

COMMENT



SKILLS shortages continue to be headline news in Australia, but they are hardly confined to this country, with the driving factors of demographic and economic change being common to many developed nations.

In the United Kingdom, part of the Government's response to a review of skills levels by Lord Leitch has been to urge universities to be more "business facing".

While one hopes that this awkward phrase does not cross the equator, the idea that universities should engage more closely with employers is one that QUT has long embraced, and the results are clear in both statistical and human terms.

Each year nearly 10,000 students graduate from QUT, two thirds of them from undergraduate programs, and the latest national survey data show that QUT continues to strengthen its national leadership in full-time employment rates.

While they are reassuring, such statistics are an impersonal and imperfect measure of the results of QUT's education programs.

The diversity of the careers and destinations of our alumni can best be appreciated by celebrating the achievements of people who have

made real impacts on their chosen professions.

Each year the QUT Outstanding Alumni Awards provide us with such an opportunity, and this year we are proud to highlight the work of alumni who have made their mark in fields as diverse as pharmacy, music, films, business consulting, oil exploration and production, education, IT and health ethics.

I extend my congratulations to Pia Angelina Francini, this year's QUT Chancellor's Outstanding Alumnus, and to the nine other Outstanding Alumni award winners.

They are, of course, just part of the many talented people who make up the global community of QUT Alumni, and while their achievements are their own, they reflect well on the university which prepared them for their professional lives.

The outcomes of our research at QUT are strong and rapidly growing, but it is only when we consider the breadth and quality of the work of our alumni that the real scale and global impact of this institution can truly be appreciated.

Professor Peter Coaldrake
Vice-Chancellor

QUT Council supports humanities restructure in 2008

Humanities

THE QUT Council, the university's governing body, has approved plans to change the future shape of humanities and arts at QUT.

The changes will involve the closure of the School of Humanities and Human Services and two degree programs in arts and social sciences.

However certain key elements of the school such as languages will be transferred and developed by other faculties and continue to be offered as part of QUT's commitment to the humanities.

The human services program within the School of Humanities and Human Services will transfer to the Faculty of Health.

QUT Vice-Chancellor Professor Peter Coaldrake said QUT would be offering the humanities and social sciences in a way that was consistent

with the University's strengths and positioning.

"We are a national leader in the applied humanities through our Creative Industries Faculty and through the way we seek to embed social science perspectives in our professional degrees," he said.

For a number of reasons, including softness in demand, change was inevitable for the School of Humanities and Human Services and its programs.

"The council resolutions lay the basis for sensible change to address demand, course performance and research priority issues."

There will be no new intakes in 2008 for the existing Bachelor of Arts and Bachelor of Social Science single degrees.

But the university will continue to take new students in 2008 into some double degree programs with the Bachelor of Arts as a component, reflecting the demand for those

programs.

A new degree in the humanities and social sciences will also be explored for introduction in 2009.

"Council was of the view that any such program would need to be distinctive in character and, like all other new offerings at QUT, be sustained by evidence of demand and other business case factors," Professor Coaldrake said.

"The university has already given a commitment to current students in the School of Humanities and Human Services that they will be able to complete their programs.

"Students are being emailed with information about the transition, with final details to be confirmed in the next couple of months."

Professor Coaldrake said he would establish a working party to consider the broader issues relating to the Carseldine campus, and would report back to Council on its progress by the end of the year.

Calling all out-of-the-box ideas

Commercialisation

DO you have an idea or invention that you think has commercial potential? Then qutbluebox is looking for you.

The inaugural qutbluebox *Out of the box* discovery competition is looking for new ideas, innovations or early-stage research and those who come forward could share in a prize pool worth \$10,000.

QUT staff and students from all research disciplines, faculties and institutes are eligible to enter their ideas which have potential commercial applicability and that may ultimately provide benefits to the community, industry or government.

Entrants must confirm that the contents of their entry are not owned by or licensed to a party outside QUT.

Applications close September 7 at 5pm and entries will be judged by a panel of experts on their novelty, inventiveness and commercial potential.

The winners will be announced at the QUT Postgraduate and Research Showcase in September.

Entries are not open to projects with which qutbluebox is currently involved.

For more information visit www.qutbluebox.com.au.

► THE QUT POSTGRADUATE & RESEARCH SHOWCASE will be held from September 17 to 21. Visit www.qut.com/postgradshowcase for details.

Survey winners are grinners



Surveys

EMMA O'Brien, Melissa Darwen and Philip Okayo, pictured at left, have grins from ear-to-ear after winning \$200 Myer vouchers simply by filling in last semester's Learning Experience Survey.

First-year students will also have the chance to win one of three \$200 Myer vouchers or four iPod shuffles by completing the First Year Experience Survey (FYES) from August 6 to 26.

Accessed via QUT Virtual, it is open to all first-year undergraduate students who have been enrolled in their current course for one semester.

The survey gives students the chance to contribute to the quality of student life at QUT by giving feedback on their experiences of their new courses, interactions with other staff and students, and with support services and facilities at QUT.

Unlike last semester's survey, the FYES is about the whole experience of studying in a new undergraduate course at QUT and life as a first-year uni student so far.

The feedback received from this survey will help QUT to ensure that all students enjoy a positive academic and social experience of student life.

The FYES will be available online and should take only 10 minutes to complete.

Students count on maths support

Mathematics

BOOSTING the maths and statistics skills of Australian university students could be one of the keys to reducing tertiary attrition rates, according to a leading QUT academic.

Professor Helen MacGillivray from the School of Mathematical Sciences said students were arriving at universities with maths skills that were in need of improvement for a number of reasons – regardless of what type of degree they were embarking on.

"In all types of universities, the need for extra learning support in

mathematics and statistics has been increasing rapidly over the past decade," she said.

"Students from all faculties, in courses such as nursing, engineering, science, IT, business and even postgraduate studies, are seeking – sometimes desperately – maths and statistics support for their learning and survival.

"Factors of this increasing student need include changes in school educational emphasis over the past 15 years, diversity of entry pathways, increased pressures on universities, decreased numbers of mathematics and statistics providers, and the increasingly

quantitative and problem-solving needs of a modern technological society."

Professor MacGillivray is conducting a national learning and teaching project which is looking at mathematics and statistics support in Australian universities.

The project has been funded by the Carrick Institute, which receives Federal Government funding to manage its competitive grants and awards.

QUT recently hosted an international symposium as part of the project, which gathered together Australian and British experts on supporting learning in maths and statistics.

Professor MacGillivray said everyone did mathematics – whether they knew it or not.

"Thinking in patterns – or algebraic thinking – trains us to tackle messy real problems in a systematic, logical and consistent way. It's the most important aspect of all quantitative problem-solving," she said.

"Behind students' increasing need for support is the theme common across disciplines: mathematical and statistical thinking and skills are as fundamental to learning and the ability to learn, as language."

- Mechelle McMahon