

Vice-Chancellor and President's review

2021 was a pivotal year for the University. Our community showed remarkable resilience in the face of disruption, while at the same time developing a new Strategic Plan that sets out how UQ will deliver for the public good in the pandemic recovery phase.

For the second consecutive year, the COVID-19 pandemic cast a shadow over the operations of the University. While Queensland remained largely virus-free for most of the year because of the successful application of a clear public health approach, the uncertainty created by restrictions and border closures meant that it was a challenging year for many people in our community.

However, despite these disruptions, our staff and students persevered – as we delivered on our commitment to serving the public good through excellence in education, research and engagement with our communities and partners.

As a measure of our overall impact in 2021, UQ continued to perform strongly across most global rankings of universities. In the Aggregate Ranking of Top Universities (which combines the results of several leading ranking systems), UQ ranked 42nd in the world, and second in Australia.

Learning and student experience

In spite of the ongoing challenges created by the pandemic, we enrolled a record number of students this year – 56,278 students in total across all programs. This is 1.7 per cent higher than the pre-pandemic 2019 enrolments.

A significant factor underpinning this stronger than expected enrolment figure was the successful shift to online learning.

With international borders closed until the very end of the year, almost one-third of UQ coursework students progressed with their studies purely online, including around 12,000 international students who studied with us from offshore.

Graduations were postponed in July, which meant that we held a record 27 graduation ceremonies in December 2021.

In total, 6,890 students graduated from the University over a period of just 10 days.

Importantly, our graduates are leaving UQ with the knowledge and skills they need to make a meaningful contribution to the workplace, and to society.

According to the 2021 Graduate Outcomes Survey, UQ is the leading university in Queensland for undergraduate outcomes when it comes to the employment rates of our alumni 3 years after they graduate.

The excellence of our teaching was once again recognised at the 2020 Australian Awards for University Teaching (AAUT) in February. Four UQ academics received AAUT awards, with Associate Professor Jack Wang, from the School of Chemistry and Molecular Biosciences, being named Australian University Teacher of the Year.

Research and innovation

As one of Australia's leading research-intensive universities, UQ is committed to the generation of new knowledge through excellence in discovery science and fundamental research, as well as translating our research into progressive ideas, better services, and new products for the benefit of society.

This year, the University received an additional one-off contribution of \$99.5 million to sustain our research, as part of the Federal Government's Research Support Program. Initially announced in the October 2020 Federal Budget, the extra funding was allocated during the year to fund strategic research projects and research infrastructure, and to support the recruitment and retention of early- and mid-career researchers.

The University continued to support the research pipeline with the approval of 967 new research projects throughout the year.

Over the course of 2021, some 3,842 active research projects were underway across UQ, with many seeking solutions to pressing challenges such as climate change, food and water security, biodiversity conservation, and the prevention and treatment of disease.

Our research is continuing to have a global impact, with 40 UQ researchers being included on the 2021 Clarivate Analytics Highly Cited Researchers list across 44 fields of research – up from 34 on the 2020 list.

Among the many highlights of this year, the University received funding support in April to establish a new R&D facility that is focused on developing high-purity mRNA vaccines and cancer therapies.

In July, we were awarded funding by the Australian Research Council (ARC) to establish a new Industrial Transformation Training Centre in Bioplastics and Biocomposites.

Then, in November, we launched the ARC Research Hub for Sustainable Crop Protection, which is committed to boosting agricultural productivity through the development of innovative products that help fight pests and prevent disease in crops.

Also in November, we received funding under the Strategic University Reform Fund to establish the Agri-Food Innovation Alliance, with the aim of collaborating with local industry to bring interesting new food products to market.

Enriching our communities

Beyond the direct impact of our education and research programs, UQ is committed to enriching communities by spreading understanding, raising awareness, disseminating culture, building capacity and connecting people.

In 2021, we launched a number of new plans, programs and activities that exemplify our approach to acting responsibly and sustainably, at the same time as enriching the communities in which we're embedded – both here in Queensland, and around the world.

The University's leadership team participated in a Regional Roadshow in the second half of the year, where we consulted with community leaders on opportunities to broaden UQ's impact in regional Queensland. The Roadshow visited Toowoomba, the Gold Coast, the Wide Bay region and the Sunshine Coast in late 2021 – and we are planning to visit communities in Far North Queensland in 2022.

We also launched two new Regional Medical Pathway programs for training doctors in the Wide Bay/Central Queensland and Darling Downs/South West Queensland, in an effort to improve access to health care in regional communities by developing a home-grown medical workforce.

We continued the important work of implementing our Reconciliation Action Plan (RAP). In May, we launched the UQ RAP Network, which provides opportunities for staff and students to participate in cultural learning activities and engage in reconciliation initiatives.

And in June, we launched our new Global Development Impact Plan, which aims to position UQ as the go-to Australian institution for international development expertise and impact. This Plan focuses on marshalling the breadth of expertise that exists within UQ to help build the capacity of people to contribute to the sustainable development of their own local communities and nations.

Building for the future

We celebrated the completion of a new landmark at our St Lucia campus in the second half of 2021, with the opening of the 11-storey Andrew N. Liveris Building.

We also officially named the new 16-storey student residences building at St Lucia after Aboriginal singer/songwriter and UQ alumnus Kev Carmody. The very first students are moving into Kev Carmody House for the start of the 2022 academic year.

A new Strategic Plan

The development of the University's new 4-year Strategic Plan was a major priority throughout the year.

Staff responded enthusiastically to our call for input to the Plan by contributing their ideas and insights to the online 'Strategy Jam' conducted over 3 weeks in May and June. We had over 8,000 unique visits to the Strategy Jam website and 1,000 separate contributions from staff.

UQ's new *Strategic Plan 2022–2025* was launched in December, setting out the University's strategic priorities for the post-pandemic era. The Plan also reframes the University's values – by identifying the values of truth, creativity, excellence, integrity, courage, respect and inclusivity as our core values.

At a broader level, this new Strategic Plan re-emphasises UQ's position not only as The University of Queensland but also as the University for Queensland. In this respect, the Plan includes a commitment to establishing a new endowment fund to support talented young Queenslanders to pursue their passion at UQ, regardless of their background or financial circumstances. This is the basis of our new 'Queensland Commitment'.

Thank you

In summary, despite the many disruptions we faced this year, the University continued to create and share knowledge in service to society – and make a meaningful contribution to communities everywhere.

The progress we made this year was due to the hard work, agility and perseverance of our staff and students. I would like to sincerely thank each and every one of them for their contribution to the UQ community in 2021.

I would also like to acknowledge the senior executive team and members of the University Senate – including our Chancellor, Peter N Varghese AO – for their strategic advice and support, as well as the passion they all have for broadening the impact of our University.

Professor Deborah Terry AO
Vice-Chancellor and President