



L to R: Vice-Chancellor and President Professor Alex Zelinsky AO and Chancellor P.E. (Paul) Jeans

A MESSAGE FROM THE CHANCELLOR AND VICE-CHANCELLOR

The 2020 Annual Report is an opportunity to reflect on an extraordinary year. It was a year of unprecedented local and global challenges and the University of Newcastle was not immune to their impact.

The Australian higher education sector was deeply and widely affected by COVID-19, initially with restrictions to travel that kept many international students away and then by public health orders that closed lecture theatres and classrooms. Early in Semester 1, our outstanding educators mobilised to move close to 1,300 courses into a virtual delivery mode in a matter of days, committed to ensuring students could continue with their studies. With equal dedication to the student experience and knowing the benefits greater engagement means for student success, we were proud to be one of the few universities to return to a COVID-19 safe form of face-to-face teaching in Semester 2, to the great relief of many of our students. The direct engagement, whether in class or through our

sporting, social and cultural activities on campus, was never more important. For a university where around half of our students are the first person in their family to ever study at university, we know the opportunities to belong, to connect and to be included can make all the difference.

In the midst of the escalating pandemic, we launched our new Strategic Plan, a plan developed in consultation with the regions and communities we serve. While launching the plan in March presented logistical challenges, our *Looking Ahead Strategic Plan 2020-2025* turned out to be precisely the plan for the times. It provided us with a robust roadmap to navigate unforeseen challenges with a focus on maintaining an outstanding student experience and serving

our communities. Our strategic engagement priorities of health and wellbeing, community connectedness, next generation resources and growing industries could not have been more relevant. Despite the disruptive nature of the first year of Looking Ahead, we made great progress.

Global politics also provided a unique and challenging backdrop to 2020. It was a year where different voices demanded to be heard. As a university we remain as committed as ever to upholding the right to free speech, and we reinforced this through our Code for the Protection of Freedom of Speech and Academic Freedom, a code which also reinforces our expectation of inclusive and open behaviours across our University. We have both the capability and the responsibility to facilitate difficult discussions on things that matter and we are proud to do so on behalf of our regions and for those whose voices are not always heard.

This year in particular we saw people rise to meet incredible challenges. From the earliest days of 2020, when bushfires raged across our regions, our staff and students showed resilience, strength and commitment for the greater good. Our institutional values of excellence, equity, engagement and sustainability provided a solid foundation for our collective efforts.

Our continued commitment to our First Nations people ensured we made significant progress in education, research and cultural capability, in a year when the pervasive inequities in our society were impossible to ignore. As the leading Australian university for Indigenous student enrolments, with 924 full time equivalent students in 2020, we maintained our efforts through our Wollotuka Institute to ensure our campuses are culturally inclusive and safe.

We were proud to be recognised once again as an Employer of Choice for Gender Equality and we continued to drive this important agenda – something that has been a hallmark of our University for many years. We recognised that the impact of COVID-19 in terms of continuity of work has once again left women more vulnerable than men and we will continue to acknowledge and address these inequities.

Our University started 2020 in a sound financial position, but as the impact of COVID-19 and caps on Commonwealth funded domestic student places compounded, we

recognised that fundamental changes to our operating model would be needed to ensure our long-term financial sustainability. With our new strategy in place, we commenced a process of restructuring our organisation to deliver the strategy. As a first step we reviewed our course offering to reduce duplication and achieve much needed efficiencies.

We were able to absorb the impacts of 2020 and returned a modest surplus. However we are aware that there are more challenges ahead. We remain focused and committed on setting our University up to succeed in 2021 and beyond and we know there will be financial challenges.

Our University proudly serves the needs of the Hunter, the Central Coast and the surrounding regions. This will always be our core purpose particularly as the Government looks to universities to lead the nation's recovery through innovation and commercialisation. We know that our regions have a critical role to play in the national recovery. We fully support the Government's push for research that translates to economic and social benefits for our communities and we are motivated by the opportunity for our University to drive prosperity for all in our regions.

Together we have navigated a difficult and challenging year. But as a university of global standing, ranked in the top 200 in the world, addressing challenges is at the heart of what we do. We are grateful to all who helped us maintain a steady course in 2020 – the University Council, Executive Committee and senior leaders, and of course our staff. We are also, as always, enormously grateful for the support we feel and receive from our wider community.

We commend to you the 2020 Annual Report – a summary of some of our University's many achievements and successes during an unforgettable year.



P.E. (Paul) Jeans
Chancellor



Professor Alex Zelinsky AO
Vice-Chancellor and President