support researchers with family priorities to engage in research activity.
• Engage and support clinicians at Flinders Medical Centre to undertake research activities with Flinders University.

3. Attract and support high-performing research leaders and teams
Valuing our people is key to our University and our research strategy. World-class Universities are defined by their critical mass of the most qualified and influential professors and researchers. The concentration of talent not only drives innovation and state-of-the-art research, but also inspires teaching programs and attracts the best students to contribute to ongoing research.

Of most importance to Flinders are our current and future research leaders, who will inspire, create and drive the research programs that will see Flinders succeed. We are committed to supporting both individuals and collaborative groups to develop their capacity and achieve their full potential. We will invest in our best researchers, attract new talent, create a rewarding environment, and build the leaders of the future at all levels.

Key Actions:
• Encourage strategic new research-intense appointments in Faculties, aligned to priority areas.
• All new academic appointments (except those that are education-focussed) aligned to research strengths.
• Identify and continue to develop current and potential key research leaders and their teams through targeted development programs and leadership opportunities.
• Ensure roles, workloads and performance management processes foster research focus and support research excellent staff.
• Continue to support the development of promising Early Career Researchers through targeted funding and development schemes.

4. Maintain close alignment of educational opportunities with research career pathways
A significant strength for Flinders has been the engagement of students in research programs, leading to their future research careers. By maintaining this alignment of educational opportunities with research career pathways we are able to increase research activity and outcomes, and potentially develop the University’s future
researchers. We need to ensure opportunities for students to participate in research programs exist and are well communicated. We need to encourage student involvement and promote research as the exciting, fulfilling career that it is. We also need to ensure appropriate development programs for our best students and our early career researchers, to build a pipeline of research-active staff for the future.

Key Actions:
- Build the Office of the Dean of Graduate Research.
- Develop a standard research support package for Higher Degree students, with a particular emphasis on addressing the special needs of international students.
- Establish a University-wide advanced scholars program.
- Align new teaching developments and courses with research strengths.
- Develop and implement a comprehensive communications and scholarship strategy focused on the recruitment of Honours and Higher Degree studies.
- Introduce budget measures to reward PhD completions.

5. Develop and strengthen major collaborations locally, nationally and internationally

Our research must make an impact on the world around us. Research is an increasingly global endeavour that requires collaboration across research organisations and with government, industry and communities. By being outwardly engaged, with strong links to stakeholders, Flinders has the opportunity to be involved in the most advanced and relevant research areas and develop critical mass in important research areas that the University could not sustain on its own.

We will continue to support existing and emerging collaborations between research teams and organisations. We will provide opportunities for individual researchers to build their networks, as well as developing cross-institutional linkages. These partnerships will inspire new research ideas, support research programs and ensure our research benefits the wider community.

Key Actions:
- Develop a strategic approach to targeting and investing in new collaborations locally, nationally and internationally, which build on strengths and existing connections, and expand opportunity for Flinders.
- Form strong links with industry groups and government agencies.
- Engage with target institutions to develop new University collaborations.
- Develop and maintain strategic links with international institutions.
- Continue to support travel and fellowship schemes to encourage national and international collaboration amongst researchers.
- Engage researchers to use new technologies to encourage collaboration.
- Identify and support opportunities for senior staff presence on external boards and committees.