

BEYOND STANDARDS 2016-2021 STRATEGIC PLAN

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FOREWORD

Beyond Standards: 2016-2021 presents the strategic goals and objectives of Asia Pacific International College (APIC) as its Governing Board and Executive Management position the College for further growth and to become self-accrediting.

Higher education is a highly competitive sector both nationally and internationally, and competitive forces will continue to heighten over the next five years. The influence of evolving educational technologies in changing student engagement will deepen and present yet more opportunities for disruption across the sector. Technological change and buoyant demand has already seen new higher and vocational education players take market share from conventional institutions and create new markets. There are further signs that conventions will be greatly challenged and that established, large institutions will see stagnant or reduced market share.

Whilst domestic and international political events continue to further promote socio-economic uncertainty, there remains strong demand for well-educated, skilled professionals and professional managers in the state and private sectors world-wide. However, the nature of their required knowledge and skills set is shifting towards that which is conventionally associated with entrepreneurs. Further change is being driven

by the advance of automation into routine professional work. Hence, demand for continuing professional development will intensify as professionals seek to remain relevant as social and commercial life changes.

APIC's past strategy and the huge contribution made by its founding President provides a firm foundation for APIC to exploit the opportunities that are open to it now and which will be available in the future. APIC's Governing Board and Executive Management aim to develop a self-accrediting, professional management institute that is internationally recognised and which synthesizes arts, science and professional practice in higher education through challenge-based action learning, professional development and action research.

This strategy builds on APIC's legacy. It redefines APIC's business model as the platform on which a reinvigorated institution will deepen its commitment to student participation and attainment. APIC will be home to a transformational learning community that is firmly connected to the world of work and society. APIC will deliver and develop actionable knowledge to educate and further develop professionals and professional managers, committed to evidence-based, ethical practice.



Adjunct Professor Jim Taggart OAM
Chair, APIC Governing Board



Professor Clive Smallman
President and Principal Executive Officer

September 2016

STRATEGIC CONTEXT

APIC is building on its solid foundation of high quality, face-to-face, competency-based action learning in business and project management. We aim to further deepen our existing significant commitment to student participation and attainment. We will deliver and develop actionable knowledge to produce and further develop professionals and professional managers committed to evidence-based, ethical practice.

Demand in the international higher education sector is buoyant and its substantial recent growth is forecast to further accelerate to 2025. Domestic demand from school leavers across Australia is weakening and is increasingly contested. However, public universities' business models are unsustainable and there are signs of disruption as established international brands and new entrants offer opportunities for graduates and established professionals to accelerate their careers or retrain through online, intensive or 'blended' courses, both award-bearing and not. We are seeing value innovation as new entrants and the private sector are able to rapidly innovate whilst controlling costs. So too are we seeing the rise of higher education awards that offer experienced professionals and managers the chance to validate their competencies as a means of partially completing higher degrees. And in a rapidly emerging paradigm, 'challenge-driven' education sees teams of students focus on action learning, with theory or formal instruction online and face-to-face tutorials focused on problem solving, often on real-world projects in collaboration with practitioners and other stakeholders.

Outside of higher education, but strongly related to it, technology is transforming the work of the professions. As this trend intensifies and accelerates, becoming and remaining 'expert' will require the reinvention of the professionals' education model, serial mastery and portfolio careers will become the norm rather than life-long singular professions. Training cycles will shorten as the next generation of professionals seek small, private online courses and personalised (mass-customised) learning systems. Future careers will include project managers, paraprofessionals (working with standard processes and systems), research and development workers and managers, knowledge engineers (designing online services),

process analysts, designers, entrepreneurs, data scientists and systems engineers as the presently dominant professions evolve.

This evolving and intensifying competitive and careers landscape brings with it heightened expectations from students and prospective employers. APIC, whilst performing solidly must respond and leverage from its foundations as well as its talented team. A much more nuanced strategy is required based on a refined vision.

At the heart of that approach will lie an ever greater commitment to student service, assuring participation and attainment. We will move from the present broadly transactional relationship we have with students to a much more engaged transformational relationship, and one which will last beyond graduation. Our nascent relationship with employers through various channels too must become stronger so that we may further develop industry engagement in action learning. We must also benchmark against the very best, and this will include a move to accredit APIC with the Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business.

So too must our industry engagement extend to action research. If APIC is to be taken seriously as a self-accrediting institute, then it must engage in research that is useful. Engaged research should make a difference, with the potential to transform individuals and entities who work together to solve real issues.

In undertaking its own transformation within this strategic context, APIC is cognisant of its statutory obligations. We have a robust, transparent and accountable governance framework. We are furthering our commitment to excellence in quality assurance, and in learning and teaching. We continue to invest heavily in infrastructure and information systems. We acknowledge the pressing need to diversify revenue sources to mediate financial risk and to create a strong, efficient and effective organisation, fully able to invest and promote transformational challenge-based action learning and research.

THE LESSONS OF HISTORY

APIC's past strategic plans have mapped a conventional development route for APIC, but one with a narrow product and revenue base that lacks distinctiveness.

This plan was developed following analysis of past plans, which enjoyed only incremental updates for some time. Whilst compliant and well structured, nevertheless they did not offer an up-to-date perspective on the intensively competitive markets in which APIC operates, and failed to reflect business opportunities and realities that APIC must now deal with. They also did not evidence adoption of current or recent business and management thinking or practice. In other words, a strategic review was required to meet our obligations under the Higher Education Framework Standards. Hence, in May 2016 the Governing Board commissioned the development of this strategy, led by the President in consultation with the Governing Board and colleagues in several forums. The present plan marks a distinct shift from the past.

APIC's past strategic plans plotted a path towards a future as a conventional university. There are 43 accredited universities in Australia, which are broadly homogeneous, pursuing research excellence and mass higher education through variations on conventional didactic method. With few exceptions courses of study are strongly homogeneous, and universities differentiate through brand, which is strongly correlated with longevity; they are also highly bureaucratic and slow-moving. Further, it is arguable that their high-cost business model is not sustainable under present funding and regulatory arrangements. There are 126 private higher education providers in Australia, of which eight are partially or fully self-accrediting. A limited review of their strategies suggests that the majority aspire to be conventional universities, and their structures and courses of study and teaching methods are aligned accordingly.

Broadly speaking, APIC faces domestic competition from 169 entities, all of whom are or aim to be a conventional university, delivering conventional courses in a conventional manner. This is not to deny that convention will not continue to enjoy success. Universities have followed the same approach to teaching since the first were founded over 1,000 years ago. Although the manner and

channels through which teachers communicate with students has changed and will continue to do so, it is likely that strong, highly established brands will continue with convention, and will thrive. However, it also is likely that they will continue to reinforce their appeal to the elite by raising tuition fees and offering scholarships to the very brightest and best. As for the rest, change is here and more is coming.

Hence, whilst APIC must meet or exceed regulatory requirements that enforce homogeneity, to transform its fortunes and to ensure success it must adopt or develop branding, business models and value propositions that are distinct. The path to such distinctiveness is not clear in the present strategy, and to date APIC has set a conservative vision for a conventional future. APIC's present strategy and business model is focused on recruiting young international students as its customers, based on a narrow range of conventional courses. That we offer end-to-end service seems not to be well communicated. APIC's relationship with its students is transactional and we must move towards a much more transformational and engaging approach. APIC presently offers face-to-face instruction only. Hence its revenue source is singular and capped. Its key activities are recruitment, admissions and conventional teaching. APIC's key resources are its people and infrastructure. Its key partner, through a well-defined service level agreement is Education Centre of Australia. APIC's main costs are salaries and compliance.

In summary APIC is in many respects a very conventional college with past strategies that articulated conventional aspirations. It is not presently leveraging its distinctive model of competency-based education, which is increasingly considered to be an effective methodology. Much of its history projects APIC as future conventional university, as standard, and one which probably would not stand out from a morass of competition. Yet, compliance should not mean conformance and distinctiveness certainly means non-standard. Moreover, if the majority of universities continue to operate a business model that is not sustainable, why would APIC follow that route rather than one that disrupts?

VISION, MISSION AND VALUES



Our Vision

APIC will be a transformational, challenge-based and distinctive higher education provider. At APIC, students, educators, researchers, professionals and other stakeholders will work together exploring collaborative solutions to real-world problems. APIC will use flipped learning with students studying course content online, where face-to-face time is reserved for collaborative, applied problem-solving, drawing inspiration from the arts, science and professional practice. Through challenging action learning and action research, its students and stakeholders will transform themselves, responding to and preparing for the changing world of work. APIC will operate beyond standards.

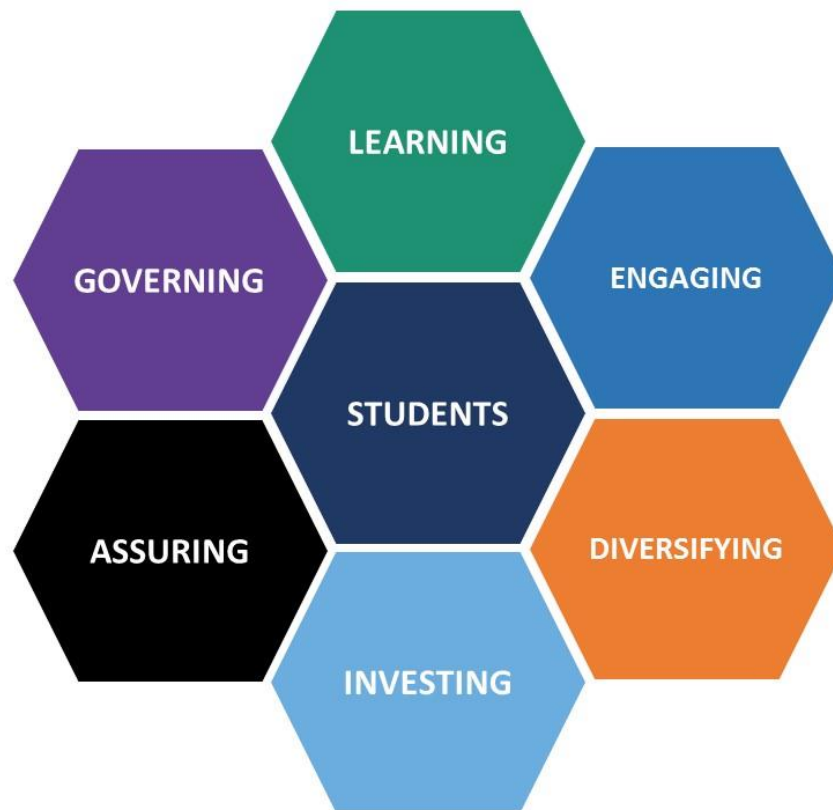
Our Mission

APIC develops and delivers action learning and action research that transforms individuals, business and society by enabling the collaborative development of solutions to real-world challenges.

Our Values

- Student-centred
- Real-world engaged
- Best-practice governance
- Academic primacy
- Academic freedom with responsibility
- Collegial professionalism
- Quality and excellence
- Rigour and integrity
- Responsible marketing
- Communicate clearly, early and often
- Listening
- Wellbeing, respect, compassion, forgiveness and gratitude

STRATEGIC GOALS AND OBJECTIVES 2016-2021



*APIC places **students** at the heart of its strategy and operations through participation and assured learning. This is supported by each of six objectives to enable APIC to realise its core objective of ensuring students have a transformational educational or developmental experience.*

Six strategic objectives support APIC's central goal and reflect APIC's commitment to:

1. Providing a **distinctive, challenge-based action learning experience**
2. Executing a program of **action research through engaging** with our stakeholders
3. **Diversifying** to expand its customer base and service offerings, assuring diverse revenue sources and financial sustainability
4. Further **investing in people and infrastructure** to change its organisational culture to deliver transformational client services
5. **Assuring quality** of processes and outcomes beyond standards
6. **Governing** robustly, assuring accountability, transparency and academic primacy

A STUDENT-CENTRED INSTITUTION

APIC will integrate academic support, career advice and pastoral care across the student life cycle. From initial marketing engagement through graduation and on to the professional life of our alumni, our intent is to offer a transformational learning experience that maximises students' investment in their education. We will provide courses that are relevant to present and future professional careers.



To be student-centred, APIC will:

1. Offer a widened portfolio of higher education and professional development courses that fit closely to present and future career opportunities or professional development requirements
2. Widen access to its courses through developing intensive face-to-face, online and blended offerings of existing and new courses
3. Continue to undertake responsible branding and marketing to ensure that prospective students enjoy the opportunity to make properly informed choices
4. Assure that recognition of prior learning is evidence-based, follows policy, is beneficial and preserves academic integrity
5. Provide effective support across the student life cycle, ensuring that ill-prepared students are not knowingly admitted, that at-risk students benefit from early intervention and support, and that students are well supported by early feedback on their performance and success
6. Ensure that all students enjoy equal opportunities to succeed regardless of the background or their mode of engagement
7. Ensure that learning is assured
8. Ensure that learning is aligned to externally referenced Course Learning Outcomes
9. Widen opportunities for students to participate in decision-making at APIC
10. Deepen its engagement with its alumni
11. Open and string communication channels with all students and stakeholders

Measures of success will include:

- Graduation, progression and retention rates
- Measures of student satisfaction and graduate employment outcomes, based on the national Quality Indicators for Learning and Teaching
- Student feedback on teaching through APIC's Subject Evaluation Questionnaire
- Student experience measures in benchmarking exercises

A DISTINCTIVE, CHALLENGE-DRIVEN ACTION LEARNING EXPERIENCE

APIC's distinctive educational model has at its core experiential and reflective learning, building on developing solutions to real-world problems, but always with a grounding in specialised knowledge.

To offer a distinctive, challenge-driven action learning experience APIC will:

1. Progressively review its existing courses, leveraging on the best aspects of its educational model (applied knowledge, critical thinking, communication skills) whilst refining it to enable scaling
2. Build all new courses on the foundation of challenge-driven action learning
3. Widen its value proposition set to include the establishment of short courses that are tightly focused on developing high-demand technological, professional or managerial skills
4. Further widen its value proposition set to include the establishment of start-up co-working spaces, promoting the growth of the technology scene across Australia and internationally
5. Pursue the involvement of commercial, industrial, non-government and governmental partners in the delivery of its offerings, sharpening the relevance of its courses to potential employers and introducing students to them

Measures of success will include:

- Graduation, progression and retention rates
- National measures of student satisfaction and graduate employment outcomes, based on the Quality Indicators for Learning and Teaching
- Student experience measures in benchmarking exercises
- Demand for short courses
- Rate of start-ups that are commercialised








ENGAGED RESEARCH THAT IS USEFUL

Society and organisations world-wide grapple with new and poorly understood problems as they adapt to rapidly changing environments, driven by political, economic, social, technological and eco-systemic issues. Much published research singularly ignores such issues, is at worst is irrelevant and, at best, lags behind practice. Hence, in parallel with its commitment to challenge-driven action learning, APIC will build a reputation for developing action research that is useful, by generating knowledge and practices that can impact real world issues.

To develop engaged research that is useful, APIC will:

1. Empower the role of Deputy Dean (Research) who, working with colleagues, will develop and lead APIC's research activities
2. Further establish and promote its working paper series
3. Incrementally develop its commitment to sending staff to internationally ranked academic management conferences to present refereed papers, followed by publication in specific journals
4. Partner with an Australian university to offer a Professional Doctorate (applying rigorous research to solve a real-world problem)
5. As its revenue improves, develop a research support fund to enable full-time-academic academic colleagues to undertake research based on fieldwork with industrial, commercial, non-government and government institutions
6. Establish the Engaged Research Centre (ERC) Network across locations in South East Asia and Australasia, linking APIC's development of start-up co-working spaces to government, commercial and industry sponsored applied research, developing solutions to socio-economic and sustainability issues

Measures of success will include:

-  Progressive increase in number of working papers
-  Progressive increase in number of journal publications
-  Increasing *h*-Index of academic colleagues
-  Number of doctoral students and completions
-  Number of ERC Nodes established, level of funding, number of projects and researchers

RENEWED BUT RESPONSIBLE BRANDING AND MARKETING

APIC's brand has remain unaltered since its founding in 2004, with the exception of a change of logo early in 2016. With respect to its founder and colleagues who have worked to develop the brand, it is perhaps time to take a look at evolving the brand to differentiate its expanding value proposition portfolio. Rebranding is a crucial step if APIC is to be taken seriously as we seek further growth in a challenging sector, and as our product set evolves and widens. APIC remains indistinct from competitors and needs to heighten its clients' perceptions of its relevance to potential students, aspiring entrepreneurs, professionals and professional managers. As it widens its portfolios, there is a need to clarify and sharpen the presentation of its offerings.

Further, it is vital that APIC continues to market its brand responsibly, ensuring that its clients have clear access to accurate and sufficient information.

To ensure that it undertake responsible branding and marketing APIC will:

1. Evolve its brand to recognise its widening portfolio of service offerings through developing a carefully considered name change, maintaining a fresh website design, and a carefully designed and well-orchestrated social media campaign
2. Ensure that its marketing collateral and website meet or exceed statutory requirements
3. Launch the evolved brand in parallel with the cut-over to the new Higher Education Standards on 1 January 2017
4. Diversify revenue streams

Measures of success will include:

- Student load and revenue
- Research revenue
- Variety of revenue sources
- Launch of rebrand
- Fresh website design
- New marketing collateral
- Marketing analytics
- Revenue concentration



TRANSFORMATIONAL CLIENT SERVICES

APIC has evolved rapidly over the past two years or so, with a sharp increase in student numbers. This has posed challenges to professional and academic staff, many of whom are unfamiliar with issues relating to higher volumes of student interaction. There are noticeable variations in the way in which professional and academic colleagues interact with students and each other, and there is a marked difference between Melbourne and Sydney operations.

As we seek to differentiate ourselves from our competitors and as we enter a stage of development requiring that we benchmark our services across the sector, it is vital that we drive towards a differentiated client experience. Be it in higher education, short courses or research, rather than simply transacting with our clients, we can differentiate from our competitors by enabling our clients to transform themselves. Our role in this is to deliver what is promised and to deal well with issues and questions that arise; APIC should be easy to do business with.



To offer transformational client services APIC will:

1. Ensure it has senior academic leadership in keeping with the size and structure of its student body
2. Maintain or improve its students to academic staff ratio
3. Maintain or improve its students to professional staff ratio
4. Over time decrease its reliance on sessional staffing
5. Administer the Organisational Cultural Assessment Instrument (OCAI) as a means of generating data that will better enable APIC to develop its employees and the workplace
6. Train its leadership team in Coaching for Leadership to enable them to guide colleagues in improving their workplace performance
7. Offer professional development that matches the needs of colleagues in improving their performance
8. Train its leadership team in the application of applied positive psychology to improve workplace behaviours
9. Train professional and academic staff in client services.
10. Further its substantial investment in physical and electronic resources and infrastructure

Measures of success will include:

- Number of senior academic leaders
- Students to academic staff ratio
- Students to professional staff ratio
- Continuing or fractional to sessional academic staff ratio
- Employee benefits ratio
- Progress towards preferred organisation culture profile, based on analysis of OCAI
- Admissions cycle time
- Graduation, progression and retention rates
- Measures of student satisfaction, based on the national Quality Indicators for Learning and Teaching
- Student-experience measures in benchmarking exercise
- Asset replacement ratio
- Information resources expenditure per student

QUALITY ASSURED BEYOND STANDARDS

Quality assurance (QA) is a statutory obligation to protect the interests of students and maintain academic primacy. However, best practice established over decades also demonstrates that QA is developmental in that it enables APIC's Executive Management team and academic and professional colleagues to:

- Receive feedback and to take action as a consequence of the feedback, setting collective priorities, and disseminating good practice;
- Identify needs and resources;
- Develop and implement action planning;
- Monitor and evaluate themselves, each other, students and the work in the College;
- Identify strengths and weaknesses in their work;
- Address staff needs for ongoing professional development and enhance their professionalism through regulation, self-regulation, and self-organized development; and
- Know where to intervene to make effective and sustainable continuous improvements.

Hence, working to and beyond quality management standards is a means of consistently and continuously improving APIC's operations, with consequent positive impacts on organizational performance and operating costs.

Standards refer to those specified by professional bodies (e.g., CPA and ACS), by academic peak bodies (e.g. Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business (AACSB), Association of MBAs (AMBA), European Foundation for Management Development (EFMD), or by international standards (e.g., International Standards Organisation (ISO)).

To assure quality beyond standards APIC will:

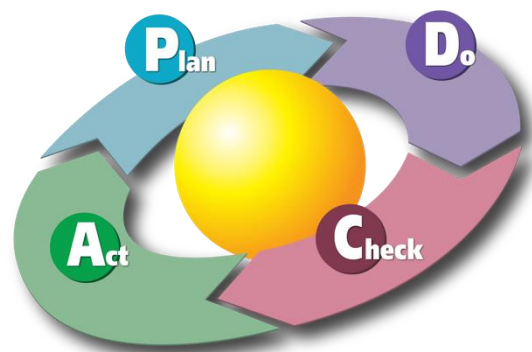
1. Undertake a fundamental review of its Quality Management System and underlying policies

and processes in preparation for the cut-over to the new Higher Education Standards on 1 January 2017

2. Initiate a project to certify itself against ISO 9001:2015
3. Initiate a project to accredit itself against the AACSB Business Accreditation Standards
4. Seek self-accrediting status at the earliest opportunity

Measures of success will include:

- Measures of student satisfaction and graduate employment outcomes, based on the national Quality Indicators for Learning and Teaching
- Externally validated compliance against the new Higher Education Standards
- Certification against ISO 9001:2015
- Accreditation against the AACSB Business Accreditation Standards
- Operating costs






ACCOUNTABLE AND TRANSPARENT GOVERNANCE

Good governance promotes regulatory, community and stakeholder confidence, engendering trust in organisations that practice it. APIC's Governing Board, Academic Board and Executive Management can draw confidence from best governance practice, since this encourages them to execute their duties properly. Good governance leads to better and more ethical decision-making and so helps APIC to meet its statutory responsibilities.

To assure that it benefits from accountable and transparent governance, APIC's Governing Board will:

1. Ensure that APIC's Governance Framework is properly implemented, following the provisions of APIC's Constitution, Governing Board Charter and Academic Board Charter
2. Take responsibility for risk management, delegations, strategic planning, academic standards and quality assurance
3. Act in the best interests of APIC as a whole, act in good faith and exercise care and diligence in the execution of their duties
4. Ensure that APIC observes all requirements of the Threshold Standards
5. Commission an annual independent review of the performance of the Governing Board
6. Commission an independent bi-yearly review of APIC's compliance performance

Measures of success will include:

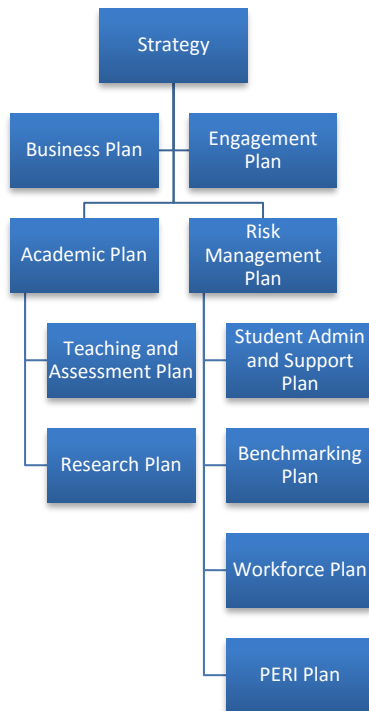
-  Governing Board and Academic Board performance
-  Financial performance
-  Compliance performance



EXECUTING THE STRATEGY

There are many good strategies that have ‘died in the drawer’ and the Governing Board are clear that the present strategy must have a clear path to execution.

At APIC, our *Strategy* feeds a series of high-level and functional plans:



The *Strategy* drives the *Business Plan*, which lays out the timing and contribution of business activities. This allows us to operationalise value innovation through identifying revenue raising opportunities and opportunities to control costs. The *Engagement Plan* identifies marketing and networking events and processes, connecting potential clients to our offerings, and reconnecting alumni.

Moving away from the strategic level, APIC’s academic operations are managed and monitored through the *Academic Plan*, which in turn directs *Teaching and Assessment* and *Research Plans*. We further manage the operation through plans focused on *Student Administration and Support*, *Benchmarking*, the *Workforce*, and *Physical and Electronic Resources and Infrastructure* (PERI).

Each plan is linked to metrics that operationalise the measures of success outlined previously, which

allows the Governing Board to monitor and assess APIC’s performance.

Performance is reviewed by the Executive Management Team on a fortnightly basis, with reports to the Governing Board and Academic Board (for the Academic Plans) moving to a monthly basis from October 2016. The Plans themselves, excepting this *Strategy*, will be reviewed on a quarterly basis, with the first review, based on the present strategy, due in quarter four 2016.

The present Strategy will be reviewed in quarter three 2017.



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