1. Overview

At the very core of our institutional promises sits the undeniable notion of scholarship. Our commitment to engage in scholarship, and as a community, to embrace the pursuit of truth by methodically identifying and answering questions and resolving contradictions, is the thread that runs through USQ's strategy. Within that strategy:-

We promise to partner with learners in the pursuit of their study objectives regardless of their background, location or stage in life.

and

We promise to enable USQ to fulfil its potential by ensuring it is a robust, productive and innovative enterprise.

Both of these promises point to treating learning and teaching as a scholarly activity, and as we do with other forms of scholarship, investing in its development, continued growth and improvement.

With these commitments, an Educational Experience Plan is intended to bridge and align our USQ Strategic Plan 2013-2015 with effective investment and practice. In our Strategic Plan we promise to partner with learners in the pursuit of their study objectives regardless of their background, location or stage of life. We turn to the notion of Personalised Learning to do so and assert that over 2013-2015 we will pursue our 2022 Vision for Personalised Learning through a) accessibility and responsiveness, b) support for student success, and c) outcomes, impacts, and ongoing engagement.

To make these promises actionable, we need to translate them and articulate them in a document supporting tactics. This Educational Experience Plan is such a document and is part of an iterative process. The development of the Educational Experience Plan is not a ‘one-time’ activity or an activity done in isolation from the USQ annual planning process. The Educational Experience Plan identifies focused initiatives and takes advantage of the University’s annual planning and investment processes to ensure co-ordination of implementation and development activity across Divisions.

Our educational experience will be characterised by open access to information with a supported personalised approach to learning and success. We will harness emerging technologies to enable collaborative teaching and individualised learning that is promoted and articulated in practice and planning through our:

- commitment to accessibility
- commitment to flexibility
- commitment to openness
- commitment to personalised service.

Along these lines USQ must first pursue its calling by supporting the scholarship of learning and teaching. Without doing so, our promise of flexible learning is little more than an utterance that will lead to technological sleight of hand in an attempt to compensate for the value only engaged scholarly teachers can provide. Secondly, without such a calling, an engaged, robust,
productive, and innovative enterprise is nothing more than a home for administrators and bureaucrats, well-meaning and efficient, but lacking educative purpose. USQ has enjoyed a history as a teaching university. By many accounts, the teaching mission is still paramount, and perhaps the dominant identity within the University. That being said, there is a widely held perception that teaching leadership has slipped away from USQ, particularly in distance and online learning. Meanwhile, USQ has invested in developing capacity and identifying ‘focused research’, which is a critical part of the University's strategic plan. The investment has resulted in structures that focus effort in Institutes and Centres bringing together scholars in ways that support:

- rationalisation of limited resources
- professional development, mentorship, and training to support development of human capacity
- incentivising productive and aligned behaviours
- community building based on collegial and peer identity.

Like the focused research strategy, which relies on the scholarship of original discovery, USQ has also identified a strategic focus for leadership in teaching, part of which we have referred to as ‘personalised learning’. To this date, an operational consensus within the USQ community about the nature of personalised learning has not been achieved. Before the University is in a position to make financial investments beyond those already made, we need to make the intellectual investment of understanding and planning for a redefined notion of learning and teaching leadership that includes the notion of personalisation.

Although there are both similarities and differences between USQ’s focused research agenda and personalised learning agenda, there is much to be learned from the way we are building research capacity from the ground up. It is essential that like focused research, USQ invests in teaching scholarship. This plan for learning and teaching scholarship represents an approach that parallels our institutional commitment to the scholarship of discovery (focused research), promoting investment, incentives, and development through a university-wide effort.

2. USQ’s Situation

The University of Southern Queensland is a comprehensive university with a long and proud legacy of creativity and innovation in teaching practice and educational programming. For decades USQ’s learning and teaching mission was clear and distinctive in the market. Distance Education, including online learning was considered a rather non-traditional niche activity on a sector-wide level, but was USQ’s focus, and with excellent practice, earned USQ a global leadership position.

During the past five to eight years, many colleges, universities, and companies have adopted distance, hybrid, blended, and online learning as part of their portfolio of offerings. Education services companies like Open Universities Australia, Pearson, Academic Professionals, and 2U have reduced barriers and accelerated program capacity in traditional universities. Meanwhile, dozens of major foundations such as Gates, Lumina, Carnegie, Sloan, Mozilla and Hewlett have launched hundreds of projects that are designed to intentionally disrupt traditional university structures, educational models, and relationships to better meet the changing educational needs of student populations and societies more broadly. Educational entrepreneurs such as Michael Saylor, David Wiley, Salman Khan, Philipp Schmidt, Wayne Mackintosh, Peter Smith, Daphne Koller and Andrew Ng, have fundamentally changed the trajectory of non-traditional education and accelerated its progress to the point where many very traditional universities have become flag-bearers, catalysts, and participants in a wide range of educational innovation.

It is in this environment, that the USQ community finds itself. We look to our left and right and no longer see familiar faces refining traditional models, but instead we see elite universities exploring ‘our space’, former non-players taking leadership that once was ours, and a multi-billion dollar venture capital industry investing in disruption - disruption of our learning and

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1 It merits noting that USQ was leading in this area when it launched NextEd and InDelta during the early 2000s. There may be something (good and bad) to learn from their execution and the impetus and cultural bias to lead in this area.
teaching model. We may also be experiencing an education policy regime in Australia that will court such disruption and promote its own – intentionally and unintentionally.

3. The Plan

The Plan that follows is designed to build organisational capacity by providing an architecture that promotes a culture of creativity and funnels resources to promising ideas that need development and merit investment. The Plan includes a platform for collaboration that starts with shared governance and a community ethic. The initiatives, both proposed and underway, provide clear connections between strategy, culture, professional development, support and improvement. The Plan builds on all of the good work being done at USQ, and relies on participation from every corner of our professional community. The success of this Plan is predicated on the assumption that our distinct qualities include our willingness to improve fundamental competencies in teaching, reduce barriers and costs to nurture unpopular but valuable ideas, transition creativity into innovation, and to be intellectually honest with ourselves while collaboratively embracing the big ideas that mean something. In very many ways, this Plan is calling on USQ to continue and accelerate building on its commitment to teaching excellence.

But, first things first, this Plan is now an idea, requiring consultation, refinement, and engagement. The specifics are subject to debate and modification; and while the Academic Services Division is charged with facilitating its creation, its objectives, participation and leadership must be found throughout the University. The USQ Strategic Plan touches on the notions of learning and teaching scholarship and broader notions of educational experience. Taken together, these topics are impacted by all divisions of the University. Although operationally the most critically connected divisions are the Academic Division, Academic Services and Students & Communities, it is difficult imagining a university, unlike a polytechnic or training centre, that does not promote the growth of knowledge through the scholarship of learning and teaching, teaching practice, integration, and original discovery.

This Plan will first introduce a number of strategic ideas whose adoption would potentially change the trajectory of USQ:

- Learning and teaching at USQ is characterised by flexibility and accessibility, enhancing quality and success.
- All learning will bridge theoretical knowledge with practice.
- All USQ graduates will demonstrate behaviours associated with an educated individual.

Although none of these are truly outside of USQ’s current consideration or alien to current practice, their execution will require strategic vision and operational commitment to sustain them. Following the broad strategic ideas there is a short section on USQ commitments that will help guide us as we identify initiatives and activities aligned with a learning and teaching strategy and brief descriptions of core organisational capacity that will need to be developed to support strategy execution. Nested within the broad strategic ideas are initiatives that are necessary and practical, designed to support teaching scholarship and enable practice, each of which would include a number of operational plans in practice. Examples of such initiatives are presented in Section 8.

SCOPE AND OBJECTIVES OF THE EDUCATIONAL EXPERIENCE PLAN

4. Scope

The Educational Experience strategy will include all University activities, initiatives, and plans that impact the academic educational experience of USQ students.
5. Objectives

This document is intended as a starting point to inspire discussion about learning and teaching at USQ. The objective of the process is to create an Educational Experience strategy whose documentation is intended to:

- Guide the continuous improvement of outcomes for students through excellence in learning, teaching, curriculum and support.
- Create a collectively understood and embraced set of values and conceptual touchstones that contribute to the University’s reputation and financial health by continuously enhancing the quality of a learning and teaching.
- Interpret what it means at USQ to partner with students in the pursuit of their study objectives regardless of their background, location or stage in life.
- Begin, collaboratively to scope learning and teaching initiatives that will assist USQ to move forward as one university.
- List a number of operational activities, projects, and efforts to both illustrate how the strategy looks in operation and to provide some transparency in our thinking and investments.

DETAIL - EDUCATIONAL EXPERIENCE PLAN

6. Principal Strategic Elements of the Educational Experience Plan

6.1 Learning and teaching at USQ is characterised by flexibility and accessibility, enhancing quality and success

In short, all courses are designed to optimise learning opportunities through flexibility and personalisation enabled by online communication, digital media, and appropriate use of technology. Delivery will be technology enhanced, mobile, personal, and media enabled. On a fundamental level, USQ ought to be positioned as a blended education and online-first university in which its students, teachers and other members of its community enjoy all of the advantages of an online university and the advantages of having significant physical campuses and other physical assets. Physical teaching space and in-person interaction ought to represent high value activities. Their value should be sufficiently high to justify the costs associated with physical assets and the access limitations they impose.

This means that unless otherwise directed, perhaps by an accrediting body, all courses and services should be fully accessible through online delivery and interaction. With rare exception, a student should never have to step foot on a USQ campus to earn a qualification. That being said, where most appropriate and beneficial, students ought to have the opportunity to engage in high-value interactions in-person with teaching and professional staff in ways that improve the educational experience. All of our policies, procedures, workflows, technologies and staffing need to support our ‘online’ commitment. This commitment in no way prohibits students from engaging in on-campus activities, services, and other academic and non-academic experiences. Making this commitment real will require significant focus in rethinking, for example, the expectations of:

- program and curriculum design and implementation
- learning design and implementation
- capacity in media production, use and awareness
- educational technology
- communication as applied to learning and teaching including, persistence, synchronicity, anonymity (identity), and social media
- professional development, training, communities of learning and practice.
6.2 Students are supported to acquire and demonstrate knowledge and skill in diverse ways

In short, USQ will actively support a variety of learning and assessment models. We are deeply committed to providing students multiple means of attaining educational success. In addition to cohort-based educational experiences, USQ will develop enhanced capacity to engage in knowledge development and assessment to support independent and self-directed learning opportunities and experiential learning, with the intent of broadening and simplifying the pathways to credentials, so students can be directed toward study in which they are engaging in meaningful intellectual development, knowledge growth, and the development of skills, capabilities or attributes.

Depending on the interests and maturity of the student, study can be determined along a continuum from entirely University constructed to entirely student constructed. Currently, USQ’s principal control bias is with the University. USQ will continuously develop capacity to support the success of independent and self-directed students and appropriate assessment for awarding credit and qualifications. This will force us to develop a variety of economic models, perhaps making content freely available and artfully crafting support roles and systems that support the independent learner as a fee for service. These capacities will complement USQ’s traditional approaches and provide opportunities for all students to become confident self-directed, critical, and reflective students. Making this commitment real will require significant focus in rethinking the expectations of:

- knowledge and attribute assessment and recognition
- activities, content and other learning materials for self-study and augmented study
- learning support for self-and augmented-study
- educational technology and learning analytics
- student support and information systems
- what it is to be a lifelong learner and how USQ will support those aspirations
- professional development, training, communities of learning and practice.

6.3 All learning will bridge theoretical knowledge with practice

USQ is in a privileged position in which a significant majority of our students are currently employed. They are practitioners and this is one of the inherent distinctive features we possess. Experiential learning is a given for many of our students and should be supported through curriculum, course design, and USQ student and employer support. In addition, USQ has a strong focus on employability and as such a university we have an obligation to connect our teaching directly with practice and with broader intellectual development. We will ensure that courses are designed, developed, and assessed on these criteria.

To the extent that many of our students come to us with a raft of professional and life experiences and focused professional or life goals in which education is an important part of their achievement, we are well positioned to thoughtfully and methodically connect theory and practice. We must do so consistently through our claims about the uniqueness of our educational experience, construction of our programs, design and development of courses and investment in enabling infrastructure. Of particular importance is information, communications, technology and media capacity, as is training and development that enables us all to develop pedagogical approaches and services that effectively connect education and practice. Making this commitment real will require significant focus in rethinking the expectations of:

- relationships with employer and employment partners (governments, corporations, volunteer organisations, NGOs, other education providers, USQ, etc.)
- activities, content and other learning materials for self-study and augmented study
- learning and teaching support for work integrated learning, internships, work simulations, citizen science and citizen civics, remote access laboratories, and other means of enabling practical experiences
- knowledge and attribute assessment and recognition
- the potential of lifelong learning for personal fulfillment and continued engagement with USQ as a learning partner.
6.4 All USQ graduates will demonstrate behaviours associated with an educated individual

We recognise that it is important for all of our students who have been granted credit or a qualification to be able to demonstrate competencies in the skills or attributes and knowledge that define a practitioner in a particular discipline or profession. This is a critical quality of an educated professional. It is what a vast majority of our students expect, our government funders expect, and broader society expects and as such, it is in part what we expect of ourselves. And, as Bart Giamatti, former president of Yale suggests, a university should never want less, but ought to aspire to more.

Beyond the skills and techniques of a professional are the other developmental characteristics that we expect from an individual who has been educated at a university, which are perhaps the arts and habits of an educated person. In Australia, some of this is captured in the notion of ‘Graduate Attributes’, which in essence are intended to ensure that university graduates can contribute as free women and men to a democratic society and engage in national and local discussions with civility, respect, and dignity. Graduate attributes also point to the ability of all university educated Australians to be critical and reflective contributors to the national economy through employment, leadership, and innovation.

Graduate Attributes include the skills, knowledge and abilities beyond disciplinary content knowledge that the University community agrees its students should develop and be able to demonstrate upon graduation. The University expects that every USQ graduate (from an undergraduate program) should, upon graduation, exhibit the following attributes:

1. Written and oral communication
2. Critical and analytical and reflective thinking
3. Problem-solving, creativity and innovation
4. Information literacy
5. Learning and working autonomously
6. Learning and working collaboratively
7. Ethical, open and inclusive engagement with communities, cultures and professions and environments
   - Engage ethically as learners and as future professionals.
   - Demonstrate capacity for cultural competency, including awareness of Indigenous perspectives.
   - Demonstrate the implications of global and cultural issues for their discipline/professional practice.
   - Show critical awareness of sustainability as an issue for their discipline or profession.

As with technical and disciplinary attributes, in order to ensure that the graduate attributes are demonstrated as behaviours in our graduates, the University needs to articulate the attributes in behavioural terms that can be integrated into the curriculum as part of program accreditation and re-accreditation, treated as learning outcomes, taught, and assessed.

Preparing the student to behave as a professional and as an educated person strikes at how we strategically design our programs, learning experiences, set expectations, and enculturate our academic community in our thinking about the university education, our graduates, and latent expectations of our critical stakeholders. Making this commitment real will require significant focus in rethinking the expectations of:

- what it means as a USQ graduate to be an educated person
- how we interpret Graduate Attributes and embed them in courses and programs
- how Graduate Attributes are measured and mapped into the curriculum

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2 These are taken from the draft policy. The current attributes can be found at [http://policy.usq.edu.au/documents.php?id=13420PL](http://policy.usq.edu.au/documents.php?id=13420PL)
the nature of curriculum, learning, and assessment design to capture technical skill, professional competency, critical and reflective reasoning and practice, with demonstrable behaviours.

7. Building Capacity to Enable the Strategy

The Educational Experience strategy will be supported by a suite of major strategic initiatives that are university-wide and cross divisional. They directly support the elements of the Educational Experience strategy outlined above and are absolutely aligned with the principles and commitments outlined in the USQ Strategic Plan.

All of our activities will contribute to:

- reducing barriers to study
- enhancing learning & teaching quality
- enabling student success.

We will do so through our commitment to provide:

- personalised service
- access
- flexibility
- openness
- quality programming.

As strategies by their very nature are somewhat predictive and subject to many factors outside of our control, it is essential that we develop enabling capacity that applies to all of our activities, commitments, and broad strategic initiatives. Three such capacities are:

a) Development of a learning and teaching quality measurement and reporting function

- Demonstrated ability to reliably measure education experience indicators.
- Ability to reliably measure outcomes of interventions and initiatives.
- Ability to provide data management, consulting, and analysis services to support strategic and operational decisions relating to academic quality assessment, enhancement, and continuous improvement.

b) Development of capacity to effectively and efficiently develop, manage, and deliver services

- Demonstrated ability to collaboratively set service performance standards and consistently deliver to them.
- Demonstrated ability to engage in a robust continuous improvement process in a dynamic setting.
- Demonstrated ability to gracefully exit service offerings in accordance with University needs.
- Demonstrated ability to move value potential generated in a variety of projects into operational value in business as usual.
- Demonstrated ability to effectively provide enhanced support to academic staff in developing high quality program and course curricula, learning resources and experiences.

c) Development of processes that align creativity with innovation and delivery

- Demonstrated ability to take advantage of ideas by testing them at a ‘demonstration’ level and responsibly assess the idea’s value.

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3 A number of individuals have been working on capacity development (workflows, models, policy and procedures) to support the learning and teaching quality function. In many ways the discussion has been about developing capacity that might sit in a traditional Institutional Research Office.

4 This is important capacity because many of the ‘strategic initiatives’ will require a cycle for introducing, testing, and implementing ideas in areas with inherent risk and investment impact.
• Demonstrated ability to responsibly transition an idea from demonstration, to pilot, to trial, and eventually into production at the correct support practice levels, ensuring alignment with university needs and appropriate levels of resourcing.

The combination of robust quality assurance, improvement functions that are coupled with methods of introducing new ideas with agility and effective delivery will help ensure that we make good on our strategic objectives even in an uncertain environment.

8. Strategic Initiatives

In this section the four strategic initiatives described in Section 6 are presented with example tactical activities that promote their realization. Each tactic is aligned with at least one of the USQ core commitments for learning and teaching. Many of the items listed below build on current activities and initiatives that have previously been discussed and are extensions of the Educational Experience Plan and operational plans.

The following initiatives are provided for illustration purposes only to help contextualise the four strategies outlined above. They are included as examples only and are not intended to form an exhaustive list or act as a ‘to do’ list.

8.1 Learning and teaching at USQ is characterised by flexibility accessibility, enhancing quality and success

a) We will actively seek appropriate technology platforms that support online learning in a blended education environment to enhance access and reduce the cost of doing business and pressure on raising student fees, reducing barriers to study.

b) We will actively investigate and pursue alternative approaches to enhance accessibility to courses and course materials through approaches like those advocated through the FLUID project providing enhanced access, flexible delivery, and personalised service through improved user experience.

c) Programs of study will be offered in the online environment and designed to offer the advantages of asynchronous communication along with interactivity in ways that do not negatively impact flexibility and accessibility. Courses will be designed using online pedagogy, while offering the convenience for on-demand delivery of appropriate materials.

d) USQ will adopt open technology standards like those offered through the IMS Global Learning Consortium (international education technology standards organisation) for dependable delivery, discovery, and access, while open technology and information structures will be used to promote interoperability and data exchange supporting flexibility and openness.

e) Whenever feasible, e-access to library resources will be expanded beyond student and staff through a variety of efforts including the Learning Object Repository, enhancing access and flexibility.

f) Our accessibility via web, social media and traditional communication routes between prospective and existing students will be focussed on clear information and on short response times, supporting both personalised service and learning opportunities.

g) Our professional development, training, and program support will be designed to meet a variety of needs depending on circumstances and objectives. As USQ will be principally online, development and support will be designed to promote quality online learning, teaching and programming.
h) Our professional development programming will include engaging approaches to promote digital literacy in the appropriate use of social media in the learning and teaching environment, supporting **personalised** service and learning.

i) Our courses will have approved threshold standards in design and delivery, structured to promote appropriately increasing levels of sophistication leading to better learning outcomes, and this will be monitored and managed, ensuring **learning and teaching quality**.

j) Our courses will use and reuse open learning objects as much as possible for example those offered through the Free/Libre/Open Works (FLOW) project, **Open Courseware Consortium**, **OERu** or through the **Directory of Open Access Journals** to increase **access**, **flexibility**, and **content quality**.

k) Our course/program design and delivery will be informed by scholarship.

l) We will systemically adopt a quality benchmarking approach including benchmarking to assess service completeness and quality like that recently developed through an **ACODE** working group. There are a number of potential benchmarking groups and we will select the most appropriate. The information gathered through these functions (learning and teaching, application of educational technology, ICT, and library practice) will be fed into the learning and teaching quality function.

m) We will strive to make access and accessibility a design principle for content design and development and education delivery systems. Approaches that like media neutral content development (ie the presentation of content in multiple formats), user driven delivery of content, and the application of off-line digital content delivery systems will figure prominently as approaches.

8.2 **Students are supported to acquire and demonstrate knowledge and skill competency in multiple ways**

a) Provide courses through the **OERu** consortium to actively promote enhanced **access**, **flexibility**, and **openness** to reduce barriers to study.

b) We will develop capacity, workflows and resourcing that reduce the barriers to introducing appropriate innovations in the use of learning and teaching technologies. **Flexible** engagement strategies and technologies are necessary to support multiple learning styles and varied use of information for **quality learning and teaching** and **quality programming**.

c) Appropriate course materials will be made available in an open environment such as an open collection in the USQ Learning Object Repository using **open** licences to a) enhance **access**, **reduce barriers** to learning and b) promote **USQ quality**.

d) Open textbooks will be used wherever possible to a) increase **access**, b) **reduce barriers** to study, and c) reduce costs for both USQ students and the USQ Library.

e) USQ will actively participate in the Openness movement through **OERu**, the Free/Libre/Open Works (FLOW) project, and other efforts.

8.3 **All learning will bridge theoretical knowledge with practice**

a) USQ will provide capacity to our students and academic staff to access and contribute to the global **open** access research publications distributed resources repository.

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5 This and the following Strategy could be well informed by Dr Luke van der Laan in his capacity as Director, Professional Studies.
Access to a wide variety of open research will support the connection between research and practice.

b) USQ will provide a virtual learning environment that enables work integrated learning support bridging university and work integrated learning opportunities.

c) Remote Access Laboratory (RAL) and research equipment.

8.4 All USQ graduates will demonstrate behaviours associated with an educated individual

a) Our programs and courses will explicitly map employability, citizenship and graduate attribute statements, with behaviours that are desired and distinguish a USQ graduate as an educated person.

FEEDBACK & CONSULTATION PROCESSES

9. Feedback and Consultation

The consultation process will be ongoing. We will use a combination of forums, small group meetings, working groups, and technology supported discussion and access to documents.

We will:

- take advantage of a web-based consultation site at the following link (http://tinyurl.com/usqeduexperience - UConnect username and password required)
- maintain an archive of legacy documents on this consultation site
- support searching within the site
- provide the opportunity for threaded discussion on topics on the consultation site
- share information about events, updates and other useful topics.

The consultation process will support iterative development of the strategy. We intend to:

- consult amongst Vice-Chancellor’s Committee members
- release this discussion document (‘straw document’) on the collaboration site, present at relevant meetings and be available to present, facilitate and discuss documents throughout the process
- seek formal feedback through comment and discussion through the consultation site, through email, and other means.

The consultation process will be iterated through increasingly formal documents that will be identified using USQ terminology at critical points (Bronze and Iron documents).

After a document is formally set, activity planning will be conducted as part of the budgeting and planning process, taking advantage of strategic funding and planning opportunities at the University level. Consultation will be built into these processes at standards set by USQ that are consistent with our commitments to improve communication and behave as one university.

A wide range of opportunities for feedback is being provided. All feedback will be given the opportunity for community discussion, due consideration, and where appropriate will inform considerations and outcomes.

Written feedback (individual or group) can be provided in a few different forums. The principal forums will include:

1. Comment on the Consultation site. (UConnect username and password required)
2. Electronic public discussion on the Consultation site.
3. Email submissions through the Consultation site or directly via InformASD@usq.edu.au
4. Hard-copy submissions to the Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Academic Services) & CIO Office (Room Y310).

Note that methods 3 and 4 will **not** be made publicly available for sharing and discussion. This may reduce the transparency, value and impact of the feedback. All submissions that are marked as confidential using methods 3 and 4 described above will be treated as confidential. There is no obligation to make a submission.

Please note that you or a group may add a new discussion topic. The Discussion Forum is open and available for viewing and commenting by all staff. (Please be aware that the University's Code of Conduct will govern these pages and that you should keep all conversations on topic; personal attacks will not be tolerated; and that any private USQ intellectual property should not be posted).

Although the Straw Consultation and feedback period will formally end at close of business on **Friday 15 August 2014**, it is intended that the site will remain open for review. We will then move on to the next phase of consultation, which will build on previous rounds of consultation.