

Strategic action plan

Macmillan Brown Centre for Pacific Studies (2015 to 2020)

Introduction

In an attempt to rebuild and grow Macmillan Brown Centre (MBC) into an innovative world class and leading research centre on Pacific Studies, this paper provides some suggestions for a new strategic direction for the next five years. It is meant to supplement the strategic proposal paper produced earlier in 2014.¹

The paper is activity-oriented and outcome based and it provides a discussion of both what is being planned for the future and what is already in the process of implementation. The proposals are meant for short term and long term planning, within the broader rubric of the mission statement.² The action proposals are not chronologically structured in terms of sequential phases because some of them may take place simultaneously and some may become prioritized over others in certain emerging circumstances or on the basis of resources availability.

The proposals will be reviewed on an annual basis to gauge the successes and how these can be replicated for the future as well as identify some challenges and how these could be mitigated. The proposals are quite flexible to allow for adaptation and appropriate changes to maximize the outcomes.

Broad vision for the future

The broad vision is to harness available opportunities and synergies to build MBC into **(a)** a world class and leading centre for interdisciplinary and innovative Pacific research through deepening and expansion of its research expertise and publications **(b)** a leading think-tank for Pacific public policy through consultancy, policy research, training and advisory role **(c)** the major centre for Pacific research resources through its comprehensive data-base on Pacific issues **(d)** a world leader in critical discussions and intellectual innovation on Pacific issues.

¹ See Fraser, L and Le Cocq, J. 2014. 'Strategic proposal: Macmillan Brown Center for Pacific Studies, 2014-2016,' paper prepared for future strategic direction of the center given the challenges of the past.

² See Fraser and Le Cocq (2014) for mission statement.

Specific aims

- a) To lift MBC to another level of attainment and development through more innovation-led research, management, publication, training, consultancies and public engagement;
- b) To frame research projects creatively and innovatively with the aim of achieving the specific outcomes within the given time frame;
- c) To organize conferences, public lectures and seminars to reach a wider national, regional and international audience;
- d) To disseminate information and knowledge generated through research as widely as possible through publication;
- e) To engage in collaborative projects with other universities, research institutes, organizations and governments;
- f) To create and sustain links and networks with other national, regional and international universities, organizations and states as a way of building capacity and generating benefits while furthering MBC influence;
- g) To generate financial resources for MBC through applied policy research and consultancies as well as bidding for major contestable research funds;
- h) To work closely with other departments, institutes and academics at the UC in matters associated with teaching, research, public outreach and consultancy;
- i) To enhance its public outreach responsibilities through research, training and media engagement with the community;
- j) To strengthen its publication capacity through online and hard copy forms;
- k) To target outputs by raising the level of performance through innovative and creative means;
- l) To aim to achieve “A” grade in the next PBRF round;
- m) To contribute to raising UC’s international status and ranking.

Strategic action proposals

1. Institutional consolidation

This involves a people-centred and participatory approach to revitalize and strengthen MBC’s governance mechanism and networks to facilitate the new strategic direction of the centre. Ensuring a strong and mutually engaging relationship between Pro-VC Arts, advisory committee, MBC director, MBC staff, university staff and the wider Pacific community in the context of MBC’s core responsibilities and broader aims of the university is a major institutional asset. In addition, there should be conflict resolution developed to address some old and potentially new conflict situations and issues which may impact on the growth of the centre.

An institutional audit of MBC will be carried out to determine some of the potential and shortcomings of MBC and how the potential can be further harnessed and replicated and shortcomings mitigated. This will take stock of existing resources including finance, human, research and support capabilities and how these can be improved to maximize the research and project outputs. The idea is to transform some of the existing challenges into opportunities to drive MBC forward in a climate of high competition and resources constrains using innovative ideas and means.

2. Institutional growth

This involves two aspects—horizontal and vertical growth.

Horizontal growth: This entails expanding and strengthening relationships and networks with universities, research institutes, international agencies, regional organizations, national institutions, community organizations, industry, individual scholars and research networks. The nature of the relationship will depend on those concerned and will involve joint projects on research, publication, policy analysis and teaching; visiting fellowship; staff exchange; student exchange; sharing of resources and other forms of joint engagements which will boost MBC's status and recognition.

Vertical growth: This refers to building up research, policy and professional capacity while increasing publicity, status and recognition of MBC through its activities as well as connections with national, regional and international institutions mentioned above. In large measure, vertical growth also depends on horizontal growth. The two go hand in hand, in fact at times can be symbiotic in nature.

3. Promoting innovative research excellence

MBC will promote research excellence by pursuing a multidisciplinary, multi-methodology, multi-issue and innovative approach towards research on a range of Pacific issues including climate change, environment, technology, health, migration, population, development, politics, law, art, culture, governance, security, indigenous knowledge and intellectual property, human rights, education, conflict and peace building, diaspora identity, etc. There is no particular restriction on the theme. Research students and visiting scholars will focus on any one of these, depending on their research interests and expertise. This is expected to attract a more diverse range of scholars as well as give MBC greater flexibility, exposure and holism—qualities which most Pacific studies centres in New Zealand lack. For convenience of classification and administration the researches will be classified under four main streams—empirical, theoretical/qualitative, artistic/creative and applied research—and research students, visiting scholars and in-house researchers will fit into any one or more of these.

- a) **Empirical research:** The first stream is basic empirical research which involves collection of hard data relating to issues such as education, employment, health, socio-economic status, demography and other social conditions of Pacific peoples. Appropriate software such as SPSS will need to be acquired for this purpose. Analysis of statistical and quantitative data can be useful for policy formulation purposes.
- b) **Theoretical and analytical research:** The second stream deals with more theoretical and analytical research dealing with social, cultural, political, anthropological, historical, sociological and economic issues and debates. This is largely qualitative and may be carried out by visiting scholars and output will be a book, book chapter or journal article.

- c) **Artistic and creative:** The third stream looks at research into and production of creative/artistic works including painting, tattoo, weaving, music, film, photography, carving, sculpture, plays and other forms of aesthetic and creative expressions.
- d) **Applied policy research:** The fourth stream focuses on applied policy research. This will also involve staff members with relevant expertise and experience from other departments in the university or from other universities. Also policy makers from the policy community in government, civil society or corporate sectors will be invited to carry out some research and produce a major policy paper or policy brief document.
- e) **Community stories research:** This involves using students to collect stories of individuals and communities relating to their lives and experiences which can be published online both in English and the indigenous language. The idea is to create a community stories database for Pacific communities in NZ, Pacific and around the world as well as develop the research skills of individual research students.

4. Applied projects and links with industry

To keep up with the times and societal demands, MBC needs to develop the professional capacity to be able to carry out research, consultancy and policy-based projects for industries. Not only will this develop MBC's expertise, it will also enhance its applied research profile within industry as well as generate income for the university and MBC.

5. Public policy think tank and expertise

This is closely linked to the above. Public policy research and formulation is an area which is on demand in the Pacific because of the growth in aid and development projects. This involves policy research and advice in the areas of development, governance, risk assessment, project evaluation and project feasibility studies. This will help in MBC's vertical growth as well as generate income for the centre and university.

A number of planned activities for the future include invitation for leading public policy leaders from the region as visitors; exchange and collaboration with policy research institutes, international organizations and governments.

6. Consolidate strong research student base

A long term vision is to strengthen the post-graduate student base and supporting facilities and expertise for supervision to ensure that MBC becomes a leading student research centre for Pacific studies. This will require more student and staff exchange with other Pacific studies institutes and international universities, incorporating industry experience and innovation and development of a paradigm changing in-house research module and model with the help of other UC academic staff.

A plan will soon be in place to attract and recruit national, regional and international research students into MBC. This will require creating a good student attraction package and more proactive publicity.

Plans for writing of new Pacific undergraduate courses would need a comprehensive preparatory process involving carrying out an evaluation of why enrolment numbers have been down, relooking at the relevance and marketability of the course contents, re-examining the pedagogical tools and approach and identifying the right level and time for offering. Also important is how this is linked to post-graduate studies to ensure that students know that there is an academic track for them from undergraduate Pacific Studies to research degree.

7. Public and international profiling

A method of public and international profiling and expanding network is to create a network of MBC associates who will be part of the MBC family. They will be MBC's eyes and ears around the country, region and world. They will also help to promote MBC and will be called upon for resources when the centre needs them. The visitors to MBC will be carefully chosen from the list of associates. The names of those who have agreed to be MBC associates are in listed in Attachment 1.

8. Visitorship and fellowship

This is one way of internationalizing, promoting and developing MBC's professional integrity, capacity and status. There will be six types of visitorship as discussed below.

- a) **Visiting fellow:** These are usually prominent and experienced scholars who will be conducting research as well as publish their research either in the form of a book, book chapter or journal article. These also include staff involved in exchange. Depending on the resources, the fellowship may continue for a month.
- b) **Eminent person fellowship:** This refers to former Pacific leaders, former leaders of regional or international organizations, current prominent community leaders or those with high profile who are invited to give lectures or seminars. This may range from 3 days to a week.
- c) **Media visitorship:** Prominent media personnel will be invited to visit the MBC and apart from presenting a seminar and paper on any subject relating to the media, write a feature story about MBC for online and hardcopy publication.
- d) **Short term visitors:** These are scholars, professionals or other people passing through and are invited to give a seminar. They may be required to be around for a day or two.
- e) **Internship visitorship:** This refers to professionals or even students who want to do their internship in relation to Pacific issues.

- f) **Studentship visitor:** This refers to research students who may wish to be attached to MBC for research purposes.
- g) **Resident artist:** This is for prominent and influential artists as well as young ones with potential who will be invited as resident artists. Depending on the resources, this could be between 3-6 weeks or even longer.

9. Institutional collaboration and exchange

A major focus so far and also for the future is forging relations with other universities for the purpose of project collaboration as well as staff and students exchange. This is important to share resources and expertise, as well as help MBC enhance its international profile. This collaborative and exchange program needs to involve national, regional and international universities.

10. Publication

Developing and expanding the publication arm of MBC is important in terms of building up its research profile as well as enhancing its international and academic standing. This needs human, technical and financial resources and a good way to approach this in the beginning is to work collaboratively with other successful publishing units such as the ANU Press in other universities. There will be five types of publication.

- a) **Books:** Initially books will be jointly published with ANU Press. This is to take advantage of their advanced online publication system which allows spontaneous global reach. MBC will develop its own online book publication system over time. The first such collaborative publication with ANU Press is a book on the Fiji election in early 2015. At the same time, MBC will have its own hard copy book publication series.
- b) **Journal:** The possibility of establishing a social science-based Pacific focused journal needs serious consideration as an outlet for the growing number of Pacific research.
- c) **Working paper series:** Scholars will be invited to contribute to the MBC working paper series and the target initially is to produce up to three in a year. These will be published online as well as in hard copy form.
- d) **Reports:** Research reports will be published online as well as in in hard copy form. Some of these will be converted to working papers.
- e) **Newsletter:** The newsletter will provide direct communication with the rest of the UC community; other universities; national, regional and international research communities; national, regional and international organizations and governments; and the community at large. The contents of the newsletter will consist of the latest MBC events,

research, projects and activities; latest news on Pacific research around the country, region and the world; and major social, cultural, political and economic issues in the Pacific. A page will be dedicated to promoting some of the MBC library unique resources.

- f) **Publishing Pacific “Guide” series:** This involves MBC producing a series of professional guidebooks for policy makers, scholars, students and general public on a series of issues such as security, governance, social protection, sea level rise, art, music, gender, etc. on the Pacific.

11. Data base for Pacific research

MBC will work towards hosting a major multidisciplinary data base for Pacific research. This involves creating an electronic database which is linked to other universities, governments, media and other organizations around the world.

12. Staff

Initially one of the requirements is for a multi-skilled person who can carry out different tasks. The person should have skills relating to IT graphics, research software use, web design and online publishing, apart from the usual skills in financial, administrative and logistical organizations. When needed, some post-graduate students will also be employed as research assistants to carry out some technical, administrative and logistical responsibilities.

Fellows can be employed through contested funds such as Marsden and HRC and voluntary employees, especially by scholars on leave will be welcomed.

13. Conferences

MBC will aim to organize an annual conference series on specific themes which may vary from year to year to attract experts and those interested in the issues concerned. The conferences maybe referred to as the Pacific World series.

14. Seminar series

A monthly seminar series for scholars, researcher and research students will be organized to ensure healthy and vigorous debates on critical issues.

15. Lecture series

The MBC lecture series will be revived. The date and the main speaker for this year will be identified in consultation with relevant individuals.

16. Exhibitions

This will be encouraged to ensure that Pacific artists are able to exhibit their work in the centre. These exhibitions can also be made online with the help of the Canterbury Museum and Pacific Island Museum Association. Artefacts can also be borrowed from other museums such as the Fiji Museum, Auckland Museum and Te papa Museum in Wellington for exhibition at MBC.

17. Pacific community relations

The precise areas of engagement with the Pacific community need to be defined to ensure greater clarity and avoid confusion. Any engagement with the community should be based on areas in which MBC has mandate and expertise in such as participatory community research, community policy analysis and advice on various issues such as identity, health, socio-economic conditions, marginalization, educational achievement, diaspora cultural adaptation, community innovation, cultural integration, etc. These should be demarcated from the more socio-cultural and religious activities which community groups are more competent to handle. A separate paper on MBC's community relations will soon be drafted after wider consultation with relevant UC staff and community representatives to get a diverse range of views.

18. Strengthening links with museum and other local institutions: This is a critical aspect of MBC's link with the local Canterbury community which has been place. This needs to be continued and even strengthened.

19. Intra-university collaboration

Collaboration with other departments and scholars within the university and also with institutes within Arts is important. Also important is working closely with the Research and Innovation Centre and UC Press. Some of these have already started and must continue into the future.

20. Advisory committee

The role of the advisory committee is very important to facilitate broader discussions on issues of policies for MBC. Apart from the current committee it is suggested that those with particular expertise which can add "value" to the new direction of MBC be incorporated. For instance, it would be good to also have people with expertise in a variety of areas such as policy research, community-based empirical research, online publishing, international networking, etc.

Conclusion

This paper is part of an initial "brain surge" exercise and is thus very tentative and is subject to changes as circumstances change. There will be an annual review and report of the year's activities to ensure that MBC is on the right path and there will be regular meetings with the Pro-VC Arts to discuss progress and challenges.

As the MBC starts to grow, the scope of its influence and responsibilities may also expand but there should be constant scrutiny over how much it can do given the limited resources. Many of the activities can be carried out collaboratively and some with minimal financial resource input. The mission statement of the MBC should continue to be the guiding light as it provides the broad philosophical direction.

The rebuilding and trajectory of growth of MBC should be a multifaceted and collaborative effort by a number of players from within and outside the university and must encompass commitment to transforming challenges into opportunities to transform MBC into a leading and world class centre for Pacific research.