

# Roundtable Event results



## KEY FINDINGS

- Collectively the three stakeholder groups represented at the Roundtable Event held on 17 November 2015 – UQ Students, UQ Staff and UQ Community – prioritised *Supporting Students*, *Innovative Education*, and *Best Practice Pedagogies* as the most important challenges to be addressed in the UQ Student Strategy.
- The outcomes of the Roundtable Event discussions reflect interconnectedness and overlap in the challenges and strategies of the Green Paper.
- With regard to *Supporting Students*, Roundtable Event participants suggest that a connected community should be built early with students engaged at the beginning of their higher education experience. They recommended better engaging UQ alumni to support their lifelong connectedness and ongoing involvement with the University, and suggest that UQ campuses should be made attractive to both students and alumni in order to maintain a connected UQ community.
- Roundtable Event participants value *Best Practice Pedagogies*, but note that best practice varies by discipline and student cohort. They observe that while online learning supports flexible course delivery, it should be implemented as a complement to face-to-face active learning approaches. Best practice teaching also relies on *Staff Recognition*, suggest Roundtable Event respondents.
- Roundtable Event respondents see that interdisciplinary learning is an opportunity to address the challenge of delivering an *Innovative Education* moving forward.

This chapter sets out the key findings from a Roundtable Event held as part of the consultation process on UQ's Green Paper *Towards... The UQ Student Strategy*. The roundtables were carried out on 17 November 2015 and had 75 participants in total (excluding facilitators) from UQ's key stakeholder groups:

### UQ Students

- Undergraduates (n=3)
- Postgraduates (n=3)

### UQ Staff

- Academic staff (n=16)
- Professional staff (n=21)

### UQ Community

- Alumni (n=18)
- Secondary school teachers (n=5)
- Industry stakeholders (n= 9)

Alumni may also be considered industry stakeholders and this should be noted with regard to the UQ Community voice.

There were 13 tables for facilitated discussion, each with a mix of stakeholders. Roundtable Event participants were asked a set of questions relating to the nine challenges outlined in the Green Paper. These questions aimed to identify and understand the group’s Top 3 Challenges as well as their aspirations for UQ’s student experience in 2026. Results are reported in relation to the priority Challenges nominated by individual Roundtable Event participants, as well as the nominations agreed upon by tables.

The Green Paper’s challenges address interdependent themes and issues, and discussions were fluid and not solely focused on the group’s chosen Top 3 Challenges.

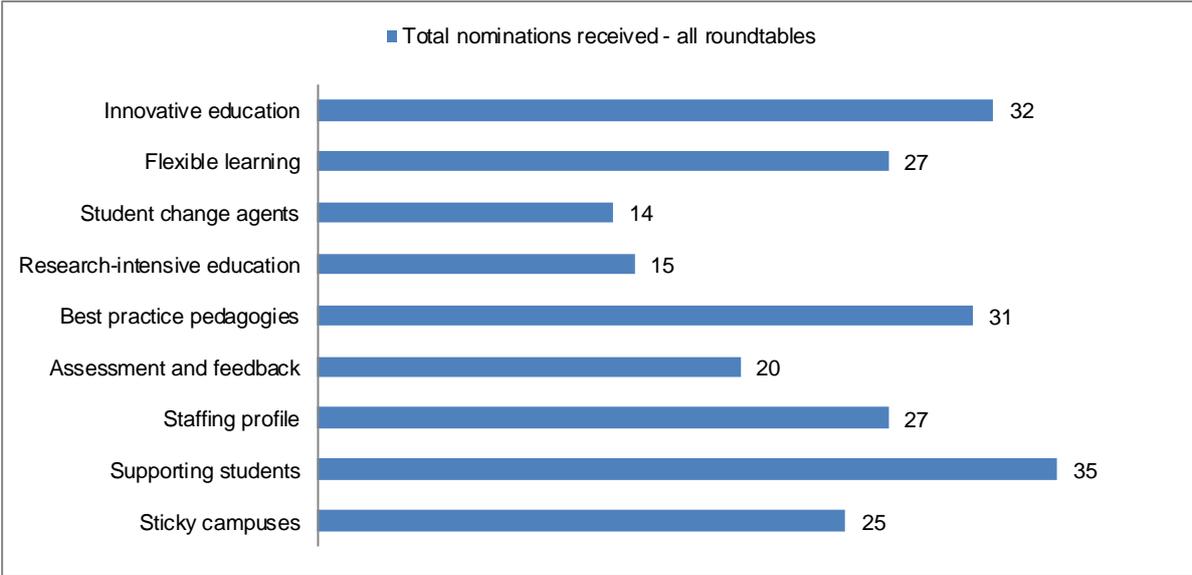
This chapter:

1. Identifies the challenges most commonly identified by invited participants during roundtable discussions (Challenges)
2. Considers why they have been selected and how UQ might address them moving forward (Context and Solutions)
3. Summarises the vision for the UQ Student Experience in 2026, as conceptualised by Roundtable Event participants (Future Vision).

### Challenges: What are the top priority areas for enhancing the UQ student experience, from the perspective of Roundtable Event participants?

The following chart shows the total number of nominations for each challenge that was selected as a Top 3 Challenge by individual participants (n=75).

Figure 1 Priority challenges in enhancing the UQ student experience – Roundtable participants – total nominations by participants

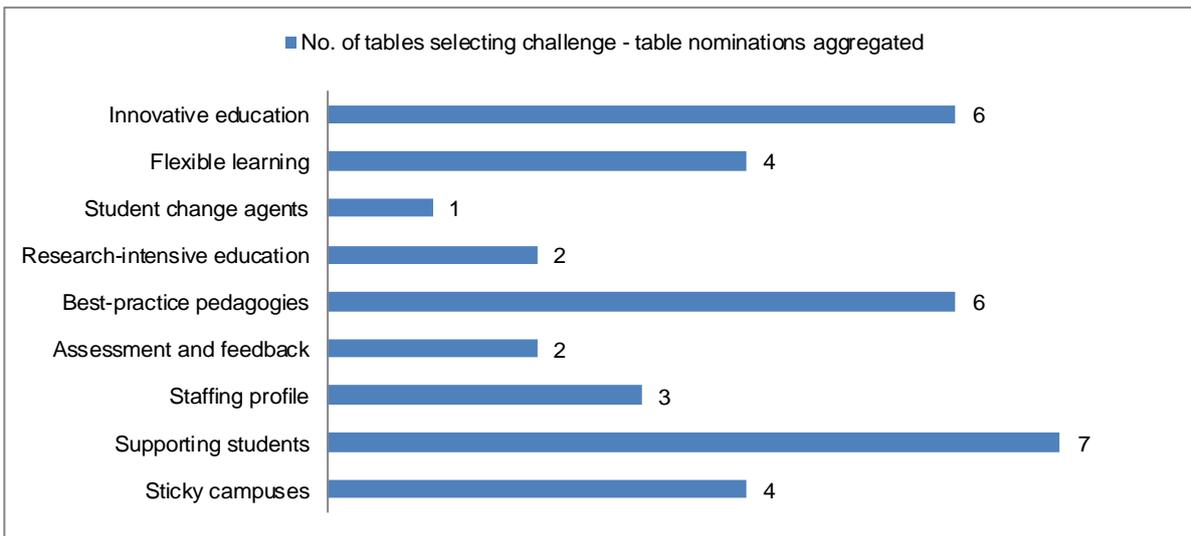


The three challenges that received the most support at the Roundtable Event were:

1. *Supporting Students* (35 nominations, 15%)
2. *Innovative Education* (32 nominations, 14%)
3. *Best Practice Pedagogies* (31 nominations, 14%)

When the nominations of individual participants are aggregated by table, the pattern of preferences remains consistent and the Top 3 Challenges remain the same. For the purposes of analysis, the total number of nominations for the Top 3 Challenges by table are 35. Only the top two challenges from a table were taken into consideration if the third choice received support from fewer than three respondents on that table, and four challenges from a table were included in cases where there were equal-third priorities that received nominations from three or more people.

Figure 2 Priority challenges for enhancing the UQ student experience – Roundtable participants – total nominations aggregated by table



Three challenges clearly received the most support as priorities, from both roundtables collectively and individual participants:

1. *Supporting Students* (7 nominations, 20%)
2. *Innovative Education* (6 nominations, 17%)
3. *Best Practice Pedagogies* (6 nominations, 17%)

The following section looks at these Top 3 Challenges in more depth, the reasons why they were considered the most important, as well as the suggestions on how these challenges can be met. Given the fluid nature of the discussions (e.g. discussions rarely focused on one single challenge) and the crossover issues contained within the challenges themselves, broader themes arising from the Roundtable Event are also documented.

## Context and Solutions: Why are the Top 3 Challenges important and how can they be addressed?

### 1. SUPPORTING STUDENTS: Supporting students through a connected community (Green Paper Challenge 8)

The 2014 University Experience Survey and Australian Graduate Survey highlighted the opportunity for UQ to do more to support its students, and Roundtable Event participants agree; supporting students through a connected community was the challenge that received the most attention, at both the table and individual participant level.

By fostering a connected community, some roundtable participants see that students, graduates and alumni will want to return to UQ and “to keep coming back”. Such communities would help develop a sense of lifelong belonging to and networks within UQ. There may be existing models of connected communities within UQ, with one table mentioning that a “global sense of community” already exists in Science.

Supporting students was linked to building connected communities, as articulated in the Green Paper, but also tied to the notion of *Sticky Campuses*, suggesting that connected communities are founded on a sense of physical place.

#### Connected communities should be built early

The start of the student journey was identified by some Roundtable Event participants as a barrier to building a connected community at UQ.

Where this issue was identified as important, discussions suggest:

- It is “difficult to transition from school” to university because students coming from a range of different schools and backgrounds
- Large first year classes and casual staff positions hinder the development of a solid and long-lasting student-academic staff relationship
- Large first year classes are a barrier to developing a group identity

*Very large first year classes mean that students only meet people later in the degree once they [are] put into small groups (Table 1, facilitator summary)*

- Courses with low contact hours are likely to find it harder to build a course community.

Roundtable Event participants identified some ways to help build connected communities from the start of the student journey:

- Building relationships between students and teaching staff, which is important for building a sense of belonging and community, “more so than any facilities’ development”
- Offering more continuing staff positions to support the development of long-term relationships between staff and students
- Building a sense of belonging and a connected community from the program level, so that students want to come to campus to mix with their peers and friends right from the start of their UQ experience.

### **Lifelong connections can be facilitated through an engaged alumni**

A key theme that emerged across Roundtable Event discussions was the importance of UQ developing educated and employable students. In relation to this challenge, it was felt that a connected community would offer lifelong guidance and learning to students in their future careers and enable a “smooth transition to workforce autonomy”.

Tables that raised this issue focused on the role of alumni, covering the following points:

- Alumni are a key aspect to developing a connected community, particularly in view of their direct links with industry, but also in developing students with vital skills for the workplace

*There needs to be more collaboration and more sharing of ideas between students, staff, industry and alumni (Table 6, facilitator summary)*

- Access to the UQ St Lucia campus is an obstacle for the outside community, including alumni and industry.

Suggestions for encouraging alumni participation in the UQ community included alumni guest lectures, annual alumni sporting events, alumni mentoring, asking alumni to donate time rather than money, and celebrating UQ alumni.

### **Sticky campuses should be attractive to students and alumni**

Many Roundtable Event participants see that a vibrant campus will attract students, and that building sticky campuses will help develop connected communities and a sense of belonging.

Ten out of the thirteen tables at the event had discussions about the UQ campuses - their physical buildings and space as well as the services and extracurricular activities offered. Suggestions on how to make UQ campuses more vibrant to both students and alumni include:

- Host more community events, music, sports, culture and festivals
- Attract more commercial businesses that are of higher quality, offering services year-long and employing more students
- Develop student accommodation on campus to help attract businesses, and include options for those students not based on campus to live there
- Partner with businesses to share spaces
- Develop the role of alumni (as discussed above)
- Offer more parking, cheaper parking and better transport links
- Provide more informal 24-hour student spaces, with power sockets and coffee
- Allocate spaces for student associations to host employer engagement meetings
- Engage with students as to why they do not currently access campus services.

*Build a one stop urban village and student hub with accommodation, food, shopping, and study areas (Table 7, facilitator summary)*

## 2. BEST PRACTICE PEDAGOGIES: The value of active learning in the digital age (Green Paper, Challenge 5)

Across the Roundtable Event discussions, there was widespread support for UQ to embrace this challenge. Participants support high impact, active learning, and integration with online learning to accommodate students' needs and incorporating best-practice pedagogies across every program.

*UQ needs to make sure that all students have the opportunity to experience active lectures and in-class activities, where students prepare in advance and are ready to actively engage with each other and their teachers to solve problems in class (Table 10, facilitator summary)*

During Roundtable Event discussions, there was considerable overlap between the challenge of *Best Practice Pedagogies* and strategies articulated in relation to three other challenges in the Green Paper:

1. *Flexible Learning* – in particular, the concept of flexible course delivery through online and other modes
2. *Staffing Profile* – building staff capabilities to deliver on the promise of best practice teaching
3. *Innovative Education* – as further detailed in the next section.

### **Best practice pedagogies vary by discipline and student cohort**

Roundtable Event discussions frequently indicated there is no one approach to best practice in terms of pedagogy. Participants noted:

- The need for teachers to have the flexibility to adapt their teaching approaches and methods to their own contexts and students
- The need to personalise UQ's student experience
- The need to provide students with the fundamentals of their discipline but also to deliver and develop cutting-edge and innovative approaches to learning
- The success of the flipped classroom model, where it had been adopted in UQ.

Discussion of the *Best Practice Pedagogies* challenge often covered issues relating to *Innovative Education*, with crossover issues including:

- The need to bring theory and practice closer together to make theory more accessible and relevant to today's students and employers
- The use of industry partners to make study more practical
- The development of collaborative and interdisciplinary approaches
- Teaching staff requiring an industry and research focus.

*Students [need to be] guided by robust pedagogies to help them develop as independent and creative thinkers with necessary professional and life skills, e.g. collaborative problem-solving to face future challenges and compete with other graduates for valuable jobs (Table 4, facilitator summary)*

These issues are discussed in more detail in the subsequent section on *Innovative Education*.

### **Flexible course delivery is not limited to learning online**

The need to deliver flexible courses was identified in some discussions to attract and better accommodate:

- Students who work part-time to pay for their degrees
- Students who wish to enrol in UQ's courses but who work full time
- Students who find accessing campus challenging (due to transport or distance).

Roundtable Event discussions often linked *Flexible Learning* strategies to the *Best Practice Pedagogies* challenge. Participants noted that online learning offers today's students' flexible study options, but active and/or face-to-face learning is an important part of the student experience - UQ needs to find the correct balance between offering active learning with teaching staff and their peers, and digital or online learning.

Participants suggested a number of ways to better accommodate students' needs relating to flexibility including:

- Adjusting semesters, an approach which would help UQ attract lifelong learners and "[pick] up a very large, expanding market"
- Better enabling part-time learning
- Offering intensive courses
- Considering alternative course formats, with links to work experience.

### **Best practice teaching relies on rewarding teaching excellence**

Roundtable Event participants broadly felt that if UQ is to deliver *Best Practice Pedagogies* then the University needs to support teaching staff to develop best practice pedagogical and technological skills, as well as attract - and appropriately reward to retain - the best teaching staff.

Discussions identified the following barriers to delivering *Best Practice Pedagogies*:

- Failing to reward teaching appropriately, and thereby failing to attract and retain the best staff. Staff moving due to unattractive salaries or casual positions was a "significant impediment in some areas of the university"
- Creating too many casual staff positions and large teaching classes at the detriment of the student experience, relationship development and learning
- Developing teaching staff who are often discipline experts, but not teaching experts.

*Expertise is recognised but teaching skills?...[We have] great academics but [we're] not making enough of them...We're recruiting the best researchers, but [not] best teachers (Table 8, facilitator summary)*

The following solutions to providing *Best Practice Pedagogies* included:

- Providing greater financial and other incentives to recognise and reward outstanding teachers, including rewards for lecturers who want to focus on research into their own teaching practice, rather than discipline.

*Ultimately, it is not about a prescriptive approach to best practice but rather an issue of enhancing and supporting teachers' motivation and effort, along with providing decent salaries and financial rewards for great teaching (Table 10, facilitator summary)*

- Professionalising higher education staff or providing greater incentives for academic staff to take up teaching and develop their teaching skills

*50% of energy should be focused at enhancing teaching – [UQ] should put emphasis on teaching (Table 11, facilitator summary)*

- Partnering and working with industry experts either to become guest lecturers or teaching staff with frontline or recent workplace experience. UQ teaching staff should be up-to-date with industry developments and approaches.

### **3. INNOVATIVE EDUCATION: An innovative education that prepares graduates for unpredictable futures (Green Paper, Challenge 1)**

Roundtable Event participants clearly agree that UQ needs to adapt to the demands of a knowledge society to work creatively and innovatively for its students. They typically saw an *Innovative Education* as important because the future is unknown and unpredictable.

Participants generally felt that UQ's current courses and programs need to adapt to the changing world, and a greater focus on critical, practical, transferable skills is needed.

*Static knowledge is not enough. Discipline specific knowledge is not enough. Graduates need skills to cope with change and the rapid [sic] new knowledge generation (Table 6, facilitator summary)*

#### **Innovation can occur through interdisciplinary learning**

Many tables noted that students need to learn interdisciplinary skills if they are to be well equipped to meet emerging global challenges that do not recognise disciplinary boundaries.

Participants widely accepted the idea that the application of different ways of thinking, of different disciplines, and of different theories to a range of problems leads to innovative and new solutions to tackling them. Interdisciplinary learning was related to the shared view that students need to learn critical thinking, problem-based learning, and problem-solving to meet these new challenges.

Key points in the discussions on the challenge of *Innovative Education*:

- Alumni have found the ability to move between disciplines invaluable. One UQ alumni described how he had resented having to accommodate Arts into his study at the time “but is seeing the value now, as it is bringing new changes in attitudes and work ability”
- It is important to develop emotional or social skills that equip students with the confidence and ability to understand and question context
- Research-intensive education encourages innovation and UQ could do more to capitalise on its research expertise

*The intellect is there but employers, industry, the University and students need to be thinking about how students can contribute to new thinking. Research methods can be used in everyday work, irrespective of the discipline or field. Employers want to see that graduates are critical thinkers and innovators. The skills developed through research are a really important part of this (Table 6, facilitator summary)*

Many students are attracted to UQ due to its research reputation but UQ needs to ensure all students have the opportunity to be connected to this research expertise and innovation. This could be achieved by:

- Offering more research placements
- Making research projects integral in student's learning (e.g. the undergraduate thesis).

### **Embedding workplace skills and knowledge application is important**

The Green Paper's discussion of WIL was also broadly supported by Roundtable Event participants, and the need to embed industry partners and work experience into student learning was frequently mentioned across table discussions.

*[UQ's] industry partnerships need to provide a context-specific education to [its] students, i.e. students need to understand what is required of them in the workplace (Table 10, facilitator summary)*

*The University needs to consider how graduates can impact on industry and bring more knowledge and competencies with them into the workplace. The University should be facilitating this by providing students with the opportunity to engage with industry earlier on in their program. Employers and industry want and need research for different reasons, but what is valued across the board are the competencies learnt through research (Table 6, facilitator summary)*

Participants gave the following examples of ways to embed these skills into the student experience:

- Learning from the Ideas Hub in EAIT, which encourages students to innovate through working with industry-based collaborators
- Applying innovation lab approaches like those at Queensland University of Technology and Melbourne University, which have entrepreneurs-in-residence to help inspire students and learn from real life experience
- Providing more workplace experiences and/or study experiences abroad to help prepare students for the increasingly globalised world, by providing insight into new ways of thinking and working, as well as equipping them to effectively manage work with other peoples, cultures, and countries.

## Future Vision: The UQ student experience in 2026

The overall findings from the Roundtable Event demonstrate general agreement from UQ's key stakeholders that UQ is facing the challenges outlined in the Green Paper. No notable objections were made to the Green Paper's proposals, and the table discussions covered many issues with relevance to all of the challenges.

When asked for their views on what they would like UQ to be known for in 2026, Roundtable Event participants mostly reinforced or summarised the key themes they outlined in relation to the challenges.

The following key themes emerged as key characteristics of UQ's future vision, as conceptualised by Roundtable Event participants:

- **A vibrant on-campus community**, with the UQ campuses as a "selling point" and online learning and remote contact as a complement to the physical space. The campus could be made more vibrant through:
  - hosting evening events;
  - leveraging student projects to initiate events and activities
  - establishing interdisciplinary "collectives" with all students, staff and alumni
  - career counselling services.
- **Fostering an active role for alumni**, who are seen as key to creating a lifelong UQ community
- **Building partnerships with industry and government**, including having industry representatives physically based on campus or delivering lectures

**Establishing a unique selling point** that provides UQ with a focus to differentiate the University from other institutions