USM | UNIVERSITI SAINS MALAYSIA | APEX™

APEX 2024
KEY INITIATIVES

APEX
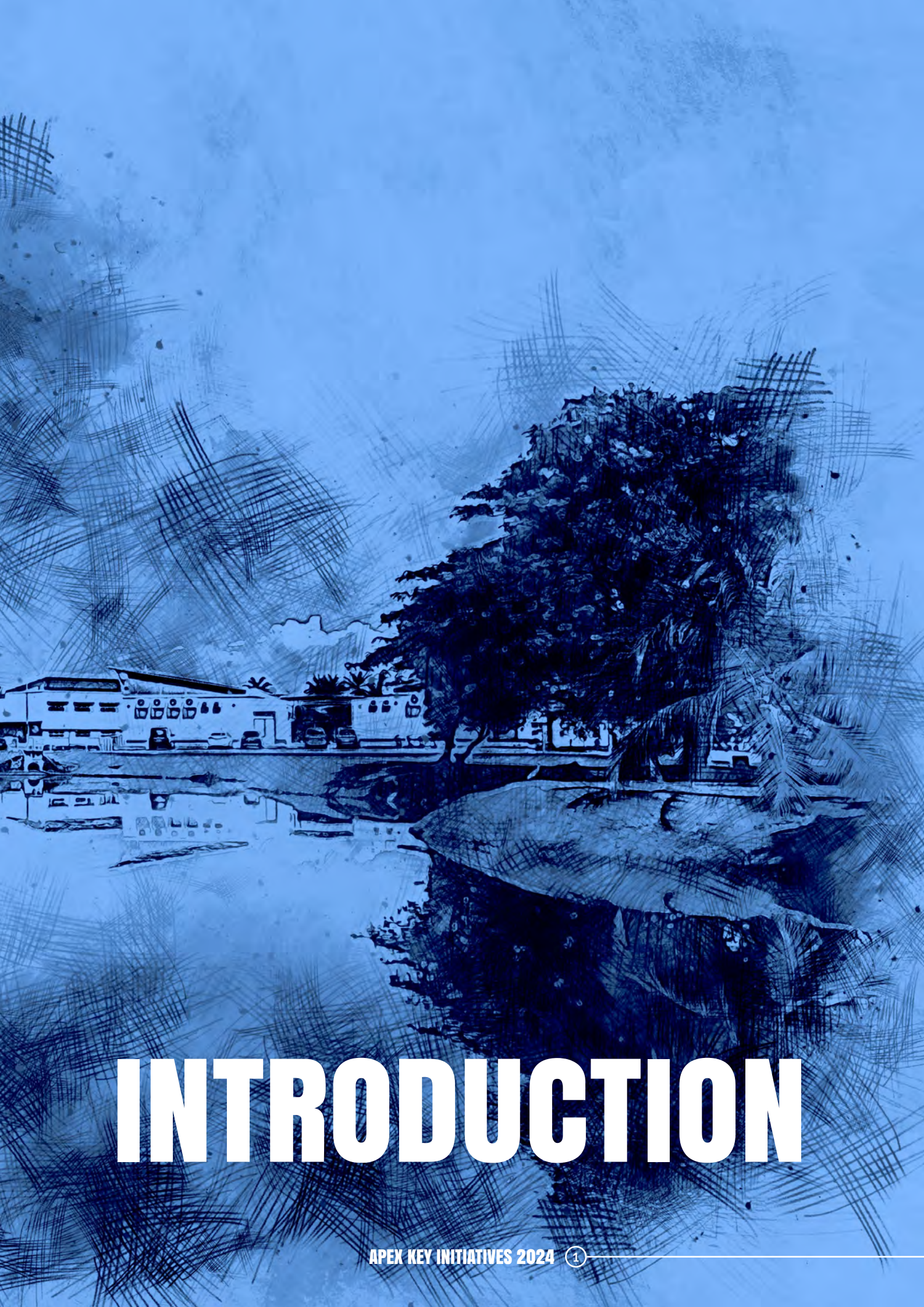## KEY INITIATIVES
2024

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INTRODUCTION

USM will continue to transform itself by raising the global agenda, autonomy, and accountability, ensuring quality and future relevance, and creating "people-led" local solutions for global problems, thus fostering sustainability in conformance with the indicators exemplified by the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and Environment, Social and Governance (ESG). As such, there is a need to re-energise and revisit strategic thrusts to accelerate the APEX agenda through innovative initiatives and approaches. Ten (10) critical APEX thrusts have been identified to elevate USM to a greater height, emphasising sustainability and the overarching APEX agenda. The thrusts' interconnection creates a synergistic and cohesive framework aimed at advancing the university's vision and mission. They are based on APEX transformation strategies that include nurturing and learning, research and innovation, services and external activities, students, talents, resources, and governance. The nine thrusts include positioning and branding, global prominence, digital @USM, dynamic and innovative education, research and innovation ecosystem, talent management, environmental sustainability, financial sustainability, and strategic foresight. These thrusts stem from the gap analysis of the APEX agenda to align with current and future needs.

Importantly, USM's vision and mission remain as an APEX agenda. USM's APEX strategies and values lie in the principles that define its character and purpose.

- Adopt the **Blue Ocean Strategy**, signifying innovative approaches to carving a unique educational landscape.

- Engage in **impactful research and innovation** that contribute positively to individuals, communities, industries, and the world.

- Embark on various transformational journeys through **sustainability-led growth**.

- Foster a culture of **innovative thinking** that encourages creativity, forward-looking ideas, and the pursuit of innovative solutions.

- Address the needs and challenges faced by the **bottom billion** and uplift their socio-economic conditions.

10 THRUSTS

Thrust		Related Initiative
1 POSITIONING & BRANDING		REVITALISING USM IMAGE
ADVANCING GLOBAL SUSTAINABILITY	**2** GLOBAL PROMINENCE	
3 DIGITAL @ USM		DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION
FOSTERING LIFELONG LEARNING	**4** DYNAMIC & INNOVATIVE EDUCATION	
5 RESEARCH & INNOVATION ECOSYSTEM		IMPACT BEYOND RESEARCH
LEADERSHIP EXCELLENCE	**6** STRATEGIC TALENT DEVELOPMENT	
7 ENVIRONMENT SUSTAINABILITY		CARBON FOOTPRINT TRACKING AND MONITORING
INNOVATIVE FINANCIAL MODELS	**8** FINANCIAL SUSTAINABILITY	
9 STRATEGIC FORESIGHT		FUTURE PROOFING USM
AGILE AND FLEXIBLE DECISION MAKING	**10** AGILE GOVERNANCE	

Introduction

Thrust ①

STRATEGIC POSITIONING AND BRANDING

Strategic positioning and branding

Establishing effective branding strategies and ensuring that the right impression is formed are vitally important for USM. The branding strategy, as laid out in the APEX agenda, goes beyond imprinting or branding of USM as a unique research venue. It involves reshaping and repositioning the image of USM to attract top-tier talent and establish the institution as a leader in research excellence and innovation, particularly in championing the 17 SDG initiatives.

Thrust 1 aspires to inaugurate a dedicated marketing and branding entity to realise this goal. The proposed Centre for University Branding and Integrated Communication (CUBIC) will scrutinise the key differentiators and competitive landscapes of USM, subsequently developing a comprehensive branding strategy. CUBIC aims to redefine brand image, visual identity, and communication messages. By utilising both digital and traditional channels, CUBIC strives to communicate the intrinsic value proposition of the USM brand effectively.

- Profiling researchers in their respective research niches.

- Promoting industry & community engagement projects with the highest APEX traits.

- Forging strategic partnerships with industry and community leaders.

- Creating an academic persona.

PERFORMANCE INDICATORS

✓ Number of media placements and articles mentioning USM

✓ Positive sentiment.

✓ Number of mentions and discussions about USM in mainstream and social media.

✓ Growth in social media followers and engagement rates.

✓ Percentage increase in website traffic, measured through unique visitors and page views.

✓ Percentage increase in brand recognition among the target audience.

APEX
BRANDING

Strategy 01

DIVISIONS

- CUBIC
- Media and Public Relations Centre
- Vice Chancellor's Office
- Research Creativity & Management Office
- Schools & Centres

ALLOCATION
▶ RM80,000

- Establishing a dedicated team of writers (with journalistic skills).

- Publicising the impact of industry-community strategic partnerships.

- Leveraging alumni success stories (KOL).

- Strategic and targeted promotion of academic programmes & research (international & local).

- Managing perception (reputation management).

- Managing all brand touchpoints (website, social media, below & above the line).

PERFORMANCE INDICATORS

- Number of press releases or articles issued and published.

- Number of alumni success stories featured.

- Percentage increase in positive mentions and coverage in media outlets.

- Percentage increase in social media reach and engagement.

- Number of ambassadors recruited.

- Website analytics, including traffic, bounce rates, and time spent on site.

DIVISIONS

- CUBIC
- Media and Public Relations Centre
- Vice Chancellor's Office
- Research Creativity & Management Office
- Schools & Centres

ALLOCATION
▶ RM50,000

REPUTATION
BUILDING

Strategy 02

EXPECTED OUTCOMES

1 Enhanced market presence: CUBIC aims to elevate USM's visibility, resulting in increased recognition and influence.

2 Effective management of branding, marketing, and creative content: CUBIC will lead to streamlined and coordinated efforts, ensuring a cohesive approach to branding, marketing, and creative content.

3 Positive tone in narratives: CUBIC seeks to establish a positive and consistent tone in USM narratives, fostering a favourable perception.

4 Informed decision-making through periodic media analytics: CUBIC will provide valuable insights, enabling informed decision-making and adjustments to the branding and marketing strategy based on real-time data through regular media analytics.

5 Reputation building and improved perception: CUBIC will build a strong reputation for USM, improving overall perception.

6 Efficient crisis communication management: CUBIC will establish crisis communication protocols and enhance USM's ability to effectively navigate and manage communication during challenging situations, mitigating potential reputational risks.

7 Standardised communication manual: CUBIC will create a standardised communication manual that provides a comprehensive guide, ensuring consistency and clarity in all communication efforts.

Thrust ②

GLOBAL PROMINENCE

In order to establish the APEX and Sustainability brand for recognition, a transformative future path with an emphasis on advancing global sustainability is required. It is timely that the USM Sustainability Model and best practices are shared globally and made known to showcase and enhance USM's standing in the international sustainability scene.

This transformative plan emphasises advancing the USM brand in global sustainability development. Through these exposures by design, we want USM's sustainability brand, value, and positioning to be shared with the world to enhance USM's standing globally.

Initiative 1

Make USM's presence felt in relevant arenas

Activities

Position USM at the global level. This includes participation in COP, UN, World Economic Forum, ASEAN networking, and taking membership in relevant professional bodies, and International Association of Universities (PARIS).

Performance indicators

Number of participations at the global level.

Outcome:
Gain global recognition that USM is a sustainability-led university – maintain or improve our ranking in sustainability.

Initiative 2

Showcase USM's leadership in driving sustainability globally

Activities

Create our own new platform or network for brand recognition – the Global Top 10 Sustainability Network. Collaborate with top -ranked sustainability universities globally.

Performance indicators

Initiate a global forum – World Sustainability Network - WSN (affiliate with the right partner e.g.: United Nations University).

**Conduct the forum at the regional level.**

Outcome:
To showcase USM is also a university leading the sustainability agenda, we will initiate a new global forum - World Sustainability Network (WSN). We can affiliate with the right partner, such as the United Nations University or any universities that share the same sustainability agenda as USM.

RESPONSIBLE DIVISION

Deputy Vice-Chancellor
(Industry & Community Network)

ALLOCATION
▶ **RM300,000**
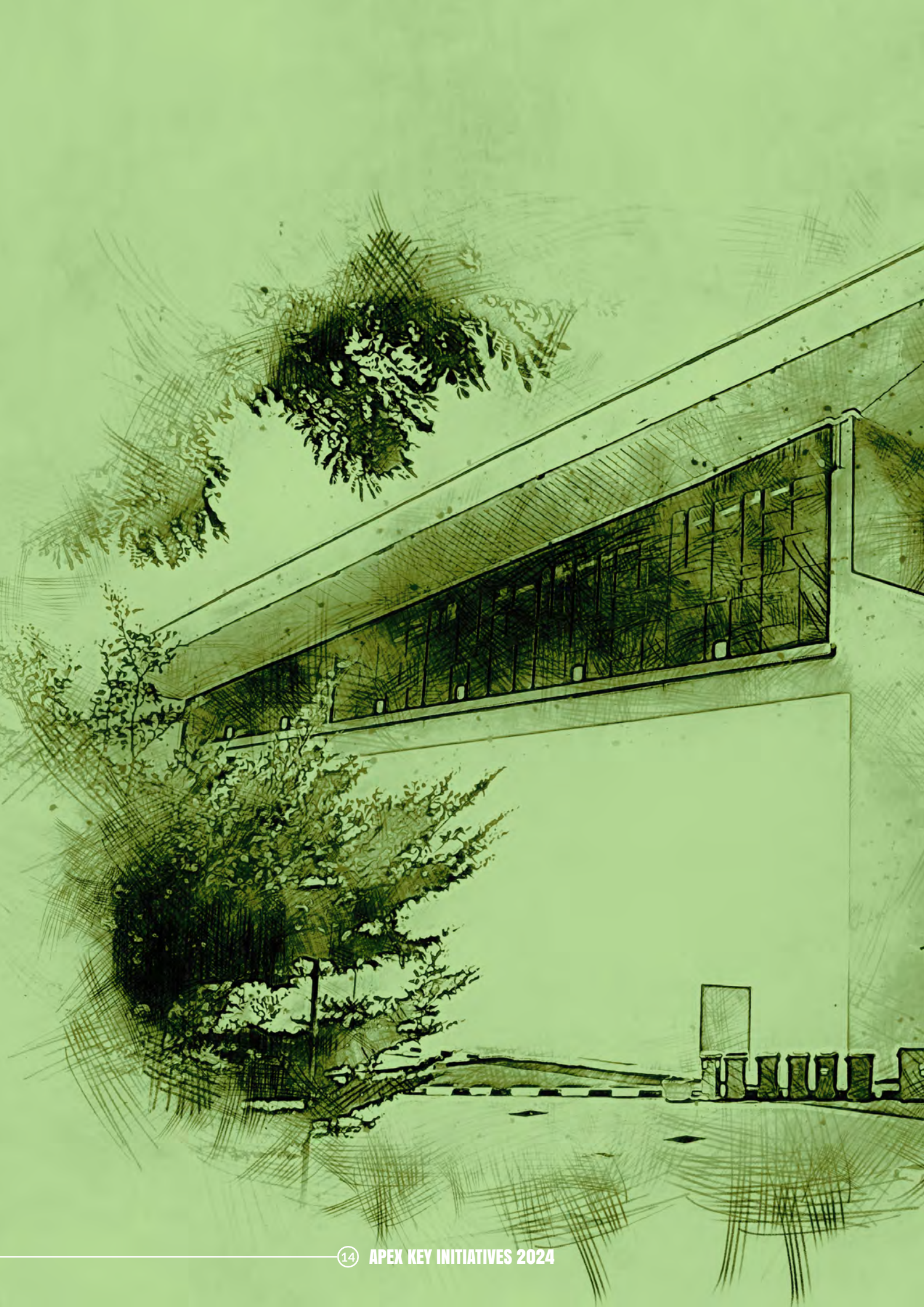
Thrust ③
Digital @ USM

The rapid evolution of information and communication technologies (ICTs) has led to the digital transformation of Higher Educational Institutes (HEIs), characterised by technological, cultural, and organisational change induced by digital technologies. Digital transformation (DT) is an inevitable trend that involves the transformation of business activities, processes, competencies and models by leveraging digital technologies strategically.

Artificial Intelligence (AI) has the potential to address key challenges in higher education, capable in bringing about significant advancements in the field of education, creating smart and ubiquitous learning environments. Its goals include enhancing learners' capabilities by fostering self-directed study, offering learning opportunities at any location and time, promoting personalised learning, fostering the development of a learning society, and supporting lifelong learning.

Initiatives

01 The use of generative intelligence (generative AI) in the production of academic teaching materials, the smoothness of the work process, customer relationship management (CRM), and micro-credential modules.

02 Collaboration with USM expertise and third parties through an application programming interface (API) for big data analytics of students, staff, and management leading to targeted actions and interventions.

03 Regularly exposing staff to technology and providing basic knowledge towards digital-oriented work process changes, including cloud computing technology.

04 A 100Gbps research network collaboration based in USM as the sole representative of Malaysia.

DIVISIONS
- Chief Digital Officer (CDO)
- Centre for Knowledge, Communication and Technology (PPKT)

ALLOCATION
▶ **RM2 million**

Thrust ④

DYNAMIC & INNOVATIVE EDUCATION

The APEX agenda emphasises on improving student-centred and sustainable development curriculum, increasing market relevance, integrating technology-based learning, enhancing skills competency, strengthening the connection between research and learning and incorporating alternative entry pathways, by utilising OpenCourseWare (OCW), and expediting open learning initiatives. By making courses and learning modules available online, USM ensures that education is accessible to a broader demographic, including individuals at the base of the socioeconomic pyramid.

In the post-new normal era, the landscape of teaching and learning is undergoing a transformative shift towards dynamic and innovative education. The educational paradigm is characterised by adaptation, flexibility, and a constant dedication to changing methods. This educational paradigm acknowledges how quickly globalisation, technological breakthroughs, and changes in societal needs are transforming the world.

The significance of establishing a smooth transition between research and education is acknowledged by the APEX agenda. USM seeks to establish a setting in which research results immediately enhance and augment the educational process. This integration promotes a culture of creativity, critical thinking, and curiosity.
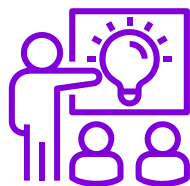
● Initiatives
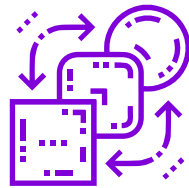
Move away from traditional lecture-based approaches to experiential and life-long learning.

Strengthen Microcredentials accreditation through the Quality Verification Centre (QVC).

Support teaching and learning through continuous development opportunities such as Academic Research Grant.

RESPONSIBLE DIVISION
Deputy Vice Chancellor
(Academic & International)

ALLOCATION
▶ **RM300,000**

Thrust ⑤
RESEARCH & INNOVATION ECOSYSTEM

The philosophy is to accomplish research and innovation that have an impact **beyond academic** boundaries. Impact means creating real change in the real world. Research and innovation should directly change and influence either the industry, society, or the community at large, especially underprivileged and vulnerable groups in various fields. To make an impact, there is a need to reach out to and engage with various and diverse stakeholders to identify and adequately understand the problem before proposing any solution. The solution must be sustainable and more than just an academic concept to have any value in the real world.

In the real world, problems are not compartmentalised in silos but rather transcend across several research disciplines. Since the world is rapidly changing, it is also imperative to intercept future global needs or to have foresight in the event of unprecedented or extreme situations (i.e., the Covid-19 pandemic, the impact of AI). USM's ecosystem of research & innovation should be transdisciplinary and far-sighted to cater to these circumstances.

USM must be able to predict and identify what are problems that may arise in the future, establish a single and proper research platform to facilitate handling this problem and select appropriate USM researchers to execute the research. Moreover, some form of training or mentoring must be provided to USM researchers to develop the skills and capacity to create research and innovation with tangible and intangible impact that are measured by both quantitative and qualitative methods. Qualitative approaches may include reports or testimonies provided by the relevant stakeholders who have benefitted from the impact. This is central to researchers' career progression and pivotal to USM's institutional reputation as a university that creates a real change in the real world.

STRATEGY 01

✓ PIONEERING TRANSDISCIPLINARY EXCELLENCE

● Initiatives

- Identify collaboration opportunities in research fields aligned with current and future global trends and challenges.

- Establish a platform to synchronise transdisciplinary research.

- Conduct cross-disciplinary and transdisciplinary research.

- Enhance USM's global prominence through impactful and forward-thinking research endeavours.

PERFORMANCE INDICATORS

- Number of transdisciplinary research project awarded

- Number of reports / narratives from stakeholders on the impact of research projects.

RESPONSIBLE DIVISION

Deputy Vice Chancellor (Research & Innovation)

ALLOCATION
▶ **RM100,000**

STRATEGY 02

TOMORROW'S INNOVATION, TODAY'S RESEARCH

PERFORMANCE INDICATORS

- Number of publications, patents, SUSO, postgraduates, in the research areas.

- Number of international and industrial collaborations.

- Impact factor of research outcomes (income generation, employment, policy, human development, services accessibility).

RESPONSIBLE DIVISIONS

- Deputy Vice Chancellor (Research & Innovation)

- Research Creativity and Management Office (RCMO)

- Centre for Innovation and Consultation (CIC)

ALLOCATION
▶ **RM 50,000**

Initiatives ●

- Assess current and future global challenges and research trends.

- Define focus areas in alignment with the university's strengths, APEX agenda, and global needs.

- Establish RUI endowment fund to sustain research funding.

Research & Innovation Ecosystem

FOSTER TALENT EXCELLENCE

Initiatives

- Shape and nurture research icons and Top Research Scientists in Malaysia (TRSM).

- Implement a special programme to foster distinguished professors, including the National Academic Award (AAN) and other outstanding awards.

- Seek recognition from the United Nations (UN).

PERFORMANCE INDICATORS

- Number of academics and non-academics awards received.

- Collaborative engagement and testimonials from community and industry stakeholders.

RESPONSIBLE DIVISIONS

- Deputy Vice Chancellor (Academic & Internationalisation)

- Deputy Vice Chancellor (Research & Innovation)

ALLOCATION
▶ **RM 50,000**

Thrust **6**

STRATEGIC TALENT DEVELOPMENT

In the pursuit of excellence and leadership in academia, USM envisions a dynamic and thriving community of individuals who contribute significantly to the university's success. The strategic focus on talent management is divided into two key domains: the professional development of acclaimed staff and the holistic development of dynamic students.

Talent management for staff includes two main programmes: the APEX Pearl Leadership Programme and the APEX Residency Programme (ARP@USM). USM aspires to have exceptional leaders to guide this prestigious university. Therefore, it is committed to ensuring that the university has a good supply of potential candidates to assume top and middle management responsibilities. To achieve this aspiration,

USM, through the APEX Pearl Leadership Cluster, will identify, train, evaluate, and recommend potential candidates for these positions. ARP is an institutionalised USM ecosystem that supports staff mobility within academic/administrative PTJs. The objectives of ARP include (i) sharing expertise within PTJs (apprentice to experts), (ii) leadership exposure, and (iii) optimisation of resources (cost savings).

Talent management for students includes the Nurturing & Development Programme, which employs a holistic approach aiming to elevate the skills and competencies of both new and existing students. This programme aims to foster academic excellence, sharpen leadership abilities, enhance mental well-being, and promote a sense of community and unity.

APEX PEARL LEADERSHIP PROGRAM

Strategic Talent Development

Initiatives	Activities	KPI
Identification of potential leaders	The selection of candidates involves input from deans, peers (360 evaluation), cross PTJ recommendations, recommendations from top management, and input from volunteers	**% of staff from the programme appointed to take up management roles within the university**
Training of potential leaders	Training will cover APEX traits, job skills & insaniah values.	
Evaluation of potential leaders	Assessments will be conducted to evaluate the merits of candidates.	
Recommendations for management positions	The APEX Leadership Cluster Programme will recommend candidates for management posts within the university.	

RESPONSIBLE DIVISION
APEX Pearl Leadership Cluster

ALLOCATION
▶ **RM200,000**

APEX RESIDENCY PROGRAM (ARP@USM)

Strategic Talent Development

Initiatives	Activities	KPI
Identification of PTJs	Identifying PTJs in need of expertise for strategic purposes.	**% of staff involved in ARP@USM**
Identification of talents	Identifying candidates for specific strategic purposes.	
Creating the ARP@USM ecosystem	Creating a database for the programme (supply and demand). Facilitating the mechanism for staff mobility. Acknowledging the contributions of staff (KPIs & Promotions).	

RESPONSIBLE DIVISIONS
- APEX Pearl Leadership Cluster
- Institutional Planning and Stratigic Center (IPSC)
- Human Resource

ALLOCATION
▶ **RM50,000**

HEBAT Development Programme

Initiatives	Activities	KPI
To enhance students' development through the HEBAT agenda	Conduct impactful projects under the 15 HEBAT attributes.	**% of students participating in the HEBAT agenda projects.**

RESPONSIBLE DIVISIONS
- Deputy Vice Chancellor (Students & Alumni)
- HEBAT development centre

ALLOCATION
▶ **RM250,000**

EXPECTED OUTCOMES

1

APEX Pearl Leadership Programme

USM has an abundance of exceptional potential leaders, embodying the APEX culture, ready to take up leadership roles within the university.

2

APEX Residency Programme (ARP@USM)

USM can sustainably utilise its vast resources to advance USM's strategic agenda, while the involved staff will benefit from career development opportunities.

3

HEBAT Development Program

Produce graduates with HEBAT attributes to positively impact society's wellbeing while addressing both the local and global demands.

Thrust ⑦
ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY

Environmental Sustainability

As a sustainability-led university, USM is committed to fostering collective responsibility towards a greener and more sustainable future through its efforts to reduce its carbon footprint. This transformative journey is envisioned through the implementation of a Comprehensive Sustainability Dashboard (CSD). This innovative strategy aims to empower the university community with real-time insights into our environmental impact, including monitoring essential elements such as water, electricity, waste, and mobility.

The CSD represents USM's proactive approach to monitoring, managing, and reducing our carbon footprint, with the goal of achieving a zero-carbon campus by the year 2040. This initiative seeks to inculcate environmental consciousness within the USM community, fostering awareness and contributions towards the environmental sustainability of the campus.

SUSTAINABILITY DASHBOARD

Initiatives	Activities	KPI
Carbon emission tracking	Set up an integrated sustainability dashboard to complement the smart water management initiative.	**Ready-to-use dashboard for carbon emission tracking and sustainability monitoring.**
Sustainability showcase	The dashboard would showcase sustainability efforts by the USM community.	

RESPONSIBLE DIVISIONS

- Deputy Vice Chancellor Industrial & Community Network
- Outsourced development of dashboard

ALLOCATION
▶ **RM500,000**

Thrust ⑧

FINANCIAL SUSTAINABILITY

Financial Sustainability

Financial sustainability is the cornerstone of ensuring university's continued growth and success. The surplus in revenue will empower the university to invest in cutting-edge research facilities, support faculty development, and enhance student learning and living experiences. This will ultimately contribute to the enhanced well-being of the USM community and will generate positive impacts for all stakeholders.

Initiatives

Financial Analytics Dashboard

To develop an efficient monitoring system and enable data-driven financial management.

Financial Training & Coaching

To train and coach managers, leaders, and administrators to be financially competent and able to develop strategies towards financial sustainability.

Financial Sustainability

New Incentivisation Model

To formulate a new and viable incentivization model to boost productivity.

Expected Outcomes

1

DATA-DRIVEN FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT

Effective and informed decision making.

FINANCIAL COMPETENCY

2

Enhance financial literacy and competency among USM management and administrators.

3

FINANCIAL INDEPENDENCE

Increase revenue to reduce the dependency on government funding.

AGILE INSTITUTION

4

Enhance agility, resilience, and autonomy in institutional spending and investment to further solidify the commitment to attain institutional excellence

DIVISIONS

- Financial Sustainability Taskforce
- Centre for Knowledge, Communication and Technology (PPKT)
- Bursary
- USAINS
- Institutional Planning and Stratigic Center (IPSC)
- Outsource

ALLOCATION
▶ **RM300,000**

Thrust ⑨

STRATEGIC FORESIGHT: MAKING USM FUTURE PROOF

Strategic Foresight is a systematic process that involves the analysis and gathering of future intelligence data for medium to long-term planning. It serves as a guiding mechanism for organisations, aiding them in making informed decisions regarding expansion and development while preparing for future challenges. The primary goal of foresight is to proactively navigate the future, ensuring that an organisation is well-prepared and equipped to face uncertainties with confidence, ultimately avoiding unanticipated setbacks.

> **Foresight is "a university human capacity which allows people to think ahead and consider, model, create and respond to, future eventualities"**
>
> *~Foresight International (2006)~*

Initiatives

Strategic foresight for digital transformation.

Analysing trends in Sustainable Development Goals.

Horizon scanning for emerging changes and global scenario.

DIVISIONS
- Foresight Task Force
- Institutional Planning and Stratigic Center (IPSC)
- Vice Chancellor Office

ALLOCATION
▶ **RM200,000**

Expected Outcomes

1

Increased organisational awareness

Allows USM to proactively adapt and strategically position itself in response to evolving dynamics, enhancing its chances of future success.

2

Holistic and contextualised mapping of key future developments

Gain a comprehensive understanding of the interconnectedness of various elements, facilitating both informed decision-making and strategic planning.

3

Forward looking perspective, future-proof plans and decisions

USM strategic plans and investment decisions are not only current but also aligned with anticipated future changes, which will enhance our resilience and adaptability in the face of evolving landscapes.

4

Thought Leadership

By staying informed and forward-thinking, USM will not only anticipate future trends but also become a trusted source of insights, establishing itself as a guiding voice for academia, industry and society.

Thrust **10**

AGILE GOVERNANCE

Agile governance involves:

- 🌀 applying the principles of agility and flexibility to the institution's decision-making processes and overall governance structure.

- 🌀 managing the complexities and changes that universities face in a more adaptable and proactive approach.

KEY ASPECTS OF AGILE GOVERNANCE:

Adaptive Decision-Making:
Flexibility in decision-making process that can quickly respond to changing circumstances, new information, and emerging priorities.

Collaborative Governance:
Involves diverse teams to address complex challenges, fostering collaboration among different departments and stakeholders.

Inclusive Decision-Making:
Involves a broad range of stakeholders, including students, faculty, staff, and external partners, in the decision-making process.

Continuous Improvement:
Feedback Mechanisms for gathering feedback from stakeholders to continuously improve processes, policies, and services.

Transparency and Communication:
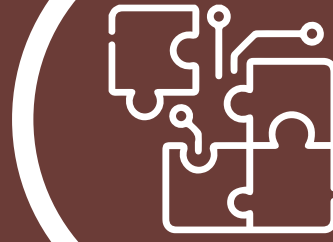Open and transparent communication to keep stakeholders informed about decision-making processes and changes.

Regular Updates:
Providing regular updates on progress, challenges, and shifts in strategy to maintain a shared understanding among stakeholders.

USM Agile Governance

2024
Initiatives:

TECHNOLOGY INTEGRATION:
Leveraging technology to enhance efficiency, communication and data-driven decision-making within the governance structure i.e., e-disiplin and e-rental.

INITIATIVE 2

REDUCE BUREAUCRACY:
Enhancing efficiency through systematic standard operating procedure. This can be done with simpler SOP that have been developed by the various committees.

INITIATIVE 3

UNLOCK THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT CIRCULARS:
By having our internal University's policy and SOPs.

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