

# **Embedding Engagement in an Australian ‘Sandstone’ University: From Community Service to University Engagement**

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## **Abstract**

*There has been much recent interest and debate in Australia around the topics of university engagement, knowledge transfer, and engaged scholarship. Diverse responses relating to teaching and learning, research, and community service are evident in many institutions. However, there is a paucity of empirical research describing institutional responses to engagement. This paper presents one university’s journey in developing an understanding of its current engagement status and the challenges in moving toward a structured institutional mission and operations that both direct and support engagement activities appropriate to that university.*

This paper reports on an institutional project undertaken to analyze and audit the broad scope of community service/engagement at The University of Queensland, Australia. The University of Queensland (UQ) is recognized as one of Australia’s leading universities. It is a member of the Group of 8 Australian sandstone universities, consistently ranks among the top 100 universities in the world, and is acknowledged as one of the top three research universities in Australia (University of Queensland 2008a, 4, 2008b). In 2008, there were more than 5,300 staff and approximately 40,000 students. Two key factors prompted this audit of UQ community service/engagement.

First, the UQ community service policy (policy number 8.10.1) was ratified by the UQ Senate in 1995. The policy goal was,

. . .to maintain and enhance the University’s standing as a significant contributor of intellectual, educational, cultural and other services to the local, state, national, and international communities.

While Section 5.1 of the policy stated that “. . . strategic planning in relation to community service will regularly reassess the objectives, targets and strategies designed to achieve the University’s goals in community service,” no review had been undertaken since its inception in 1995.

Second, over a similar period of time university engagement (also described in different contexts as regional engagement, university-community engagement, higher education community engagement, or knowledge transfer) had taken on increased profile in both Australian and international universities. In its broadest sense, university

engagement encompasses how universities work together with stakeholders for mutually beneficial outcomes. Understanding the breadth of such engagement, undertaken at UQ, will help inform both the review of the current community service policy and identify opportunities for UQ to position itself to take advantage of new developments relating to engagement.

This paper presents a context for the audit based on a comprehensive and systematic review of relevant literature, an overview of research design, and a summary profile of university engagement at UQ. Discussion revolves around three key theme areas that emerge from the data analysis:

1. Moving from community service to university engagement;
2. Support for and recognition of university engagement; and
3. Embedding engagement at UQ: Implementing change.

The concluding section reflects on implementation of the institutional learning process that underpinned the audit and discusses outcomes from the project and potential implications for other higher education institutions.

## **The Context for Community Service and University Engagement in Australia**

This section, based on a review of relevant literature, provides a brief introduction to some influential thinking that has directed contemporary discussion around this topic. The primary purpose of the review was to identify key pieces of literature to inform the UQ audit project. Forty-eight keywords were identified for the search. These cover a broad range of community service and university engagement concepts (Table 1). Literature was sourced from 10 academic databases.

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**Table 1: List of Literature Search Terms**

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| 1. capacity building                           | 13. community-based service learning       |
| 2. community-based participatory research      | 14. participatory community-based research |
| 3. civic engagement                            | 15. communities of place                   |
| 4. collaborative university-community research | 16. public relations                       |
| 5. community and civic engagement              | 17. knowledge transfer                     |
| 6. community capacity building                 | 18. outreach                               |
| 7. community engagement                        | 19. engaged learning                       |
| 8. community engagement as friendship          | 20. engaged research                       |
| 9. community service                           | 21. engaged scholarship                    |
| 10. community-academic partnerships            | 22. engaged university                     |
| 11. community-based participatory research     | 23. engaged universities                   |
| 12. community-based research                   | 24. engaging citizens                      |
|  | 25. service learning                       |
|  | 26. knowledge sharing                      |

27. knowledge transfer
  28. professional service
  29. institutional engagement
  30. industry partnerships
  31. community participation
  32. community development
  33. public scholarship
  34. business and community engagement
  35. scholarship for the common good
  36. scholarship of application
  37. scholarship of community outreach
  38. scholarship of engagement
  39. scholarship of teaching and learning
  40. service engagement
  41. higher education community engagement
  42. university-community engagement
  43. university-community partnerships
  44. business and community outreach
  45. business/higher education
  46. regional development
  47. campus-community partnerships
  48. community consultation
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The search identified 66,214 publications. To concentrate on the most relevant literature, only academic, peer-reviewed publications between 2001–2007 were selected providing 1,892 articles. The abstract from each of these articles was assessed regarding its relevance to the UQ audit. This selection process narrowed the literature down to 890 key articles, which were then reviewed by the project team. Additional seminal papers from pre-2001 were also added to the file as they were identified. These articles inform the following summary of literature.

In its broadest context, university engagement is part of a wider discussion relating to democracy that extends over nearly 2,300 years. From a contemporary perspective, there is increasing recognition of a need to include a diverse range of knowledge and experience in democratic decision making processes. In such a democracy citizens are active, informed, and engaged in local issues, and there is recognition of “. . . the equal importance of others and their claims,” and the concept of a common good (Caragata 1999, 283; Jordan 1989).

In today’s complex society, such an approach provides an opportunity for a more participatory democracy that embraces a collaborative approach between diverse stakeholders in brokering this common good. Until recently in Australia, the potential for universities to play a role in helping to realize these common good outcomes has not been widely discussed.

Intuitively, it is understood that Australian universities have, both historically and currently, contributed much to their communities through their diverse engagement initiatives. However, the breadth and impact of this engagement has not, until recently, been well recognized outside the traditional confines of community service (Winter, Wiseman, and Muirhead 2005). While, since the mid–late 1990s, interest in university engagement has steadily increased in Australia, there remains a lack of common understanding at both institutional and national levels as to what this encompasses, why universities should invest resources in such activity, and how its impact can be measured. As such, the broad concept of university engagement is the subject of ongoing debate.

Two key pieces of literature are commonly associated with stimulating increased interest in university engagement, both in Australia and overseas. First is discussion by Gibbons, Limoges, Nowotny, Schwartzman, Scott, and Trow (1994) on the new production of knowledge in which they describe “. . . changes in the mode of knowledge production in contemporary society” (Gibbons et al. 1994, 1). This transformation sees a move past the traditional model of segregated Mode 1 knowledge production, to a new Mode 2 approach where universities are identified as one stakeholder among many knowledge producers in a new, more fluid and interdependent approach (Table 2).

**Table 2: Some Characteristics of Knowledge Production in Mode 1 and Mode 2**

Mode 1	Mode 2
Disciplinary	Transdisciplinary
Hierarchical	Participatory
Pure or applied	Applied
Linear	Reflexive
Quality is academically defined	Quality is academically defined and socially accountable

Holland (2005, 12) suggests that Mode 2 approaches to knowledge production “. . . will be increasingly important with continued growth of new, more flexible approaches to intellectual inquiry . . . that supports new forms of collaboration.” Discussion around Mode 2 approaches has undoubtedly influenced contemporary concepts of scholarship and prompted international discussion around university engagement. Mode 2 suggests a significantly different role for the academy, a move away from the academic as the expert, to a role as a facilitator of collaborative knowledge creation processes. Arguably, at this time proportionately few academics have the appropriate skills or experience to implement the Mode 2 approach to scholarship. Such practitioner attributes are critical in facilitating informed, high-quality, and inclusive engagement processes (Cuthill 2009).

The second piece of literature, which has influenced recent discussion around university engagement, is *Scholarship Reconsidered* by Boyer (1990). Given the culture of academia, as well as its governing policies, Boyer recognizes that how we respond to contemporary knowledge production processes is largely determined by the way in which scholarship is defined. His initial proposition revolved around “. . . four separate but overlapping functions of scholarship . . .” that collectively foster a more socially responsive and intellectually coherent approach to academic inquiry (Boyer 1990, 16). These include scholarship in relation to discovery, integration, teaching, and application. Later work by Boyer (1996, 19) extended this proposition to explore *The Scholarship of Engagement*, which he describes as “. . . connecting the rich resources of the university to our most pressing social, civic and ethical problems . . .” (Table 3).

**Table 3: Boyer’s Dimensions of Scholarship (from Commission on Community-Engaged Scholarship in the Health Professions)**

Dimension of scholarship	Details
Scholarship of Discovery	. . . refers to the pursuit of inquiry and investigation in search of new knowledge.
Scholarship of Integration	. . . consists of making connections across disciplines and through this synthesis, advancing what we know.
Scholarship of Teaching	. . . includes transmitting, transforming, and extending knowledge.
Scholarship of Application	. . . asks how knowledge can be practically applied in a dynamic process whereby new understandings emerge from the act of applying knowledge through an ongoing cycle of theory to practice to theory.
Scholarship of Engagement	. . . connects any of the above dimensions of scholarship to the understanding and solving of pressing social, civil and ethical problems.

While discussion presented here appears to identify a new approach to scholarship, it is reasonable to suggest that some proportion of both past and current scholarship already embraces much of the philosophy and methodology implied within both Gibbons’ and Boyer’s conceptual frameworks. As such, engagement should not be seen as a new approach that threatens traditional concepts of scholarship rather, as Bruckardt, Holland, Percy, and Zimpher (2004, 1) suggest, it provides an exciting opportunity for universities “. . . to strengthen and expand on the scholarship and teaching that have been the foundation of the academy”. Arguably, such scholarship remains on the periphery of Australian academia, despite considerable rhetoric from universities, governments, and the private sector, which advocates for an increased focus on university engagement.

For example, recognition of university engagement, as an important part of higher education business, has been supported in diverse Australian reports and/or forums. The Business/Higher Education Round Table (B-HERT) (2006, 3) argues that engagement is a core business activity for universities, “The **Third Mission** that complements the mission of teaching and the mission of research.” This view is supported by the Australian Universities Community Engagement Alliance (AUCEA) (2006, 2), a formal alliance comprising 32 of Australia’s 39 universities, who argue that “. . . engagement initiatives span the full range of university endeavour.” The Australian Vice-Chancellors’ Committee (2005, 4) concur, stating that engagement focuses on “. . . universities’ application of research, teaching and scholarship in partnership with the needs of business and communities.”

These Australian statements are also reinforced in international discussions. For example, the Association of Commonwealth Universities (ACU) (2001, i) argues that,

Engagement implies strenuous, thoughtful, argumentative interaction with the non-university world in at least four spheres: setting universities aims, purposes, and priorities; relating teaching and learning to the wider world; the back-and-forth dialogue between researchers and practitioners; and taking on wider responsibilities as neighbours and citizens.

The four spheres suggested by ACU are also reflected in more detail in principles for quality management of engagement, outlined in the *University Engagement Quality Management* framework (Cuthill 2008). The primary intentions of the 38 principles listed in the framework are to

- provide both direction and support to the diverse range of University Engagement being undertaken in Australian universities;
- ensure the quality and impact of engagement in Australian universities is constantly enhanced through application of an organizational learning approach;
- encourage alignment in the understanding, planning, and assessment of engagement by institutional stakeholders including engagement practitioners, planning, and quality specialists, researchers, university management, and so on; and
- raise the profile of and support for university engagement by establishing a national UEQM framework that clearly identifies the opportunity that engagement presents for individual Australian universities (Cuthill 2008, 33)

These examples suggest that engagement should not be thought of as something that is compartmentalized. Rather, it can be seen as woven into the broader institution through diverse efforts and initiatives that are all consistent with the organization's mission (Holland 1997). However, despite these ongoing discussions, frameworks, and a proliferation of senior engagement appointments in Australian universities, most university engagement arguably still remains embedded largely within “. . . the one-way, paternalistic and altruistic implications of the term community service” (Sunderland et al. 2004, 58).

More recent conceptual discussion (Sunderland et al. 2004; Watson 2003), research publications (Cuthill 2008, 2009; Winter, Wiseman, and Muirhead 2005; Garlick 2003) and conferences/workshops (AUCEA 2006, 2007, 2008; Griffith University 2005; United Nations & Queensland Government 2005) have all contributed toward moving discussion past a simplistic view of engagement as merely a new buzzword for community service, toward a comprehensive and clearly articulated presentation of engagement as a multi-faceted concept, which underpins much university activity.

However, while it is reasonable to suggest that all Australian universities are now directing various levels of attention to engagement, few appear to have made serious attempts to institutionalize their engagement in an informed and measured way. As such, university engagement in Australia still appears to be predominantly instigated at the individual or project level, around specific areas of interest. Little is understood or

reported regarding either the quality or impact of the engagement being implemented, and there is little understanding of the role engagement plays in helping achieve an institution’s mission.

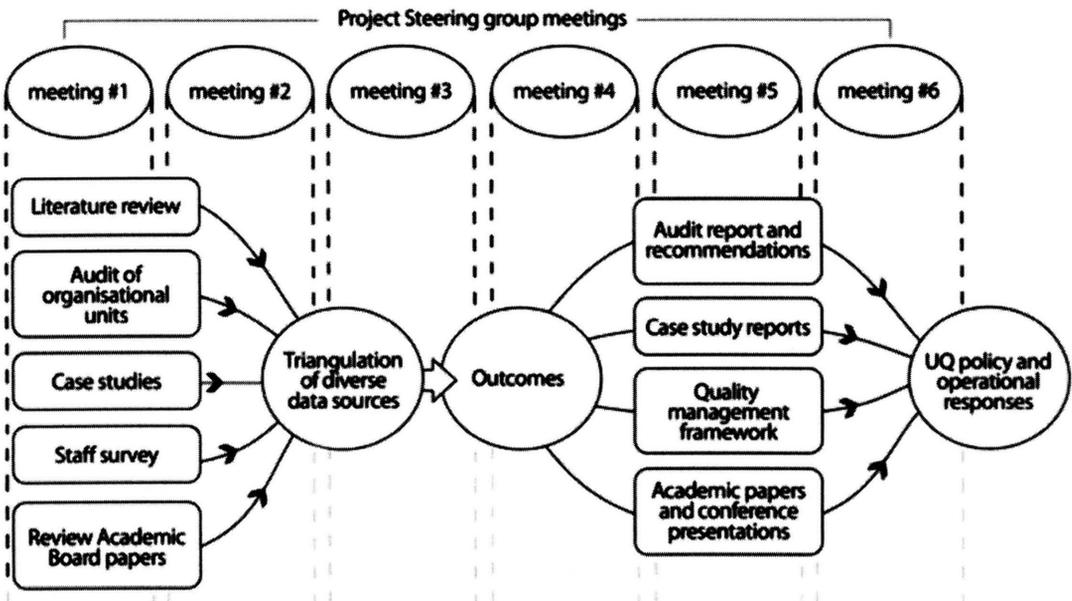
Universities have been constrained in their responses to engagement by a lack of studies that focus on the institution as the unit of analysis (Holland 1997; Maurrasse 2001; Ostrander 2004; Percy, Zimpher, and Bruckardt 2007; Weerts 2003). As Ramaley (2000, 9) argues, there is a need for “. . . the institution as a whole . . .” to recognize, value, and support engagement as scholarly work. Research reported in this paper directly addresses that gap, presenting context specific evidence to guide institutional responses to university engagement at UQ.

## Research Design

Funding was provided from the UQ Vice-Chancellor to undertake an 18-month audit of community service and university engagement. A project steering group was established to provide direction and support to the project and to act as champions for the audit. The group was co-chaired by the Deputy Vice Chancellor (Academic) and Pro Vice Chancellor and comprised another seven senior UQ academic and administration staff, and an external participant who had been a recent member of the UQ Senate. A series of six steering committee meetings were convened during the 18-month project timeframe.

A research design was developed based on a mixed-methods approach including literature review, structured and semi-structured interviews with key informants, in-depth case studies, a web-based staff survey, review of Academic Board reports, and the collation of secondary data (Figure 1).

**Figure 1: Audit project research design**



Two purposeful sampling techniques, criterion and convenience, were used in this project. The three criteria for purposive sampling were

1. senior managers;
2. teams of staff who work together in partnership with stakeholders; and
3. secondary data that describes faculty engagement and/or Academic Board reports.

Convenience sampling focused on a web-based survey to access as many UQ staff as possible. Data sources, methods and samples, and measures used are summarized in Table 4.

**Table 4: Data Sources, Methods and Samples, and Measures**

Data sources	Methods/sample	Measures used
Audit of thirty-two organizational units	Structured interviews with 42 staff and collation of secondary data from the 32 organizational units	Interview questions informed by literature review, input from the Project Steering Group and results from the web survey.
Seven in-depth case studies	Semi-structured interviews with 18 staff and collation of secondary data from case studies	Some structured questions from previous interviews were used with increased emphasis on participant led discussion.
Review of Academic Board reports	Reports from 14 schools and 4 centers	Utilised existing reports within the university
Staff survey	Web-based staff survey (N = 499 – 10% of staff)	Measures adapted primarily from the Carnegie Foundation classification (2007) and Kellogg Commission (1999).

The audit of 32 organizational units presents a high level horizontal cut across the institution, providing broad-scale description of the diversity of engagement activity at UQ. The seven case studies provide rich data, a vertical drilling down to describe engagement activity within a specific operational context. Interviews and secondary data were collected from both the organizational units and the case studies.

The survey provided an opportunity for staff to give input to the audit. The survey response rate was low (N = 499, ~10% of staff). Anecdotal evidence and data from other sources suggests that many staff do not see themselves as working in this area. In particular, general staff, who comprise 57 percent of the UQ workforce, seem to view community service and/or university engagement as the responsibility of academics. In light of the low response rate, survey results were used conservatively to complement the extensive qualitative and secondary data that was collected.

Academic Board reviews were identified, by the project steering group, as a potentially useful source of historical data on community service and university engagement. The

Academic Board oversees the University's review process for institutes, centers, and schools. Comprehensive external reviews, focusing at a school or centre level, are implemented on a septennial basis, to achieve improvement in academic performance through a process of self-assessment, benchmarking, critical reflection, forward planning, and peer review. Data collection to inform the audit project focused on Academic Board reviews that relate strongly to community service, engagement, and external relations activities.

Both qualitative and quantitative data were collected over a nine-month period from May to December 2007. Qualitative data provides rich description of the personal experiences, understandings, and perspectives of individuals (Cresswell 2003; Stake 1995). Quantitative data provides status reporting of engagement activity at UQ. While any one data source offers limitations relating to the reliability and validity of research results, the combination of multiple sources provides trustworthy information. Triangulation of diverse data sources was used to validate results by comparing similarities and differences across these sources.

The project design also included an institutional learning process as an objective of the audit. Key elements of this process included the establishment of a high level project steering group and the direct involvement of all executive staff, from the university's 32 business units, in data collection processes and review. The rationale behind this learning focus was threefold:

1. to facilitate a dialogue around engagement among senior staff;
2. to create some initial shared understanding about engagement across the university; and
3. to identify (and recruit) engagement champions among decision makers.

In a similar approach, implemented at the University of Massachusetts Lowell (USA), it was found that the institutional learning process helped move engagement:

. . . from the informal to the formal, from the private to the public, and from something that was just done to something that could be analysed, evaluated, and improved upon as part of a university's pursuit of knowledge and its application (Silka 2007, 133)

Such outcomes were anticipated as a result of the UQ audit project.

## **Summary Profile of University Engagement at UQ**

It is clear that The University of Queensland has a broad range of university engagement activity that is implemented across all of the 32 business units audited. This engagement crosses local, state, national, and international boundaries and involves diverse stakeholders from the private, public, community, and higher education sectors. The extent of this work should be viewed as significant in relation to the broad scope of UQ business activity. For example, nearly a quarter of UQ staff indicate that they spend more than 16 hours per month on engagement, and another 31

percent spend between 6–15 hours per month. In addition, while there is a degree of vagueness around reporting of expenditure on engagement, anecdotal evidence suggests that UQ invests significant financial resources each year. It is also clear that there is much confusion in relation to what university engagement at UQ encompasses.

Analysis of responses to a question relating to the “types of engagement activity implemented” identifies five key engagement themes, which encompass diverse engagement subthemes. These themes are generally consistent with the reviewed literature and provide a broad typology describing UQ engagement (Table 5).

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**Table 5: Typology of UQ Engagement****1. Research**

- Commercialization
- Consultancy
- Community-based participatory
- International collaborations with public, private, higher education and/or community sectors
- Adjunct appointments
- Knowledge transfer processes (publications, presentations, etc.)

**2. Equity and outreach**

- Equity scholarships
- Outreach initiatives to identified equity groups

**3. Community service**

- Community access to UQ facilities including museums, art galleries, libraries, gyms, meeting rooms, etc.
- Staff volunteering or pro-bono work with community-based and/or not-for-profit groups, etc.
- Student volunteers
- Public lectures, forums, conferences, etc.

**4. Teaching and learning**

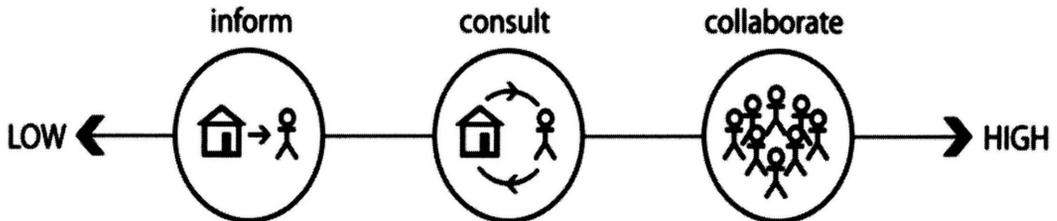
- Student placements, internships, etc.
- External input to curriculum development
- Clinical placements

**5. Fundraising, marketing, and networking**

- Networking events
  - Alumni
  - Board membership
  - Public relations and advertising
  - Fund raising and lobbying
  - Student recruitment programs
  - Open days, school visits to campuses, etc.
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From a methodological consideration, staff report that these diverse activities are implemented at different levels of engagement (Figure 2). Such levels of engagement have been described previously from both academic and practitioner perspectives (e.g., Arnstein 1969; Ross, Buchy, and Proctor 2002; International Association of Public Participation 2009).

**Figure 2: Levels of Engagement**



In practice, an appropriate level is chosen in different contexts for achieving different purposes. For example, university staff who provide an information service to an external stakeholder are implementing a one-way engagement process. This might be delivered for example, as an information brochure, a public presentation, or through provision of an equity scholarship. In contrast, consultation involving two-way interaction between the university and stakeholders might see an external agency being asked to provide input to curriculum relevant to their industry. Collaboration involves working together with a shared vision and/or goals, such as evidenced through research commercialization or community-based participatory research.

It should be noted that there are no hard boundaries between these levels. They are offered as a conceptual guide, and any engagement activity might slide back and forth between different levels during the engagement process. Based on this “levels of engagement” methodological model, it is suggested that all UQ staff are at various times involved in some form of engagement activity with either internal or external stakeholders, at one or more of these levels. As such, university engagement underpins much UQ activity and can be seen as one way of doing business.

This summary profile of UQ engagement provides a foundation for the following discussion, which focuses on three key discussion points which emerged from the data analysis:

1. Moving from community service to university engagement
2. Support for and recognition of university engagement
3. Embedding engagement at UQ: Implementing change

# **Moving from Community Service to University Engagement**

Historically, community service at UQ has been framed strategically as one leg of a tri-part mission, which also encompasses teaching and learning and research. However, this service orientation has focused largely on the altruistic intent of UQ doing good deeds in the community. A new and broader engagement frame places emphasis on the mutual benefits of engagement, benefits that flow to both the university and its many diverse partners. The rationale for an engaged approach was succinctly described by one interviewee,

. . . we approach our community partnerships with mutual respect — we have as much to learn as we have to offer. It means that we understand that effective partnerships are built on shared responsibility, commitment and goals — it must be a “two-way-street.” We understand that the best partnerships are those where both sides benefit — a win-win strategy. I don’t know how else to say it . . . getting somebody who knows how to do A, and somebody who knows how to do B, and together they make something new happen. (University of Queensland, 2007)

While there is a distinct lack of empirical evidence relating to the benefits from university engagement, a review of the diverse data collected during the audit identifies a range of potential benefits including:

- economic development and innovation, evidenced through productivity gains, local investments, new businesses and employment opportunities;
- involvement of staff and students in the discovery and application process, thereby fostering development of highly valued workforce skills and practical knowledge;
- provision of shared social infrastructure such as libraries, art galleries, and sporting facilities;
- increased research productivity and opportunities through new partnerships;
- attracting additional sources of funding;
- knowledge transfers to help deal with social, economic, and environmental issues;
- financial efficiencies achieved through collaborative responses to issues;
- support to public interest groups and issues including, for example, Indigenous Australians, environmental groups, and social justice organizations;
- improvement to university courses and research through engagement activities;
- enhanced institutional identity;
- attracting and retaining more first generation and diverse students; and
- profiling world-class research and teaching and learning.

Overall, the concept of mutual benefits underpins a new acceptance and understanding of engagement that is in distinct contrast to more traditional concepts of service, which see the university as benevolent providers of expert advice and support to communities. Of particular relevance to UQ, as a research intensive university, the mutual benefits frame for engagement was identified as important by those involved in

large research partnerships involving commercialization. One participant describes this relevance,

In this very large research project, where the opportunities for commercialisation are significant, I think the vision of engagement is mutual . . . it's the aligning of academic interest of the University with community interests on the basis of mutuality and transaction . . . [rather than a view that] we're just doing things for them or where we're just taking things from them.

Such a view is appropriate to both the current UQ mission and the institution's historical context. In particular, it was noted that there is a need to honor and maintain established cultural norms relating to research.

However, the broad concept of university engagement encompasses much more than just commercial research partnerships, and other interviewees argue that research commercialization should not overshadow the range of engagement activity at UQ. For example, responses from UQ staff indicate that they implement a diverse array of engagement activities such as student field placements, community service projects, community-based participatory research, equity and outreach programs, cultural/arts initiatives, contributions to public debate, clinical practice, scholarships, and public access to university infrastructure (e.g., Van de Ven 2007; Minkler and Wallerstein 2003).

There is strong argument that, in today's competitive market place, the viability and sustainability of much higher education business heavily relies on the strong and genuine relationships developed through a diverse range of engagement initiatives. However, at UQ there is some question whether institutional arrangements appropriately recognize and support recent moves toward such activity. As one faculty member describes, there is a transitional challenge when moving from the traditional culture of an elite research intensive university toward a broader engagement agenda,

. . . what makes us unique is that the institution is producing research and creating knowledge. The challenge is how to marry that with engagement to inform what we should be doing and then make knowledge useful. To see this work as not outside research and production of knowledge, but part of it.

Some senior managers are already confronting these transitional challenges and re-assessing the current UQ culture in terms of engagement, and the potential benefits this might provide not only to research efforts but across a broad range of UQ activities. One senior academic outlined his vision,

So my hope would be that the new Vice Chancellor and people at the highest levels of leadership would see how we can take this to the next level and in so doing, create new models for what can actually happen at a research university that keeps us true to our culture and our values as a research institution, but is very forward-looking and takes us to places we haven't even been yet because I think there is an opportunity.

Achieving such a vision will require institutional responses that address specific constraints noted during the audit, particularly in relation to appropriate recognition and support for those charged with implementing engagement activities. Staff strongly identify a current deficiency in this area,

. . . let's say you're a faculty member who as part of your job, spends one day out of the five not in the classroom, but with the class out in the community, either observing or engaged or doing something that benefits the students and their education, as part of your teaching function and if you do it well . . . that is recognised.

It will be difficult to move forward with a new engagement mission until such constraints are addressed through an institutional engagement agenda.

## **Support For and Recognition of University Engagement**

A common view, which emerged through interviews, suggests that engagement activities have long struggled for legitimacy at UQ. Groups or individuals, who base their work around engaged approaches, are seen as existing toward the margins of institutional activity. As Silka (2006, 106–107) notes, a focus on university engagement can be seen to be “. . . at odds with the culture of certain types of higher education institutions, say the leaders.”

This poses something of a dilemma. Over recent years UQ has strengthened its focus on stakeholder relationships and community partnerships (University of Queensland 2007). However, staff who are currently working to achieve such outcomes generally report that they are struggling, citing a lack of support and recognition. In attempting to address this need, there were suggestions as to operational procedures which would affirm, support, and motivate both these and other staff to undertake engagement activities in support of the UQ Mission.

Perhaps the most obvious avenue for responding relates to promotion and tenure processes. Currently, staff argue that it is positive peer assessment of research outcomes that is most likely to support career advancement. Recent changes to promotions assessment also serve to acknowledge and support high-quality teaching. Community service is noted among promotions criteria; however, according to staff responses it is not rewarded. Currently, engagement is not explicitly identified at all. This situation dissuades staff from undertaking engagement activities. As one interviewee explains,

. . . I think the problem is oftentimes you have junior staff who are particularly interested in engaged scholarship, but they have to . . . [secure] tenure first and to get tenure, you really better be focused on what the requirements and needs are of your particular school or faculty, and that's always going to be a

struggle . . . they've got to work toward whatever indicators are being used to grant tenure.

Other identified issues pertaining to support and recognition include staff capacity relating to appropriate skills, knowledge, time, and resources, all of which are essential for achieving high quality engagement outcomes. Interview responses describe the current situation,

I know I am expected to engage with many communities when it comes to my position here at [unit name] but I really am not provided the time or skills to do so. I don't even believe it is mentioned in my job description. There is only so much we can do and making time to go out and form relationships with the community just is not a priority if we are not given the time or resources to do so.

I really get a great response from the groups I do engage with when it comes to my research but the time and effort can sometimes create problems in the projects I am involved with. We either run out of time or simply don't have it in our budget to conduct this type of approach. It is a shame really but you have to work with what you have and when you get the chance you can really run with the opportunity.

We don't have many resources to do engagement. You'd think that this tiny project we are working on we could find some resources, time and money to conduct a small engaged component, but it is really difficult sometimes. We try but I don't think we have the capacity to do more than we already are. Simply the time and effort required to complete a participatory component is just too time consuming and expensive.

There is a clear message here. As with all other disciplines and professions, successful university engagement requires a context-specific combination of appropriate skills, knowledge, time, and resources. To put this in a comparative context, UQ administrative staff wouldn't be expected to undertake research if they did not have research training, nor would a botanist be expected to undertake a clinical psychological study. Interviewees argued that the same principles should apply with engagement. Insufficient investment in capacity building for engagement likely will result in poor-quality engagement outcomes that may affect adversely the university's reputation. Articulation of a broad set of staff attributes required for undertaking university engagement should be developed for use in staff position descriptions and translated to promotions and/or tenure criteria. This would also provide clarity for staff on what engagement at UQ actually requires in terms of staff capacity.

As reviewed literature highlights, university engagement is a relatively new, ill-defined, and quite complex concept, which has quickly taken hold in much of the Australian higher education sector over the past 10 years. This lack of definition or shared understanding of university engagement was clear among audit participants, for example, as one participant describes,

I have a definition of community engagement that is quite broad so it effectively encompasses almost everything we do. I am not sure how the University defines it, I just go with what I think it is . . .

The need for direction in this area was noted, particularly with regards to clear articulation of the institutional engagement mission and objectives. This would, in turn, provide direction for appropriate structural and operational responses, another area of concern for some staff, who identify for example, that their current administrative positioning impacts on their ability to effectively carry out their engagement role,

Structurally I do not belong here. The mission of this particular department does not support what I do here with the [program name] and how I need to spend time, money and effort engaging with thousands of stakeholders and communities in order to promote the University and provide opportunities for its students. My supervisor follows the objectives of the department to the letter and this does not include what I need to do in regards to this program. It is so frustrating! I need to be somewhere where I can find support and work with others that have the same goals as what my position demands of me. At the moment, the current objectives of this department does not support engaged tasks.

The operational disconnect between staff members and their organizational units further emphasizes the need for clear articulation of university engagement directions at the institutional level.

Another recognition concern relates to a general perception that current engagement activities are not well profiled either internally or externally. A senior academic commented on this situation,

At the moment we do massive amounts of community engagement that nobody knows about, that nobody gets publicised and so we continue to have a reputation as a university that has no face in the community at all . . . I think the problem is not that we don't do it, but that we don't do it explicitly enough.

It was suggested that the University can immediately value-add to engagement outcomes through better profiling and marketing of current activities. Such a response would provide external stakeholders with better understanding of UQ engagement activity. It would also help raise the profile of engagement within UQ, and in addition provide recognition to staff who are currently implementing high-quality engagement. One faculty member discussed how staff might value such recognition,

I think that there's an incredible amount of [engagement] work going on in this university, that's just phenomenal and I think it's very idiosyncratic about what gets communicated and how. So I think, that in some perverse way, even though it wouldn't translate into promotion or tenure, people are generally

very pleased to have their work get some attention and I think that could be really helpful.

## **Embedding Engagement at UQ: Implementing Change**

We now understand that university engagement at UQ is a highly diverse activity implemented across all of the university's 32 organizational units. It is evident that some UQ engagement practitioners currently are implementing world-class engagement and do not appear to require additional support.

However, the audit provides clear evidence of the need for institutional-level responses to address nine key requirements. These include

1. an institutional mission statement for university engagement and an engagement operational plan;
2. a senior management appointment with overall responsibility for university engagement;
3. engagement monitoring and reporting processes, including quality principles and procedures;
4. an internal capacity building program for engagement;
5. staff recognition, rewards and awards for engagement;
6. raised profile of UQ engagement activity;
7. better coordinated institutional level policy, research, and operations relating to equity and outreach;
8. greater recognition of and support for engaged scholarship, particularly in relation to community based participatory research; and
9. an institutional cost-benefit study of university engagement at UQ.

These requirements are context specific to UQ but may have broader relevance to other higher education institutions. More detailed discussion on each of these nine requirements follows.

It is clear that unless UQ, as an institution, embraces engagement as a valued and legitimate component of its core business, ongoing engagement initiatives will continue to be defined largely through the interests and efforts of individuals. This situation will not necessarily serve the UQ mission well, nor will it provide any assurance regarding the quality of engagement implemented. A clearly articulated mission statement for engagement is required to direct university engagement at UQ, along with associated operational planning, and appropriate resources to achieve stated objectives. The statement must be action-oriented, build on the university's strengths, and align these strengths to collaboratively address stakeholder issues and/or needs.

In support of the mission statement, a senior leadership appointment is required to take responsibility for overseeing identified actions. In combination, this direction and leadership will provide an institutional platform for high-quality engagement.

However, as a matter of some urgency, internal capacity building for engagement practitioners must be addressed. Engagement as a specialised task requires specific skills and knowledge. Initial capacity requirements, identified by project participants, include training relating to 1) facilitation of collaborative processes; 2) relationship development and management; and 3) engagement planning, methods, and evaluation. Enhanced staff capacity will directly contribute to quality engagement outcomes.

Institutional commitment to and support for engagement staff must be explicit, and subsequently reinforced through recognition, rewards, and awards. This requires

- staff position descriptions that articulate the necessary skills and knowledge required for positions that have an engagement focus;
- promotions criteria that acknowledge engagement efforts and outcomes; and
- development of appropriate career opportunities and pathways.

In addition, consideration might be given to acknowledging quality engagement through enhanced profiling, including, for example, focused marketing, internal awards, and dedicated engagement funding schemes.

Two specific areas of UQ engagement activity are identified as requiring special attention. These are Community-Based Participatory Research (CBPR) and Outreach and Equity. With regards to CBPR, staff implementing such research indicate that there is little support in this area. It is clear that UQ has not yet responded to this growing area of research focus. Reporting on the U.S. context, Holland (2005, 15) describes a similar situation,

. . .the elite research university sector in the U.S. have only recently begun to recognise that the very nature and traditions of research and scholarship are evolving quickly and that modes of networked, collaborative research such as engaged scholarship will be an essential element of academic excellence in the 21st Century university.

An engaged scholarship capacity building program, involving training, mentoring, and networking responses is required to directly support this work. With appropriate support, CBPR can produce scholarly outcomes in line with UQ research expectations. In addition, CBPR has the potential to contribute to positive community outcomes, as part of a common good or corporate social responsibility agenda that can enhance the reputation of the university.

With regards to the diverse range of equity and outreach activity currently implemented across the university, there is an identified disconnect between policy, research, and operational efforts. This lack of coordination will need to be addressed if the university is to achieve both operational efficiencies and national equity benchmarks.

All Australian universities and their external stakeholders invest human and financial resources in their engagement activities. There is an assumption of benefits from this

investment; however, the true costs or impacts of engagement are not well understood. This situation is not limited to UQ. As a recent UK research report (focusing on the true costs of public participation) states, “Actual cost-benefit analyses of public participation are, as far as we have been able to discern, virtually non-existent” (Involve 2005, 61). A cost benefit study will provide direction and support in assessing the resources invested, the benefits to internal/external stakeholders, and it will help enhance understanding of engagement impact. Data from a cost benefit study can be used to inform:

- institutional learning regards engagement (e.g., best practice);
- accountability requirements, including triple bottom line reporting;
- engagement communication and marketing strategies; and
- national auditing requirements.

Better understanding of the costs and benefits associated with engagement at UQ would provide a platform for informed decision-making, particularly in regards to resource allocations and priorities.

## **Conclusion: Outcomes from the Institutional Learning Process and Future Steps**

The audit project involved an institutional learning process. This process primarily targeted senior UQ staff, and was implemented through the establishment of a project steering group, and the direct involvement of UQ executive staff in project interviews. The intent behind this institutional learning process was threefold. It sought to

1. facilitate a dialogue around engagement among senior staff;
2. create some initial shared understanding about engagement across the university; and
3. identify engagement champions among decision makers.

As a result of the process, it was anticipated that senior UQ staff would be both more knowledgeable about and supportive of any resultant institutional policy and operational changes relating to university engagement. The 18 months allocated to the audit proved to be a suitable timeframe to implement this process.

Since the start of the audit project in early 2007, the UQ institutional landscape has undergone significant change relating to engagement. The Vice-Chancellor, in the new *UQ Strategic Plan* (University of Queensland 2008), identifies **engagement**, along with **learning** and **discovery**, as the three key strategic priority areas of focus for the next five years. A *UQ Engagement Portfolio Plan* has been developed to direct operational responses. The portfolio plan directly responds to identified requirements listed in the UQ audit report.

Although it can be said that the university was already looking to strengthen its engagement agenda prior to the audit project, the emerging cultural change that is now taking place can be at least partly attributed to the institutional learning process conducted within the audit project. It seems that senior staff are much more willing to consider engagement from an informed perspective built up through their involvement

with the project. As such, we can see engagement rapidly moving from the “. . . informal to the formal . . .” (Silka 2007, 133).

Despite the specificity of the UQ context, the audit project serves to highlight three contributing and interrelated factors for achieving cultural change, relating to university engagement, which may be relevant for other higher education institutions. First is the need for initial support from at least some senior decision makers, to begin exploring what university engagement means within the context of their institution and its mission. The support of the Vice-Chancellor in initiating and funding this project, and the ongoing support of two other senior executives has opened doors that might otherwise have remained closed. The immediate institutional responses that have been implemented at UQ have taken even the research team somewhat by surprise.

Second is the need for robust data to inform any change process. Data from the UQ audit helped build a shared understanding of the status of university engagement at three levels: 1) international, 2) national, and 3) institutional. As a result, current UQ university engagement activities, opportunities, and challenges have been considered in light of appropriate inter/national contexts. This provided a valid argument as to why a large research intensive university might want to embrace what is a significant cultural change.

Third is the need to involve and take a diverse range of senior staff along with you during the change process. Establishment of the project steering group and direct involvement of senior UQ staff, in data collection and review processes, undoubtedly contributed to the immediacy of institutional responses. While we do not claim that there is unreserved support for all of the identified requirements, there is an informed and ongoing dialogue around engagement and explicit understanding that UQ now formally acknowledges university engagement as part of its core business.

While institutional responses have been (perhaps surprisingly) speedy, it should be considered that these are the first steps taken by one research intensive Australian university to formally recognize and support an institutional approach to university engagement. However, there will undoubtedly be further steps taken (some moving forward, perhaps some backward) before university engagement is fully and comfortably embedded within UQ.

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