

Vice-Chancellor and President's review

Resilience and agility. These are the qualities that shone through in our community, as we negotiated our way through the many challenges that arose in 2020.

After a 6-and-a-half year absence, I was incredibly proud to return to The University of Queensland (UQ) in August this year to take up the position as UQ's Vice-Chancellor and President.

Given that my return occurred in the second half of 2020, I would like to start by acknowledging my predecessor, Professor Peter Høj, and I want to thank him for his leadership of the University – especially through the initial stages of the COVID-19 pandemic.

While the pandemic created numerous disruptions for the University and our community in 2020, I also want to acknowledge the remarkable resilience and agility shown by our staff as we dealt with these challenges.

In Semester 1, for instance, our staff worked incredibly hard to shift 1,529 courses to online delivery in the space of just one week. In the weeks that followed, as the nationwide lockdown came into effect, around 6,700 UQ staff quickly moved to working from home, while another 1,300 remained on campus to maintain our facilities and grounds, and to ensure the continuity of vital research.

As we sought to keep the UQ community connected and safe, the shift to digital delivery of our programs and events became a consistent theme throughout the year. The UQ Life Virtual Village was established in April as an online forum for students. In May, the UQ Theatre Festival and Reconciliation Week were both conducted online, while the School of Music started live-streaming its lunchtime concerts. Then, in August, we held our first fully online Open Day, attracting more than 6,000 prospective students from 109 nations.

The UQ community also pulled together in 2020 to provide much-needed support for the thousands of students facing hardship as a direct result of the pandemic.

In total, \$1 million in grants was distributed to 600 students via the UQ COVID-19 Student Emergency Support Fund. Meanwhile, an army of staff volunteers, led by Student Services, pitched in to deliver 9,000 food hampers and 28,000 free meals to students in need of support.

2020 highlights

Once again in 2020, our research and educational programs had a wide-ranging impact and UQ continued to enrich the communities that we serve.

UQ either enhanced or maintained its position in the major ranking systems of the world's universities released in 2020. Most of these ranking systems place UQ among the world's top 50 and Australia's top 3 universities.

The excellence of our teaching was recognised in February at the Australian Awards for University Teaching, where UQ received more awards than any other university. Among the 8 awards won by UQ academics, I was delighted to see that Professor Blake McKim, Professor Barbara Mearns and Mark Hill were jointly named the Australian University Teachers of the Year.

The shift to teaching online in Semester 1 enabled the University to continue developing the knowledge and skills of our students, and prepare them for their future careers. In total, we taught almost 55,000 students in 2020, which was only slightly down on enrolments in the previous year.

However, one significant difference this year was that, due to the impact of border closures, we had more than 9,000 students who continued their studies purely online, from an offshore or interstate location. This meant we were able to support these students to progress towards graduation.

Despite the challenges created by the pandemic, we ensured that the University finished the year in a relatively strong financial position and we maintained around 8,000 research projects – and continued to feed the research pipeline with the approval