



THE UNIVERSITY OF  
**SYDNEY**

# Sydney Southeast Asia Centre

Strategy 2024–2029



## Acknowledgement of Country

We recognise and pay respect to the Elders and communities – past, present, and emerging – of the lands that the University of Sydney's campuses stand on. For thousands of years they have shared and exchanged knowledges across innumerable generations for the benefit of all.



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## *Director's foreword*

The next decade will be a pivotal one for Southeast Asia. This vibrant and dynamic region of over 675 million people has a trajectory of extraordinary growth and transformation. Australia's future prosperity is deeply intertwined with the advancements of Southeast Asia. At the heart of this growing prosperity is innovation and collaboration, built upon a foundation of trusted partnerships. As Australia's leading research hub for Southeast Asia, the Sydney Southeast Asia Centre (SSEAC) has a critical role to play in fostering new knowledge partnerships that can transform the lives of individuals and communities.

I am delighted to unveil the SSEAC Strategy 2024–2029, which presents our mission, vision and objectives for the next five years. The three pillars of our strategy are research excellence, connecting the University to the region and research impact, regionally and globally. Within each pillar, SSEAC will leverage the unparalleled breadth and depth of research at the University of Sydney.

Our multidisciplinary approach is ideally suited to the complex and multifaceted challenges facing the region. Issues such as climate change, ageing populations, digital transformation and the transition to net zero energy all demand bold, complex and innovative solutions. At the core of solving these challenges is the need for new knowledge generated by outstanding research partnerships.

Over the next five years, we will establish the University as a premier knowledge collaborator across Southeast Asia. Our researchers will continue to collaborate with academia, government, industry and civil society – grounded in our values of mutual respect and understanding. Our research will span disciplines and countries, developing innovative solutions that tackle the most pressing challenges and contribute to the common good of the region and beyond.

**Professor Greg Fox**  
Interim Director, Sydney Southeast Asia Centre

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*"SSEAC has a critical role to play in fostering new knowledge partnerships that can transform the lives of individuals and communities."*

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# Who we are



## The Sydney Southeast Asia Centre (SSEAC) is Australia's leading multidisciplinary research centre focused on Southeast Asia.

Since its establishment in 2012, SSEAC has been pivotal in developing the University of Sydney's reputation for research excellence across the 11 countries of Southeast Asia (Brunei, Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, Myanmar, the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, Timor-Leste and Vietnam). Our strengths lie in our disciplinary breadth, multidisciplinary collaborations and comprehensive coverage of Southeast Asia.

As a pan-University centre and multidisciplinary initiative at the University of Sydney, SSEAC brings together over 10,000 members and affiliates, including over 400 academics at the University. This SSEAC Strategy 2024–2029 aligns with the University's *Sydney in 2032 Strategy* and builds upon important frameworks that position SSEAC for regional success. These include Faculty and University School research priorities, the Australian Government's strategy for economic engagement in Southeast Asia (*Invested: Australia's Southeast Asia Economic Strategy to 2040*), the UN Sustainable Development Goals and

priorities of national governments from across Southeast Asia. The Strategy builds upon the recommendations of a five-year external review of the Centre undertaken in 2023.

This Strategy was developed by the SSEAC leadership team: Professor Greg Fox (interim Director), Professor Tiho Ancev (Deputy Director, Research Development), Dr Natali Pearson (Curriculum Coordinator), the SSEAC Executive (Associate Professor Justin Beardsley, Dr Sandra Seno-Alday, Associate Professor Susan Banki, Dr Abdul Razeed, Professor Sonja van Wichelen, Dr Sabin Zahirovic, Dr Sophie Chao and Associate Professor Petr Matous), the SSEAC Country Coordinators (Professor Daniel Tan, Associate Professor Jeffrey Neilson, Professor Nick Enfield, Dr Jake Chen, Dr Louis Taborda, Dr Aaron Opdyke, Dr Yeow-Tong Chia, Associate Professor Aim Sinpeng and Lynda-Ann Blanchard), the SSEAC Centre professional staff team (Lydia Papandrea, Simon Holding and Minh Le) and the Office of Global and Research Engagement (Professor Elizabeth Cowley).



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*"Our strengths lie in our disciplinary breadth, multidisciplinary collaborations and comprehensive coverage of Southeast Asia."*

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# *Our vision*

We will be a leading hub for knowledge development and exchange, addressing the critical challenges facing Southeast Asia.

Southeast Asia is a region of remarkable diversity and dynamic growth that is integral to Australia's future. With its rich tapestry of cultures, languages and religions, the region is a microcosm of global interconnectedness. Australia and Southeast Asia share a myriad of challenges, ranging from economic prosperity, environmental sustainability and pandemic preparedness to digital transformation and regional stability. These common purposes provide a strong underpinning for collaboration and impactful research. As a leading comprehensive research-intensive institution with longstanding links throughout the region, the University of Sydney is ideally placed to undertake collaborative research that addresses the region's major challenges.

Undertaking transformative research in this diverse and complex region is, however, frequently challenging. The cultural, political and administrative barriers to effective engagement in Southeast Asia are often considerable. Researchers most likely to achieve sustained impact in Southeast Asia require a high degree of cross-cultural competence, and the ability to nurture local partnerships and engage multiple disciplinary perspectives. Harnessing the deep expertise and academic breadth across the University to address these complex regional problems requires a focused whole-of-University approach to research.

Therefore, the vision of the Sydney Southeast Asia Centre is to be a leading hub for knowledge development and exchange that addresses the critical challenges facing Southeast Asia. We will bring together academics from across the University working in Southeast Asia and support the knowledge, skills and networks required to undertake highly impactful research in the region. Our plan will bring together research teams from across the University, connect them to great local partners, assist these partnerships in securing significant external funding, and support these research teams to conduct outstanding impactful research.

## **The SSEAC strategy will:**

- Establish processes that enable all University researchers engaged in Southeast Asia to meet each other and collaborate successfully, both within and across disciplinary boundaries.
- Enable individual researchers at all career stages to grow their research experience and build increasingly trusted relationships with their regional partners.
- Contribute to the quality and impact of University research.
- Build our reputation and the profile of our work across the region.

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# *Alignment with the University's strategy*

SSEAC's strategy closely aligns with the University's *Sydney in 2032 Strategy*. Our focus upon outstanding research will enable SSEAC to tackle the greatest challenges in Southeast Asia and contribute to the common good.

Our projects in the region will generate new knowledge that has tangible benefits for local communities. Leveraging our deep partnerships across Southeast Asia, we will provide the University with the agility required to respond rapidly to regional challenges and seize new funding opportunities. By supporting our members to thrive while working in the region, we will cultivate a new generation of research leaders adept at navigating diverse cultures and societies.

Our expertise in multidisciplinary research will help the University to leverage its comprehensiveness and bring together the diverse perspectives required to solve complex problems. The outcomes of our research will offer sustainable solutions to critical issues such as climate change, urbanisation, agricultural development and chronic diseases, benefiting Southeast Asia and the world.





# *Our values*

Our values underpin all that we do.

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Approaching partnerships as equals,  
with respect and authenticity

Striving for excellence

Cultivating mutual trust and understanding

Supporting diversity and inclusion

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# Sydney Southeast Asia Centre Strategy 2024–2029

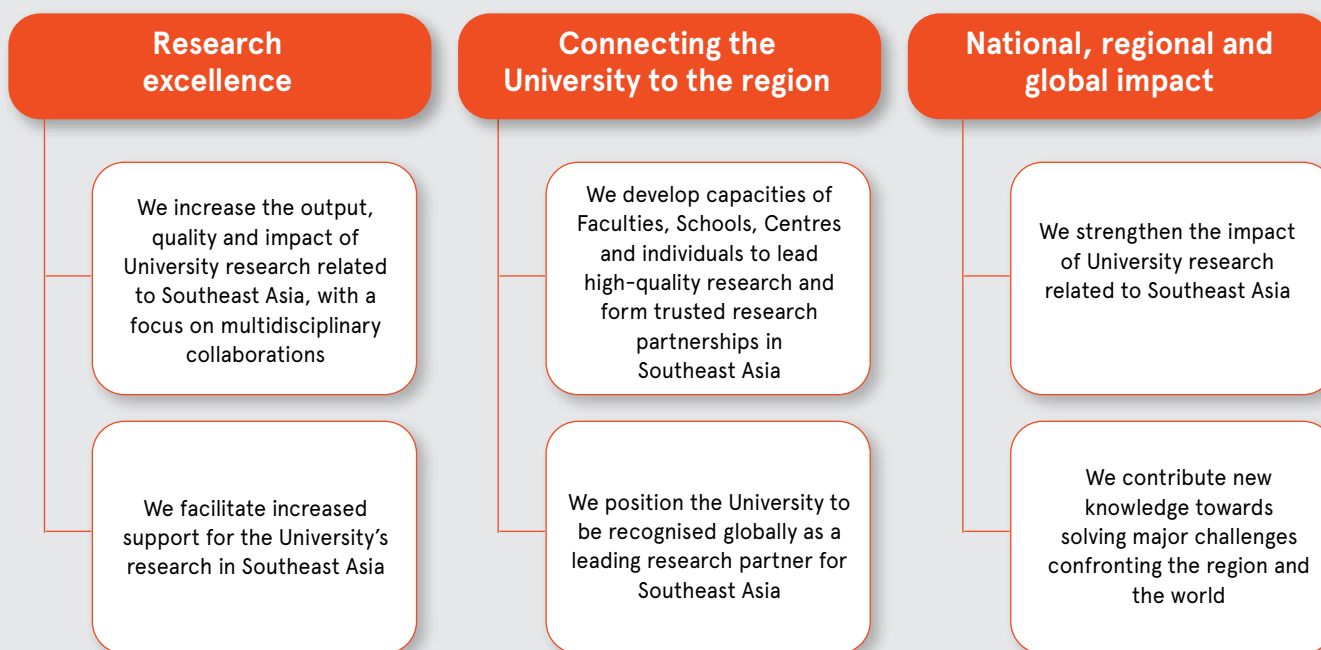
## SSEAC’s Vision

We will be a leading hub for knowledge development and exchange, addressing the critical challenges facing Southeast Asia.

## SSEAC’s Mission

To foster impactful research and trusted knowledge partnerships in Southeast Asia.

## SSEAC’s strategic priorities





## Strategic priority framework



### Research excellence

#### Enablers

- Focus on regional challenges
- Strengthen funding to catalyse scale-up
- Grow regional networks
- Build capacity for impact



### Connecting the University to the region

#### Enablers

- Partner with Faculties, Schools, Centres
- Expand regional research capacity (e.g. University of Sydney Vietnam Institute)
- Support visiting delegations
- Forge philanthropic support from Australia and internationally



### National, regional and global impact

#### Enablers

- Centre on mission-driven challenges
- Strengthen funding to catalyse scale-up
- Grow regional networks
- Build capacity for impact

## Strategic priority outcomes

1

New knowledge and impacts that address important issues for the region

2

Trusted and productive partnerships in Australia and the region

3

Strong capacity across the University community to undertake successful research in Southeast Asia

4

A national and global reputation for expertise and excellence relating to Southeast Asia







# *Our priorities*

Our three strategic priority areas are research excellence, connecting the University to the region, and national, regional and global impact.

## Research excellence

### **We increase the output, quality and impact of University research related to Southeast Asia, with a focus on multidisciplinary collaborations**

We believe that researchers will achieve the greatest impact when they approach their partnerships with mutual respect and authenticity. This impact will not only be in the research that we do, but also in the capacity that we build through our partnerships.

### **Catalyse outstanding applications for external funding for research in Southeast Asia, including a focus on multidisciplinary collaborations**

We will enable the University of Sydney to conduct outstanding research in Southeast Asia that brings together people with the best combination of disciplinary expertise required to tackle important regional challenges. We support researchers from across the University community to develop a deep understanding of the local, national and regional context for their research programs.

We will identify external funding opportunities to support the research undertaken in Southeast Asia by academics from across the University. Our approach is to bring together multidisciplinary teams that are best placed to submit highly competitive applications. We will be rapidly responsive to the external funding environment. At the same time, we will seek to leverage the resources of the whole University for collective success. We will seek to support applications for traditional sources of funding, but we will also galvanise our

expert knowledge in pursuit of international funding schemes and philanthropic funding sources, thereby contributing to the diversification of the University's funding sources.

We will leverage the capabilities of the University of Sydney in the region, including through the University of Sydney Vietnam Institute, to generate ambitious applications for large-scale collaborative funding. Over the next five years, we will seek to draw links between funded projects, extend existing research success, and leverage the University's comprehensiveness and depth to have a lasting impact on the greatest challenges in the region.

### **Build the capacity of researchers, across the career spectrum, to implement outstanding research in Southeast Asia**

The success of our research in Southeast Asia is dependent upon our researchers being highly competent to effectively engage in complex cross-cultural settings. We will support researchers from across the career spectrum to augment their knowledge of the cultural, political and social contexts within which they work. Key to this will be developing mutually beneficial connections between our researchers working in each country. We will also work with our local partners to develop their capacities, ensuring that our research teams are equipped to undertake truly outstanding research. Our researchers will be proficient at cross-disciplinary research, bringing a range of perspectives to answering research questions. We will also promote the work of our researchers within the region, including equitable recognition of local partners. This will contribute to the University's reputation as a premier partner with which to collaborate.

### **Foster outstanding collaborative research in the region by forming, expanding and connecting groups of researchers at the University**

We recognise the incredible potential for the University to harness its academic breadth and depth to develop innovative approaches to complex problems. As a pan-University multidisciplinary initiative, SSEAC will work to connect researchers from different parts of the University. We have three approaches to expanding the University's regional research success.

First, we will support researchers to scale-up their research programs in Southeast Asian countries. We will equip our researchers to take their projects to the next level, helping them to build increased trust and experience. This may involve contributing to pilot projects positioned to leverage larger-scale funding or growing major collaborative projects to even greater success.

Second, we will build and strengthen links between University researchers already working in Southeast Asia. This will be achieved through our Country Academic Networks. For researchers working in the same settings, this will provide an opportunity to share local knowledge and networks, providing mutual benefit. We will also build disciplinary and cross-disciplinary links across countries – ensuring that knowledge from one context can be shared with those working on similar challenges in other regional settings. Where possible, we will seek funding for multi-centre projects spanning different countries, that can demonstrate solutions to complex regional problems at scale.

Third, we will connect researchers who have not yet engaged in Southeast Asia into existing research programs. This will enable them to leverage the expertise of other experienced researchers. This approach reduces the initial barrier to undertaking the first successful project in complex cross-cultural settings. SSEAC will partner with other Centres, Institutes, Faculties and Schools from across the University to multiply the benefits of established research for additional collaboration and mutual benefit.

### **We enable increased support for the University's research in Southeast Asia**

We will partner with researchers from across the University to develop outstanding research funding applications. We will help to diversify funding applications submitted by University researchers across the Faculties and Schools, including international governmental, non-governmental and philanthropic sources. Funding for pilot work and proof-of-concept studies will contribute to applications for major research funding schemes. We will also conduct targeted workshops and grant development programs that enable early- and mid-career researchers to develop their capacity in writing successful research proposals for international funding agencies.

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## Connecting the University to the region

### **We develop the capacities of Faculties, Schools, Centres and individuals to lead high-quality research and form trusted research partnerships in Southeast Asia**

We will serve as a bridge that enables the University's research community to engage fully in the vibrant and diverse Southeast Asian region. We will make the University's extensive expertise in Southeast Asia visible and accessible, co-hosting events with Faculties and Schools that promote, model and strengthen international multidisciplinary research excellence. Our team will facilitate briefings for University leaders and academics regarding important contextual factors that are critical to research success. We will work actively with academics to bring together teams that submit competitive funding applications for multidisciplinary research.

SSEAC will support links between the leading institutions in Southeast Asia, ensuring that our academics who work in diverse areas of research can coordinate their engagement and avoid duplication. We will establish awards for research excellence that recognise outstanding Southeast Asian research and researchers. Each year, we will convene a Southeast Asia Symposium which will showcase our research and partnerships across the region and strengthen collaboration within our research community.

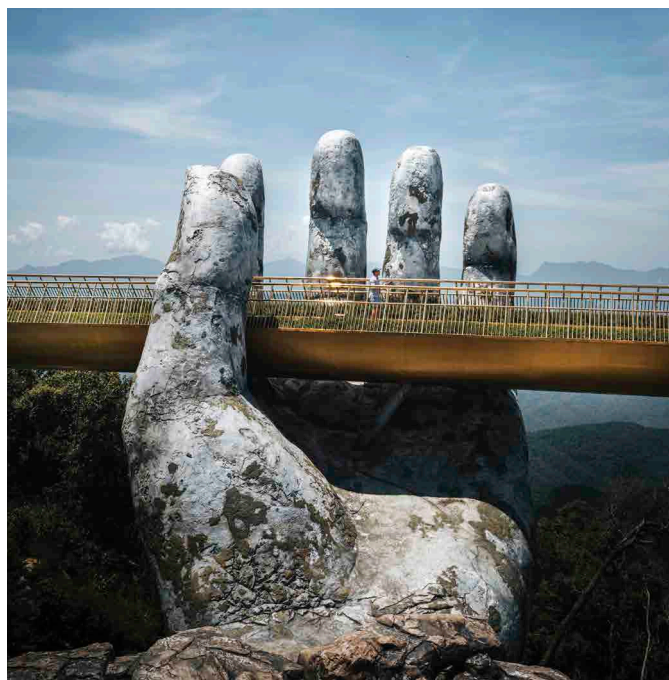
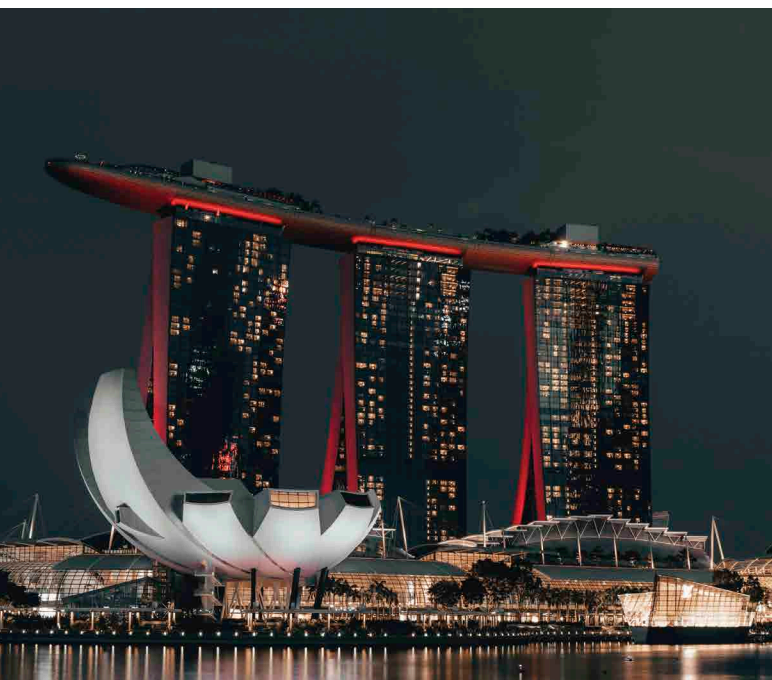
Our Country Academic Networks will provide a focal point for newly arriving and current University academics to connect with countries in the region. Alignment with Faculty priorities will be supported through a SSEAC Advisory Committee, which will include representatives of each University Faculty and School. Ongoing links between Faculties and SSEAC will be promoted through a network of academics and professional

staff who are involved in regional research. Leveraging our links to government, the University sector and non-governmental organisations in the region, we will help academics and centres to grow their networks and regional engagement.

### **We position the University to be recognised globally as a leading research partner for Southeast Asia**

Our regional engagement builds upon our core values. These are approaching partnerships as equals, with respect and authenticity, striving for excellence, cultivating mutual trust and understanding and supporting diversity and inclusion. By consistently behaving in an ethical and collaborative manner, we will maintain trust and establish our reputation as the preferred research partner across the region. Our approach will be centred upon the needs of the region. We will develop our understanding of these needs through sustained personal and institutional relationships. In all that we do, we will evaluate our performance and always seek to improve the way we work.

In the region, we will make our expertise visible and accessible to leading and rapidly emerging Universities. Within Australia, we will offer high-quality briefings for senior Australian and regional government representatives and disseminate the outcomes of our research through reputable regional media. In particular, we will engage regularly with the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade in Canberra and regionally. We will co-host academic events in the region, showcasing the partnerships and outcomes of our research. The University's reputation for research excellence will also be enhanced through joint academic events with other Southeast Asian-focused institutions, visiting scholars from Australia to the region and other high-profile events.



## National, regional and global impact

### We strengthen the impact of University research related to Southeast Asia

Ultimately, great research changes lives and shifts the dial on major global challenges. We aspire to create lasting benefit for the communities of Southeast Asia through our research impact. We will support our researchers to work closely with policymakers and global funders to position our projects to have real-world impacts. This will include co-development of research priorities, and bringing together different perspectives to ensure that the new knowledge we generate is able to be translated into practice. Training and mentoring in research translation and impact will enable our early-career researchers to pursue rapid upward career trajectories and make a real difference through their work.

### We contribute new knowledge towards solving major challenges confronting the region and the world

We will mobilise research teams to create ambitious grant proposals addressing priority 'grand challenges' that have regional and global significance. We have ambitious aspirations for what research can achieve. In selected areas where we are well-positioned for success, we will adopt a 'mission-driven' approach that will bring together the people best positioned to tackle these challenges. We will share exemplars of research success for emerging research leaders and build communities of practice involving our partners within our Country Academic Networks. Recognising the importance of partnership, we will work with government agencies, non-government agencies, community organisations and professional bodies in Australia and across the region. This will enable us to leverage additional local expertise for maximum impact.





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