Leadership Meeting results

KEY FINDINGS

• Embedding workplace skills and supporting knowledge application are viewed by UQ Staff (Senior Leadership) as priority areas for attention in the UQ Student Strategy.

• Entrepreneurship is an important quality for UQ students if they are to meet the needs of an ever-changing world, yet Senior Leadership view this as an area as yet under-explored at the University.

• Enhancing the UQ staffing profile is viewed as a key challenge to be addressed in the UQ Student Strategy. Senior Leadership see that students will directly benefit if the University invests in building, balancing, and better utilising the capabilities of its staff, particularly with respect to teaching practice.

• Student involvement in teaching is a suggested option to deliver extension experiences for students as well as free up staff time for innovation.

• Teaching excellence should be better rewarded and recognised at UQ, according to UQ Staff (Senior Leadership).

• Senior leaders perceive strategies to expedite program completion as important to students. They see that a year-round calendar may have some value in this regard, but there would likely be too many barriers to implementation such as resourcing and staffing capacity.

• Interdisciplinary learning is viewed as an opportunity for innovation in UQ teaching.

• There is some variation in the value attributed to the challenges in the Green Paper based on the organisation unit affiliation of respondents, with Senior Leadership from faculties more likely to prioritise Flexible Learning, and Senior Leadership from institutes more likely to value Research-Intensive Education and Staffing Profile.

• Flexible Learning is broadly accepted by Senior Leadership from UQ faculties in particular, with strategies to achieve this viewed as necessarily wide-ranging to meet the diverse needs of students and different disciplines. Schools caution against a uniform approach to addressing the Challenge of Flexible Learning.

This chapter sets out the key findings from 20 interviews and meetings that took place in October and November 2015 with leaders of UQ’s faculties and institutes. The findings reflect the voice of UQ Staff (Senior Leadership) on the Green Paper.

Data was obtained from interviews with the following respondents:

UQ faculties

• Executive Dean and Associate Dean (Academic), BEL
• Executive Dean and Associate Dean (Academic), EAIT
• Dean, Deputy Dean and Director, Graduate School
• Executive Dean and Associate Dean (Academic), HABS
• Executive Dean and Associate Dean (Academic), HASS
• Executive Dean and Associate Dean (Academic), M+BS
• Executive Dean and Associate Dean, Science.

UQ institutes
• Director, AIBN
• Acting Director, Diamantina Institute
• Director and Deputy Director, Global Change Institute
• Director, IMB
• Director, QBI
• Director, SMI

It also includes the outcomes of consultation discussions held at the following seven meetings:
• Academic Board
• BEL Board
• HABS Teaching and Learning Committee
• HASS Faculty Board
• Law School Staff Strategy Day
• Student Experience Committee
• University Teaching and Learning Committee

Interviews with UQ Staff (Senior Leadership) were broadly guided by questions aimed at determining and understanding the priority challenges as presented in the Green Paper and identifying related implementation and resourcing strategies.

Senior Leadership also provided general feedback on the Green Paper.

This chapter:
1. Identifies the challenges most commonly identified by UQ Staff (Senior Leadership) in interview discussions (Challenges)
2. Considers why they have been selected and how UQ might address them moving forward (Context and Solutions)
3. Summarises the general feedback of UQ Staff (Senior Leadership) on the Green Paper, excluding process issues (Future Vision).
Challenges: What are the priority areas for enhancing the UQ student experience, from the perspective of UQ Staff (Senior Leadership)?

During consultation interviews, UQ leaders were asked to nominate the challenges they consider to be key to the UQ Student Strategy from the nine outlined in the Green Paper. To facilitate comparability with results from the other consultation activities, the three most commonly identified challenges prioritised by respondents are discussed in this chapter.

The chart below shows the total numbers of nominations for each challenge selected as priority challenges across the 13 interviews with respondents.

![Figure 1](image-url)  

The three challenges that received the most attention across the interviews as a whole were:

1. *Flexible Learning* (8 nominations, 21%)
2. *Innovative Education* (7 nominations, 18%)
3. *Staffing Profile* (6 nominations, 16%)
There is some variation within the respondent group, based on faculty/institute affiliation

There are some differences between faculty and institute preferences, as demonstrated in the figure below. It is noted, however, that the total number of Senior Leadership is small, and differentiation within the group should be treated with caution.

Figure 2  Priority challenges for enhancing the UQ student experience – UQ Staff (Senior Leadership) – total nominations by institutes and faculties

Faculties prioritised Flexible Learning (7 nominations) and Innovative Education (5 nominations). These are closely related challenges and their focus on learning and education methods are in keeping with the expected objectives of UQ faculties and schools. Conversely, UQ Staff (Senior Leadership) affiliated with UQ institutes conveyed less support for these challenges during stakeholder interviews.

In terms of Flexible Learning, Senior Leadership from UQ faculties focused on their knowledge of students’ changing needs and individual circumstances; they consider this requires an organisational response from UQ in order to provide a range of course times and learning delivery options.

WIL Partnerships is viewed as integral to the challenge of Innovative Education. One member of the senior leadership group from a UQ faculty said that students are excited by employability, not research, and this is in contrast to the overall views of UQ Staff (Senior Leadership) in institutes where research is highly valued.

Senior leaders from institutes nominated Research-Intensive Education and Staffing Profile as top priority challenges. This is broadly consistent with the primary focus on research in UQ institutes. These senior leaders see crossover with the challenge of delivering a Research-Intensive Education and seeking to build industry partnership for WIL, particularly in view of the nature of the professions to which their students aspire. Some institutes offer research scholarships and other research opportunities, while others simply note that early exposure to the research environment is important.

Exposing students to research is important and this is an area where the Institutes can assist. [Our institute] already offers around 30-40 summer and winter scholarships. The demand often exceeds availability (UQ institute, facilitator summary of interview)
Institutes appear to be more attentive to Staffing Profile than UQ faculties because they have had to make special efforts to ensure their research personnel are also engaged in teaching, including writing teaching time into employment contracts, supporting Teaching and Learning Coordinator roles, and facilitating opportunities for their RHD students to teach and tutor. Senior Leadership from institutes stress that faculty buy-in is essential to ensure institute personnel are able to teach into UQ courses.

Some institutes also feel that they have world-class researchers with practical, real-life and industry experience that are not being sufficiently utilised by schools, noting that both institutes and schools could do more to capitalise on this opportunity. UQ Staff (Senior Leadership) suggest the University should optimise the experience and insight of these researchers and facilitate teaching in schools by institute personnel.

The following section looks in more depth at the challenges most mentioned by UQ Staff (Senior Leadership) as a whole. It explores the reasons why they were considered the most important as well as suggestions on how they would be implemented and the requisite resources.

The nature of the Senior Leadership interviews and meetings mean that there are crossover issues, and as a result this section also attends to additional challenges from the Green Paper where applicable.
Context and Solutions: Why are the key challenges important and how can they be addressed?

1. FLEXIBLE LEARNING: Diverse student population with new priorities and expectations (Green Paper Challenge 2)

Discussions with UQ Staff (Senior Leadership) often focused on delivering flexible approaches to learning and study to meet the changing needs of students.

Flexible learning approaches are required and strategies to achieve this are wide-ranging

UQ Staff (Senior Leadership) mostly agree that flexible teaching and programs are required to accommodate the diverse needs of students. They offered broad feedback about how and why flexible learning options could be integrated into UQ’s teaching practice in order to enhance the UQ student experience:

- Increase flexible study to accommodate part-time students who work to pay for their courses
  
  The University has never focused on attracting a part-time working cohort, but the reality is students have to work to support themselves. The University’s idea of a full-time student isn’t reality. Students want flexibility and flexibility has to be how the end user sees it... (UQ faculty, facilitator summary of interview)

- Introduce flexibility at the program level
  
  UQ is very set in its ways in terms of program delivery. Students want more flexibility in terms of when they can undertake a course, which isn’t just about the academic calendar, as well as the mode of delivery. UQ needs to offer and deliver programs in ways that give students more flexibility to engage (UQ faculty, facilitator summary of interview)

- Embrace online learning as a key mode of delivery in courses as well as giving credit for fulfilling online course components.
  
  The demand to give credit for MOOCs will grow, particularly at the postgraduate level with demands for RPL (UQ faculty, facilitator summary of interview)

With regard to multi-mode learning, UQ Staff (Senior Leadership) consider that digital resources can improve student satisfaction and learning. Senior leaders provided feedback that the initial investment in developing online resources is worthwhile because they can be re-used, which frees up staff time that would otherwise be required for preparation to instead deliver more face-to-face teaching.

However, some senior leaders stress that it is important for UQ to find an appropriate balance between maintaining academic engagement through face-to-face lectures, and online learning. Providing flexible online options may facilitate student disengagement from lectures and the campus: “There needs to be a balanced approach” (Senior Leadership meeting, facilitator summary of interview).

One respondent felt that giving students more flexibility over their learning experience was at odds with strategies to develop a Sticky Campus, also suggesting that robust mechanisms would need to be in place to “ensure pathways have flexibility within structured and academically determined boundaries” and,
therefore, avoid any potential damage to UQ’s reputation from students’ “poor” choices (UQ faculty, facilitator summary of interview).

Student entry practices may need updating

In the context of an increasingly diverse student population, UQ Staff (Senior Leadership) consider that student entry practices may need to be reviewed. Feedback on student entry practices has some crossover with the Green Paper strategy relating to RPL, but also extends into other areas not explored in the Green Paper.

Their summary comments include:

- **Consider where UQ students are coming from and expand entry pathways.** The OP cohort is declining and UQ has few entry pathways outside of QTAC. More entry pathways will increase student diversity

- **Review program prerequisites.** A major difference between UQ and other universities is UQ’s prerequisite requirements. UQ’s prerequisites should be in line with other Go8 universities, and possibly all other universities. UQ should systematically review all programs to identify where it is out of step with the rest of the country

- **Accommodate students who have existing skillsets and experience.** This could be achieved by assessing students’ abilities on recruitment and using these results to develop a personalised learning pathway. Personalisation could include offering a selection of units and modules from which students can choose. Conversely, sometimes students enter a program with limited or no formal training, and a bridging online course could be beneficial to help them quickly get up to speed.

Strategies to accelerate program completion are seen as being important to students

Some UQ Staff (Senior Leadership) see a need to review course duration in order to accelerate program completion. They rationalise this on the basis that students want to complete their studies early for personal and financial reasons.

Some students want flexibility and acceleration so they can complete their studies earlier, but other students what enrichment, enhancement and an innovative edge to what they are doing. Fast-tracking is not always the answer (Senior Leadership meeting, facilitator summary of meeting discussion)

In some cases, other universities may be offering comparable degrees that can be completed in a shorter time. For example, senior leaders provided feedback that UQ’s medicine degree is currently a seven-year program while there other institutions offer six-year programs.

People want to get through degrees as fast as they can, so perhaps dual degrees are a thing of the past and vertical degrees are the future (Senior Leadership meeting, facilitator summary of meeting discussion)

A year-round calendar may have value but could be difficult to implement

Consistent with the Year-Round Calendar Strategy in the Green Paper, some Senior Leadership members agree with a move to trimesters. Others suggest abandoning the semester system altogether and delivering course units and modules throughout the year - units and modules could be offered at different
times in the year, use face-to-face and online methods, and where appropriate, be delivered intensively. It is seen that this strategy will also help students who fail a year to use their time more effectively.

There is, however, some concern that a move away from the existing semester system may:

- Prove difficult to resource (e.g. “it’s difficult to get people to teach during summer semester”)
- Be a burden for teaching personnel (e.g. “draining for staff”)
- Undermine research capacity (e.g. make it difficult for staff to maintain their research commitments and “keep pace with other world leaders”)
- Undermine UQ’s reputation (e.g. “it could damage liberal education at UQ, the academic foundation of any world-leading university”).

There is no one-size-fits-all approach to Flexible Learning

UQ Staff (Senior Leadership) caution against a one-size-fits-all approach to Flexible Learning, expressing this advice in two main ways - in relation to the student experience, and with regard to teaching practice:

- UQ should seek to personalise the student experience so as to accommodate the range of students’ needs

  The University’s offerings need to be flexible so students can opt in and out based on individual circumstances. For example, a student might do one course on campus and then opt to do the next course online so that they have more flexibility to work. The approach should be to offer students a menu of course times and delivery options to select from, rather than a one size fits all model
  (UQ faculty, facilitator summary of interview)

- A uniform approach to teaching or a blanket application of the trimester system is not appropriate because different schools and programs require different approaches.

  What might work in some programs, won’t necessarily work in all programs. Offering a summer semester to accelerate completion may be a suitable approach for niche programs, however it may not be appropriate for the undergraduate level. A more intensive model may suit postgraduates, and their employers, more
  (UQ faculty, facilitator summary of interview)

  What works in one discipline will not necessarily work in every discipline or for every topic, such as MOOCs or flipped classrooms (UQ faculty, facilitator summary of interview)

2. INNOVATIVE EDUCATION: An innovative education that prepares graduates for unpredictable futures (Green Paper Challenge 1)

Discussions about Innovative Education mainly focused on requisite solutions.

However, there was some discussion about the need to ensure that new teaching approaches are appropriately applied within faculties and programs, and UQ Staff (Senior Leadership) warn that seeking to apply curriculum enrichment across all programs will be too challenging and resource intensive.
There is a widely held concern that students are not attending class due to work commitments, however, the world is changing. Rather than looking at what we can do to put students back to where they were, we need to focus on the future and the best approach to engage students (Senior Leadership meeting, facilitator summary of meeting).

**Embedding workplace skills and knowledge application is a high priority**

There was considerable discussion on the need for UQ to help students develop their employability and transferable skills. This discussion also intersected with issues raised in relation to Challenge 4 of the Green Paper: *Research-Intensive Education*.

The following points were made during discussions on this topic:

- *Students increasingly care about future employability*. Some parts of UQ have been adapting to this demand by engaging with students about their future careers early in their programs, and investing in staff to support this engagement. WIL is a useful tool to enhance student employability, and could be incorporated throughout UQ’s programs. Postgraduate courses could be expanded by 6-12 months to enable students to be embedded in a work environment and have a quality research experience.

- *Employability should be a universal focus across the University*. Best practice in other universities in relation to a focus on employability, such as in the United Kingdom, has transformed their university rankings.

- Research experience is beneficial to students, but the purpose should be to help students develop transferable skills, not the research outcomes. UQ is rightly renowned for its research but it needs to be fully utilised within the student experience so that students can appreciate why and benefit from funds used in this area.

  *There should be more optional research opportunities for students and the University needs to consider how it can use research to enhance employability* (Senior Leadership meeting, facilitator summary of meeting).

- *UQ’s institutes can assist in offering students research experience*. This could be through guest lectures or teaching or undergraduates could be embedded within Institutes to gain research experience.

- *Industry wants students equipped with core competencies, not degrees per se*. UQ needs to adapt to this reality. A part of this will be changing assessment so that it recognises and rewards these competencies and transferable skills.

  *UQ needs to consider how it’s providing a general education for students so they can look at the job market more broadly and see what suits them* (Senior Leadership meeting, facilitator summary of meeting).

One respondent said that Inter-professional Education (IPE) is critical, but saw it would be a “struggle” to find a common course across all programs (HABS, facilitator summary of interview). Others feel that there is a tension between developing students equipped with specific skills for their future profession, whilst also fostering more generalist transferable workplace skillsets.
• Industry is looking for a “discriminator” and beyond grades. They are looking for employees who have workplace experience and who they know will fit in with the organisational culture.

• Finding student placements can be challenging. UQ schools and institutes use work placements in their courses and programs to various degrees. It can be difficult to find sufficient numbers of placements for students, particularly for larger programs. Where there is a lack of local placements for students, alternative experiences need to be explored, including overseas placement. One respondent suggested UQ could negotiate exclusive partnership rights with employers.

Interdisciplinary learning represents an opportunity for innovation

UQ Staff (Senior Leadership) engaged in significant discussion about interdisciplinary learning; they broadly support its use as a means to inspire innovation and provide students with a broader view of the world and transferable skills.

Some respondents discussed their current multidisciplinary approaches and they are keen to give students the opportunity to experience different disciplines within their programs.

The concept of using Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts and Mathematics (STEAM) to provide students with interdisciplinary experience, for example into Arts, would give students a broader view of the world. UQ isn’t as flexible with joint degrees as most places and breadth into other areas isn’t always encouraged or promoted (UQ institute, facilitator summary of interview).

If the Faculty was to go down the path of innovation, design and creativity, then partnering with fine arts could also be valuable as to be a very successful engineer you also need to be exceptionally creative (UQ institute, facilitator summary of interview).

In particular, the Global Change Institute expressed an interest in establishing a flagship interdisciplinary placement program: the Global Change Fellowship Program. The Institute notes that related considerations include whether involvement in the fellowship program would be voluntary or for credit and how the use of MOOCs for credit throughout their program could build students’ interdisciplinary knowledge.

Entrepreneurship skills are important but not sufficiently developed

Some senior leaders commented on the importance of entrepreneurship in UQ students, noting there is a need to create independent thinkers with the confidence to follow their own ideas.

There is a feeling that UQ has some work to do to progress its support for entrepreneurship, in order to ensure it is on par with other institutions and its approach holistically embraces this aspect of student development.

Senior leaders suggest that UQ look at entrepreneurship models in the United States and the United Kingdom for inspiration (e.g. Stanford, Harvard and Cambridge).
Findings from the 2015 Staff Engagement Survey (an annual survey of UQ staff views) suggest there is potential for more UQ staff to further develop their contribution to the teaching effort. UQ Staff (Senior Leadership) largely agree with this sentiment, frequently making mention of UQ’s staffing profile as a challenge for the University.

**Building, balancing and better utilising staff capabilities is an opportunity for UQ**

Several respondents suggested that UQ review the University’s staffing profile and consider the balance of teaching, academic and research staff, with caveats including:

- Not all staff want to teach and making them teach would not be beneficial for UQ or the students

*The current staffing profile isn’t right, but just adding more Teaching Focused staff isn’t the answer. It’s also unrealistic to think all staff should teach, as not all staff have experience in this area or the desire to follow a teaching career path. A generic model for all staff won’t work (UQ faculty, facilitator summary of interview)*

- If staff want to teach, they should be supported to teach

*Researchers have to be motivated to teach; it’s not something they can be forced to do. Previously there was some motivation through ResTeach, but this no longer exists. If a researcher wants to engage with students and wants to teach than they should be supported, however there are sufficient academics available to teach the current courses (UQ institute, facilitator summary of interview)*

- UQ should avoid a one-size fits all approach to teaching and the staffing profile.

There were a range of other suggestions for building new staffing capabilities and better utilising the existing capabilities of UQ personnel, including the following feedback:

- UQ should introduce new teaching roles, such as a Professional Teaching Fellows (similar to a Senior Tutor) where the focus is solely on teaching, not scholarship and writing grants and papers. Teaching-Focused staff have an expectation around scholarship, so there would need to be a clear distinction between Teaching-Focused and Fellowship roles so that staff are able to prioritise their time and activities accordingly.

- More educational designers would be needed if the University moved to a more flexible teaching model.

**Student involvement in teaching enhances UQ staff capabilities**

Some UQ Staff (Senior Leadership) see an opportunity to better utilise UQ students in teaching as a way to extend and enhance staff capabilities in this area. Their feedback is also broadly relevant to the Green Paper’s Staff-Student Links Strategy, which aims to position UQ students as change agents by creating opportunities for students to collaborate with staff in learning, leadership and outreach (Green Paper Challenge 3). Relevant feedback from Senior Leadership includes:

- Some RHD students see teaching as a career opportunity and UQ should support students and adapt UQ teaching to meet this aspiration. Although the attitude that teaching is a distraction from research and writing papers still persist in some areas, more and more students want to teach
PhD students could be given extended contracts to enable them to support a course. Their energy and dynamism would be good for the teaching staff and it would be advantageous to students, with teaching experience likely to be valued by employers.

Teaching excellence should be better rewarded and recognised at UQ

It was frequently suggested by senior leaders that if more UQ staff are to embrace teaching or if UQ is to attract more teaching staff then the University will need to more appropriately reward and recognise excellent teaching. Some UQ Staff (Senior Leadership) indicated that UQ’s current reward and recognition approach does not achieve this, and it was suggested that:

- UQ’s reward structure does not support new teaching approaches (e.g. active learning) as rewards arise from research thereby encouraging staff to focus on research

- UQ does not currently assess and benchmark excellent teaching and there is little visibility of teaching excellence

The comments from senior leaders are consistent with the Green Paper Strategy for Staff Recognition, and there was also some limited discussion that extended into the strategy of Staff Development. UQ Staff (Senior Leadership) suggested UQ might enable a team-based approach to teaching where teaching staff are supported by other staff, such as teaching assistants and specialist tutors. This could include using a teaching test when recruiting all staff so that more staff have teaching skills to support their colleagues.
Future Vision: General comments on the Green Paper

UQ Staff (Senior Leadership) expressed broad support for the Green Paper, with comments such as “nothing major was missing” and “the student experience is at the heart of everything UQ does”. They offered a range of suggestions with regard to advancing the UQ Student Strategy in a meaningful way, as follows:

**UQ should be clear on the purpose of the UQ Student Strategy**

- UQ needs to be clear on what it is seeking to achieve. The Green Paper appears to be a strategic vision that will require large structural changes but it is not clear if the University wants to just “tweak things” or radically rethink its offer
- UQ should avoid chasing student satisfaction ratings at the expense of what is best for students
- UQ needs to think about what is its signature and how it fits in the academic and higher education space in Australia and internationally.

**UQ needs to carefully approach implementation of the UQ Student Strategy**

- The challenge will now be deciding on what path UQ follows and invests in as there is “no silver bullet” and all nine challenges are interrelated
- Implementation of solutions will be a long journey and how it is resourced will need to be carefully considered

*The Green Paper is a beautiful document, however it proposes a fundamental change in how the University does things. Ideologically it is great but the reality of implementation will be difficult and buy-in from academics might be challenging. Resourcing will be critical.*

(UQ institute, facilitator summary of interview)

- There is some concern over the capacity of the Green Paper to accommodate school and institute differences, with feedback to suggest that it reflects a top-down perspective which overlooks program nuances and expertise.

**The UQ Student Strategy must focus on the holistic needs of students**

- UQ should consider how it demonstrates its interest, concern and support for students having to balance work and study, and their life outside UQ
- Building a sticky campus and a connected community is important
- The campus needs to provide more spaces for students to come together, and discuss study or other issues, throughout the course of the day and evening
- There are many lonely students at UQ and UQ needs to consider the way staff interact with students, personally and professionally, to ensure they feel valued
• UQ should engage with students and ask them what they want from their campus and community

• There are international examples where universities have successfully developed sticky campuses and connected communities such as Harvard

• The tutorial or college system helps build networks and could be applied more broadly across UQ.

UQ staff are integral to the success of the UQ Student Strategy

• Buy-in from staff will be very important in the successful implementation of the Student Strategy. To help gain this support, it was suggested that Challenges 1-6 could be framed around curriculum to help engage academics in the process

The scale of the Student Strategy is substantial and innovative. UQ should be prepared to adapt to new changes, and put the student experience at the forefront of the University’s response. Resourcing will be critical during the implementation stage. The University needs to think about sustainability of the funding model. While the Green Paper is at a relatively early stage, it will be important to look at costings soon to get a sense of what is feasible and what the University can achieve. It’s important to balance competing forces and tensions. For example, there is a tension between flexibility and sticky campuses

(Senior Leadership meeting, facilitator summary of meeting)

Staffing is seen to be linked to all of the challenges set out in the Green Paper.