



STRATEGIC PLAN 2024-2026

Preamble

“Truth Transforming Life and Practice”

Executive Summary

This Strategic Plan (the Plan) is the outcome of a number of years of discussion, reflection and analysis, and has been undertaken as a participatory exercise involving the Board of Management and Executive Team. Further input has also been provided by faculty, staff, current and past students, supporting constituency, and partner organisations.

- The Plan will provide a strategic framework for the Board of Governance in the execution of its governance responsibilities, and to the Executive Team in the operational and academic leadership of Eastern College Australia (ECA).
- The Board will routinely and systematically review the Strategic Plan each year, and will regularly allocate time each meeting for analysis, reflection, and review of various aspects of the Plan.
- The Executive Team and Principal will also benchmark key executive and operational decision-making against the Plan and provide regular reports to the Board on outcome measurements and performance indicators.

Scope

This strategic plan is intended to provide a framework for academic, community and governance decision-making and planning for three years with regular review.

Mission

Eastern College Australia provides teaching, training and research from a Christian worldview that serves the Christian church and community whilst contributing to human flourishing through the transformed lives of its graduates.

Vision

Harnessing the strengths and resources of both Melbourne School of Theology (MST) and Eastern College Australia, in a two-school, one community model, we aim to become a leading regional provider of excellence in integrative Christian higher education.

Values

Faith

ECA is a community committed to biblically-based Christian life, faith and witness, believing that God is glorified, and people are transformed through Christ-centred education and vocational training

Reason

ECA is committed to the pursuit and proclamation of knowledge and truth from a Christian worldview, valuing and aspiring to academic excellence, critical and creative thinking and life-long learning that integrates theory and practice.

Justice

ECA, as a community, is committed to both teaching and modelling peace and justice in human relationships, transforming people and communities through the lives of its graduates, exercising responsible care and stewardship of God's creation, and recognizing the image of God, and therefore inherent value in all people.

Spiritual Formation

We are not simply concerned with academics. Our hope is that every student will be transformed by their studies both in mind and character, experiencing not only personal, spiritual renewal, but the development of life-long habits of the heart that will see them continue to grow in faith throughout their lives.

Servant and partner to the local church and Christian communities

We are not only an expression of the Christian church but see ourselves as it's servant. We value the trust relationship with Christian faith communities as they encourage their people to be trained here. We seek to listen to and engage with church and mission leaders in a partnership to advance God's Kingdom.

Innovation and Flexibility

In an era of rapid globalization, the diaspora of people and cultures, and dynamic social upheaval, it is critical that higher education remains relevant, agile, innovative, and culturally sensitive, capable of addressing the theological, social, and ethical issues of our day with biblical depth, excellent scholarship, and wisdom. We endeavour to remain intuitive to these changes with creativity, flexibility and agility within our curriculum and pedagogy, while retaining our core commitment to the Christian faith, and our witness for Jesus Christ.

History

Tabor College was established in Adelaide by the Christian Revival Crusade (now CRC Churches International) in 1979. Tabor Melbourne began in 1988 with Dr Ian Richardson, the founding principal. It operated as a separate entity to Tabor Adelaide, an interdenominational evangelical, charismatic and Pentecostal college, but used a common curriculum. The college had humble beginnings, with a library of a single crate of books and classes in rented premises in Blackburn and then North Fitzroy. Following continued growth, the college established a long-term rental agreement and relocated in 1993 to premises in Ringwood North. This remained the college's home until December 2010.

The College developed its own curriculum and became independently accredited during this time at Ringwood North. The college expanded its offering beyond Biblical Studies, Ministry and Counselling into Intercultural Studies, Arts and Education. New programs were added as government accreditation was received, and in 2005 Tabor Victoria became an independent Higher Education Provider.

There was an expansion from certificates to degrees and post-graduate awards. This was reflected in a growing student body, with more than 500 enrolled students in 2005. Faculty, staff, and student numbers grew, along with the library and physical resources.

With the lease on the Ringwood North property ending in December 2010, Tabor Victoria relocated to Jacksons Road, Mulgrave, where property and resources were shared, at the invitation of the then Churches of Christ Theological College (now Stirling College). Classes commenced at the new location in February 2011 and continued until December 2017. In August 2015, Tabor Victoria, with a view to strengthening its independent identity, changed its name to Eastern College Australia (ECA).

In 2017, ECA announced the formation of a significant new partnership with MST (Melbourne School of Theology). As collaborating Colleges, located at MST's site in Wantirna, both Eastern and MST retain their separate identities, and offer distinctly accredited courses and awards. Eastern continues to offer high quality Vocational Education Training (VET) and Higher Education in Christian Foundations, Aid & Development, Community Development, Counselling, Education, Arts and Social Sciences and Youth Mental Health and Wellbeing - from Certificate to Masters levels.

ECA Strategic Priorities 2024-2026

1. Reputational Excellence

Seek to be known across Australia as a Christian Higher Education Institution of excellence with a range of pathways.

- a) Maintain and improve the excellence in learning, teaching and research among students and faculty.
- b) Ensure high standards of governance, administration, and operations in an environment of continuous quality assurance and innovation.
- c) Serve the global community through transformational community development, teacher training and counselling for mental health well-being from a Biblical Christian worldview.

Strategic Priority 1 – Reputational Excellence

- In the last decade, there has been some anecdotal evidence of brand and reputational damage due to various reasons which includes changes in leadership over the last 10 years, theological confusion, internal conflict, unknown “Eastern” badge, multiple relocations, and anecdotal weak Education offering. (See Schedule 1 for SWOT Analysis). Since then, Eastern has had to rebuild its reputation and brand and is slowly doing so.
- To be an organisation of reputational excellence the executives believe that Eastern needs to simplify, focus, and build on selected core competencies. After rationalising the courses delivered by ECA and MST, ECA’s focus will be on Education (teaching teachers), Community development and Counselling. Simplifying the range of courses allow ECA to build up the resources that it will need to achieve excellence. This principle will guide both the higher education and vocational courses offered (see Schedule 3 for RTO Strategic Plan Executive Summary on the bridge between Higher Education and the RTO courses). Bespoke courses will add costs and divert resources and is not recommended at this stage of Eastern’s development.
- In addition, to improve the reputational excellence, Eastern is ultimately aiming for Self-Accrediting Authority status and is used to drive our compliance standards.

Measures

Improved SES Score - Currently sitting at #17 in the Nation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 86% from 2024-26 (2021: 91.7%, 2022: 84.8%). • Move into the Top 10 for SES in the Nation by FY2026.
Positive stakeholder feedback	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • CITE Alliance, AIFC and SILA, Worldview, Albany, Mission partners and Christian Schools.
TEQSA/ASQA Compliance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All courses re-accredited with no conditions. • Renewal of registrations with no conditions.
Streamline and improve operations and processes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improve efficiency and effectiveness of our administrative, governance and operation through major projects: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Implementation of corporate HR System. ○ Improve internal data reporting. ○ Operational audit and process maps to be implemented in key departments.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Drive further efficiency through synergies with MST. ○ Enhanced student support services to foster a more positive experience for all students (including equity and regional students). ○ Develop a strategic plan for technology resulting in improved student satisfaction.
Develop new products which are consistent with our core competencies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Master of Counselling and Bachelor of Counselling and possibly a Master of Arts (Linguistics). ● Non-accredited online courses ● Establish Hubs for training of pre-service teachers in regional areas using the employment-based study model.
High student retention	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● > 90% student retention rate

2. Faith integration

Integrate Christian values and worldview in all aspects of academics and operations.

- a) Maintain a spiritually vital community with strong Christian values.
- b) Ensure all courses are underpinned by a Biblical Christian worldview across all modes of delivery.
- c) Ensure systems of governance, administration and operations are framed and conducted according to Christian values.

Strategic Priority 2 – Faith Integration

- ECA’s vision for a truly multi-disciplinary expression of the Christian worldview in a range of vocations, is the heart of the 2024-2026 Strategic Plan. It seeks to deliver high quality courses and have faculty who are committed Christians in an academic environment that meets all HESF standards for higher education and RTO standards for vocational courses.
- Our core philosophy is a faith integration model that articulates the formation of a Christian worldview based on the biblical narrative, which resolves any compartmentalization in our lives. ECA holds strongly to the “Christ-transforming Culture” approach.
- The role of ECA’s Christian higher education is not to isolate or protect students from a threatening world, nor to offer an indoctrination into a particular Christian sub-culture. The task is to integrate faith and knowledge in chosen disciplines alongside the promotion of healthy spiritual formation.

Measures

Recruitment and training of staff	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Recruitment processes must ensure all staff have a strong commitment to the Christian faith and involved in their local Church. ● Orientation and ongoing development of all teaching staff regarding the integration of Biblical Christian worldview which includes Christian perspectives of First Nations Peoples.
Values	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Values to continually be communicated in chapel, staff meetings and collateral.
Accreditation and structure of courses	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Courses structured to engage with Christian theorists and to integrate a Christian worldview in each area. ● All courses to have strong integration with Christian worldview.

Spiritual Formation of Students and Staff	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Maintain and improve the Chapel and discipleship experience for all students. • Positive feedback from students regarding spiritual formation and Christian worldview training.
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3. Financial Viability

Ensure viability through growth.

- Increase student enrolments and maintain high student retention.
- Establish and maintain financial sustainability and stability.
- Forge closer relationships with stakeholders, other Christian Higher Education providers, community groups, peak bodies, and accrediting agencies.

Strategic Priority 3 – Financial Viability

- Financial viability has been under some pressure for some time at Eastern with progressively lower enrolments each year for the last 4 years due to a raft of reasons including the COVID-19 pandemic. Without government assistance over the last 4 years, it is highly likely that Eastern would not have been able to fulfil its financial obligations.
- While we are a not-for-profit organisation, we are also a not-for-loss organisation which means we must do what we can to ensure long-term viability of the College. This means that our philosophy for new ventures, courses and departments is that they are to be individually viable (within a N-year timeframe). This assessment is done by the finance team and corporate costs must be accurately allocated to each department/course/venture.
- Financial forecasts suggest that breakeven is possible in FY2026 provided there is consecutive increases in students and unit enrolments. Forecasts suggests that unit increases required are to 50% in FY24, 16% in FY25 and ~6% in FY26 (See Schedule 2).

Measures

Financially Viable	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Breakeven budget by FY2026 with yearly improvements in closing the gap to breakeven. Anticipated loss for FY24 is -\$360K – see Schedule 2 for path towards breakeven.
Increase student and unit enrolments	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consecutive increase each year in student numbers and unit enrolments. See Schedule 2 for details of student numbers required to breakeven in FY2026. • Review and implement a strategy for donorship and a method for student scholarship allocation inclusive of First Nations People, equity students and international students.
Strong marketing and recruitment plan	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Creation and implementation of a strong marketing and recruitment plan. Marketing and recruitment plan to be presented and approved by the Board in FY24.
TEQSA Risk Assessment Rating	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improvement in TEQSA Risk Indicator of our Financial Position from moderate risk to low risk by 2026.
Simplify our “products”	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Critically simplify the range of courses that we offer, focussing on our core competencies.



EASTERN
COLLEGE AUSTRALIA

Be challenged. Be change.

Graduate Attributes

The ECA Graduate Attributes represent what we want our students to become - graduates who will:

- Know, experience, and understand the importance of biblically informed faith and worldview in human identity and the formation of character.
- Have the confidence to engage intellectually and respectfully with alternate worldviews, and the values and perspectives of others.
- Have attained excellence in evidence-based, contemporary knowledge and professional competencies in their chosen field of study for vocational calling.
- Exhibit intellectual curiosity, passion, and agility, valuing life-long learning and thought leadership.
- Demonstrate critical thinking, reflection, analysis, and communication skills.
- Exhibit Christ-like humility as innovative and creative individuals equipped to be a transformative influence in an interdependent world.
- Contribute to society as responsible global citizens with a commitment to social justice, environmental stewardship, and Christ-like compassion.



SCHEDULE 1 - SWOT ANALYSIS

<p>Strengths</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Unique and only Christian HEP in Vic• CSP Allocations• Only on campus provider of Christian Education• No rental costs• UGBOOT Software• Highly committed Christian staff• Strong rapport with CSA, and CEN school networks• Key staff (such as Tim Meyers) connections with schools and missions.	<p>Weakness</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Tabor – Eastern Brand - Lost profile and rebuilding trust with stakeholders• Financial and Resource Challenges• Academic leadership• Support staff to run a HEP and ac admin load• VET compliance and ac admin staffing• Loss of engagement with alumni• Unclear core competencies – driven by champions rather than strategies.• Innovation and agility to market needs challenge• Inadequate CSP's• Technology resources challenge
<p>Opportunities</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Growing demand for Christian Teachers• Continued operational synergy with MST• Improving reputation amongst key stakeholders• New courses: Master of Counselling, Master of Youth Mental Health and Bachelor of Counselling• Strong Partnership with key stakeholders CITE Alliance and the AIFC and interstate Christian schools• Increased government funding to increase supply of teachers• Extend education offerings for PST's to regional and interstate centres• Use technology (hybrid model) to increase enrolments• Develop a scholarship plan for PST's• Increase engagement with First Nations People and international students	<p>Threats</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Loss of identity• Loss religious freedom• Staff burn out• High staff turnover• Lack of resources• Financial liquidity to keep the college solvent• Poor experience from students (lower SES scores and anecdotal feedback from Students)



Schedule 2 – Financial Forecasts

ECA PROJECTED BUDGET SUMMARY 2023-2026												
	2022	2023		2024			2025			2026		
	Actual	Actuals	Down Side	Forecast	Up Side	Down Side	Forecast	Up Side	Down Side	Forecast	Up Side	
HE Income (units)	1,232,279	1,277,439	1,568,739	1,797,488	2,075,403	1,717,156	2,242,295	2,523,571	2,145,534	2,752,516	2,958,173	
VET Income (students)	171,043	243,101	270,000	328,881	350,890	280,000	368,579	368,579	300,000	375,000	400,000	
Other Income	26,931	119,212	316,120	399,100	396,120	285,000	300,000	350,000	225,000	350,000	375,000	
TOTAL INCOME	1,430,253	1,639,752	2,154,859	2,525,469	2,822,413	2,282,156	2,910,874	3,242,150	2,670,534	3,477,516	3,733,173	
Administration Costs	96,645	58,918	126,326	126,326	126,326	146,379	146,379	146,379	152,234	152,234	152,234	
Occupancy Costs & Library	75,017	45,042	84,908	84,908	84,908	88,304	88,304	88,304	91,836	91,836	91,836	
Promotions	70,620	38,373	41,120	41,120	41,120	42,764	42,764	42,764	44,475	44,475	44,475	
Teaching/Student Costs	281,720	447,533	700,714	700,714	700,714	728,743	728,743	728,743	735,500	735,500	735,500	
Staffing Costs	1,550,143	1,748,056	1,808,758	1,933,758	1,933,758	1,843,651	2,018,651	2,018,651	1,924,397	2,099,397	2,099,397	
TOTAL EXPENSES	2,074,145	2,337,922	2,761,826	2,886,826	2,886,826	2,849,841	3,024,841	3,024,841	3,123,442	3,123,442	3,123,442	
Other Income	1,029,688	535,452										
Other Expenses	408,505											
TOTAL SUPRLUS/LOSS (EBITDA)	- 22,709	- 162,718	- 606,967	- 361,357	- 64,413	- 567,684	- 113,967	217,309	- 452,908	354,075	609,731	
HE Unit increase from prior year	n/a	30	87	193	269	68	101	213	65	129	195	
HE Units total	462	432	519	644	705	561	745	842	680	874	940	
Total Student HE incl. audit	155	129	147	182	195	159	202	226	187	235	252	
Liquidity		745,826	138,859	384,469	681,413	- 428,825	270,502	898,722	- 881,733	624,576	1,508,453	



Schedule 3 – RTO Strategic Plan 2024-26 - Executive Summary (Taken from RTO Strategic Plan 2024-26)

Eastern College Australia is a dual-sector provider, with both higher education courses (as an institute of higher education) and vocational training courses (as a Registered Training Organization (RTO)). The RTO has been in operation since 2008. VET courses have been added to its scope in response to suggestions or requests from internal and external stakeholders. It is fair to say that the RTO had served bespoke requirements, without a strategic purpose.

The priority #5 in the combined MST/ECA Strategic Plan (2023):

Recognising the value and need for practical, Christian vocational training, we will commit to resourcing, and growing Eastern College Australia as a Registered Training Organization (RTO), and explore new opportunities for relevant and strategic input into VET courses.

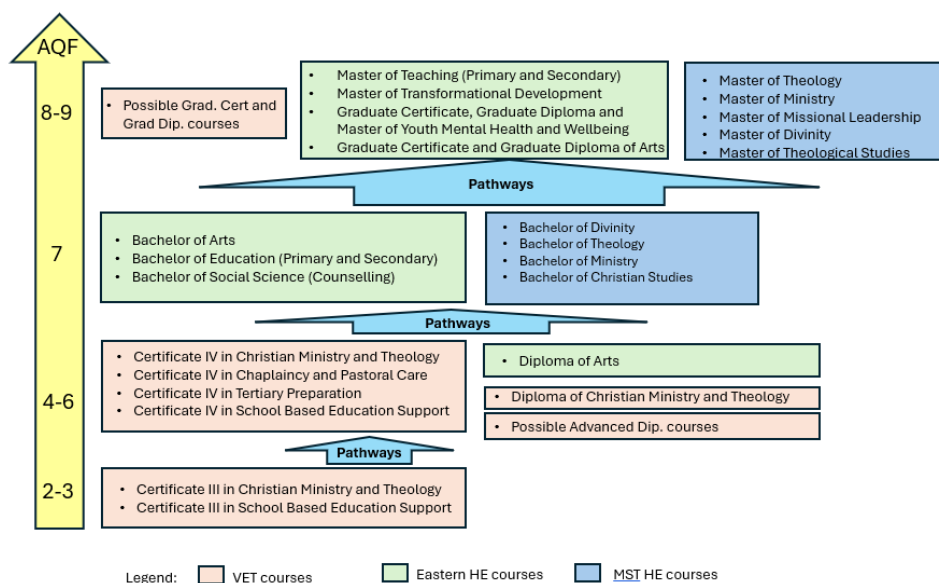
In 2024, ECA has 5 training packages and 3 accredited courses in its RTO scope. In 2023, these VET courses contributed \$243,100 to ECA’s income and -\$72,864 to ECA’s college-level financial performance.

The RTO must have a strategic relevance to ECA’s future – and it can.

Strategic relevance

Using the AQF structure as a model, the RTO can offer AQF2 to AQF8 level courses, under the vocational education and training (VET) setup. Most of ECA’s current VET courses can be aligned with ECA and MST courses, using the ABS’ Field of Education¹ ASCED parameters. In short, the RTO’s VET courses can, legitimately, be formal pathways to ECA and MST’s higher education courses.

A pathway mapping is shown in page 11 and schematically demonstrated below:



¹ Australian Bureau of Statistics ASCED (<https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/classifications/australian-standard-classification-education-ascad>)

Since the RTO can provide legitimate and practical pathways into higher education, then a number of actions are required:

1. Formal pathways must be mapped and documented. The Academic Boards (ECA and MST) must approve each pathway.
2. Any new VET courses will be evaluated against their pathway potential.
3. Course advisors and course coordinators (of both colleges) must understand how such VET pathways can work and promote them to students who will benefit from such pathways.
4. Bespoke VET courses should be discontinued.

By formalizing this VET pathway strategy, there will be clarity for the selection of VET courses and the selection of elective units within VET courses will also be guided by their alignment to the future higher education courses.

Challenges ahead

The barrier to entry to offer VET courses is low and the number of providers offering similar courses is large. The most significant challenge for ECA's RTO is to employ and retain Christian VET trainers. These are actually two separate hurdles: (1) there are many RTOs who pay higher rates for trainers and (2) the supply of Christian VET trainers is very low.

Student enrolments into the VET courses have been relatively low. These VET courses can and should be better promoted, especially into schools, churches and mission organizations. The recognition of formal pathways should enhance the value of these courses and the relatively lower course fees, supported by the availability of State-based funding, should make these courses attractive.

Finally, the compliance requirements to operate an RTO can be onerous. The VET regulator (ASQA) is arguably more exacting in their expectations than the higher education regulator (TEQSA). ECA's VET leadership is lean and consists entirely of part-time staff. The appointment of the Manager of VET Courses role has been effective in the operational management of trainers and units offered. To achieve its strategic intent, ECA needs to appoint a senior manager to provide compliance oversight for the RTO and to explore new opportunities for its growth.