

Griffith 2015: Beyond Top 10

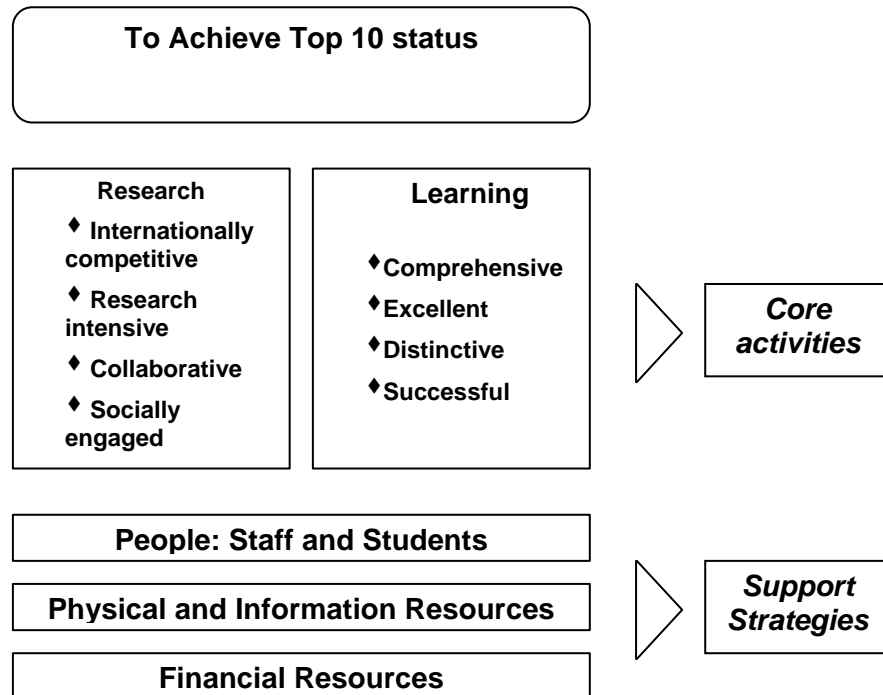
Colleagues

In March I hosted a series of campus meetings to brief staff on current progress, the key issues that the University faces, and responses to those issues. At the heart of the presentation was an invitation to the University to think beyond 2010 to imagine and create the university in 2015.

In this paper I briefly summarise what has been achieved – indeed much progress has been made towards our top ten goals – before suggesting we still need to shift the goal posts somewhat as we plan beyond 2010.

In 2002 University Council endorsed the *Griffith Project*, and shortly after the associated strategic plan. In 2005, following a review of our progress and broad consultation, Council endorsed a refocused strategic plan for the period 2006-2010. The strategic plan sharpened our focus – rendering explicit that our top ten aspirations were in the core areas of research and learning. We set precise targets that were scaleable and measurable at the Group and subgroup level. The plan recognised that achievement of our aspirations in research and learning required recruiting and retaining excellent staff and students, and aligning and acquiring financial and other resources to support these activities. Equity and engagement were not distinct areas of activities – but rather are core features of our learning and research activities, in ways that differentiate us from others in the sector.

It is now two years since the plan was approved, and we are within sight of the end of the decade for which the current plan provides. Much has been achieved and much has changed in the strategic environment in which we operate. It is therefore appropriate for us to look beyond 2010, and to begin to think about the priorities and directions for the University in the second decade of the 21st century.



In this first section I report our progress against our strategic agenda. (For full details of performance against targets – see www.griffith.edu.au/vc/). While there are many challenges there is clear evidence that progress is being made. In the later sections, I outline the new priorities that the University must address if we are to become the world class University we all want Griffith to be.

Progress – Research

We have set ourselves ambitious targets in research. A core strategy to achieve these targets was the creation of strategic research programs to consolidate and leverage our areas of international strength. Five programs were identified (Australian rivers institute; democracy, security and public policy; drug discovery; environments for healthy living; and social change and wellbeing). There is significant evidence that this focus is already delivering results. Our water researchers have attracted multimillion dollar grants for the Smart Water facility at the Gold Coast and for the Tropical Rivers and Coastal Knowledge network under the umbrella of the Australian Rivers Institute. Our biomedical researchers are achieving similar success in Glycomics, adult stem cells and most recently the \$13 million grant to Eskitis as the Queensland node of the Cancer CRC. 2006 has delivered us a significant increase in ARC income and placed Griffith 11/12 on dollars per researcher and total income. We broke through on NHMRC fellowships (achieving the same number as UQ for the first time). Our total research income and dollars per researcher increased for the first time in two years.

Further evidence of the success of this strategic focus on research strengths is the recent announcement by Minister Bishop that Griffith will host Australia's first Centre of Excellence for Policing and Security. Under the ARC's Special Research Initiatives funding scheme, the Australian Government will provide \$10 million over five years

to the Centre of Excellence which will play an important role in helping to understand the origins, motivations and dynamics of security threats such as crime and terrorism.

We have formed a number of significant international collaborations (including with Peking University and the Ministry for Environment Indonesia). Particularly pleasing was the results of the Williams and Van Dyke (University of Melbourne) rankings of disciplines in Australian universities. In all but two of the fields reviewed, Griffith was already top ten or within one or two points of this status. (For further details, see: http://www.melbourneinstitute.com/publications/reports/dr_aus_uni/default.html)

The major disappointment for the year was our success rates for ARC discovery and NHRMC grants. In both cases many more staff applied than in previous years, pushing our application numbers up, but not our success rate.

Summary research scorecard

- ✓ Strategic Research Programs
- ✓ ARC income
- ✓ NHMRC fellowships
- ✓ Total research income
- ✓ PhD completions
- ✓ International links and research partnerships
- ✓ Williams and Van Dyke - rankings
- ✗ ARC success rate and NHMRC success rate

Progress – Learning

Much has also been achieved in the learning domain. Consistent with our goal of a **comprehensive** program profile we have successfully developed the curriculum, the facilities and the staff to offer a suite of new professional programs, as well as reinvigorating existing programs. We were successful in our lobbying of the Commonwealth for places for these programs.

We have enrolled more students than ever before and have met our total targets for student load. Unfortunately this has not been uniformly the case, with some disciplines and campuses experiencing demand difficulties. There also remains significant softness in our postgraduate coursework numbers, with mixed results across academic groups. Employment rates have improved for Griffith graduates and are very good for some programs, but others need further improvement.

For the last couple of years we have focused attention on the first year experience. It is therefore pleasing to report that there are early signs that retention of domestic students may be improving slightly, although this is still a key area of concern.

In 2006 we refocused our school liaison program through the establishment of the *Griffith Connect Partner Schools program* and reinvigorated our scholarship program through the establishment of the *Sir Samuel Griffith Scholarships*. I have no doubt

that these initiatives provide the basis for enhanced relationships and access to students in the corridor.

Our 2007 intake saw mixed outcomes. There was an overall decline in the proportion and numbers of students in the state choosing Griffith as their first choice for university study. On the positive side we should meet our total load commitments, we offered more places to high OP students than in previous years, and we had higher conversion rates of offers to enrolments. Our demand for South Bank and the Gold Coast (in most disciplines) remains very strong. On the negative side in many programs we had a longer OP tail than last year and we had demand problems on the Nathan and Logan campuses. There are a number of reasons for falling demand. In part it reflects the national demand trends. This is exacerbated on a number of campuses where we are perceived as the number 2 or 3 player in the market. In consequence when our two main competitors drop their entry scores there is a knock-on effect for Griffith.

Griffith's participation rate for students with a disability has increased from 2.61 in 2001 to 4.45 in 2005, well above the national average of 3.96. The success and retention rates for Griffith's students with a disability are also above the national rates. Participation and success of Indigenous Australian students at Griffith is also strong compared to national figures, although there is further progress to be made. However, Griffith's access and participation for students from a low socio economic status background has fallen and is below state and national averages.

The university has maintained its outstanding success in recruiting international students. But with that success has come challenges, including ensuring an appropriate balance across all of the university's programs. Griffith relies heavily on on-shore enrolments of international students and the university will need to consider how to best balance this profile by more off shore partnerships including teaching, research and engagement. While Griffith has long included international perspectives in many programs, it has not yet internationalised its curriculum as completely as desirable. Griffith has already responded to the emerging issue of English language proficiency by embedding English language support within academic programs. However, there are indications that the degree will no longer be a sufficient certification of English language proficiency and we will have to consider whether Griffith international graduates will need an exit test in English that has international credibility such as IELTS.

Summary learning scorecard

- ✓ New programs
- ✓ New places
- ✓ Retention improvement (possibly)
- ✓ Scholarship and school partner program
- ✓ Scale – quantum
- ✓ International enrolments
- ✗ Discipline and campus issues
 - Graduate employment and postgraduate coursework
 - Student equity
 - Internationalisation of curriculum

Progress – staff

Achievement of our strategic agenda depends on retaining and recruiting excellent staff. Over the past year we have appointed over 100 academic staff and many professional support staff. In a tight academic market this is an excellent outcome. In addition a key platform for strengthening Griffith's research performance was the commitment to *Next Phase* strategic research appointments. We aimed to make 6 appointments in 2006 but I am pleased to report that 13 appointments were made. All of these staff will be counted in the RQF.

The implementation of *Academic Work@Griffith* is a major achievement. It provides the foundation for allocating, recognising and rewarding academic work in a manner consistent with the strengths and goals of individual staff members.

Summary staff scorecard

- ✓ Strategic recruitment – 13 next phase appointments
- ✓ Successfully recruited to develop our new programs
- ✓ *Academic Work @ Griffith*

Progress – resources

Attracting and retaining great staff and students to deliver excellent outcomes requires resources and we have made strong progress in this domain. The success of our strategic research programs in areas such as water, stem cells, cancer research and other areas have delivered nearly \$50 million to support research in those domains.

Last year we transformed the budget model to ensure that it is transparent, aligns with priorities, rewards high performance and promotes attention to both income and expenditure (http://www.griffith.edu.au/vc/key_issues/pdf/growing_griffith.pdf). This model directs an increased proportion of funds to the academic groups.

Our capital program has continued to deliver great new facilities and significant refurbishments on all campuses.

Project Streamline has been working away at refining administrative processes to ensure they are as efficient and effective as possible. The recently announced changes to leave and travel policies are examples of such overdue changes. We are also in the process of rolling out desktop video conferencing software, and enhancing our room based videoconferencing to greatly reduce the need for intercampus travel.

The establishment of our Development and Alumni office has brought a long overdue resource into the university and we hope the office will help schools to better service providers and donors as well as help increase our fundraising potential and connections to alumni generally.

Summary resources scorecard

- ✓ Transformation of budget model to align with priorities
- ✓ Success in external grants (stem cells, water, cancer, etc)
- ✓ Capital program – fantastic buildings, improved campus look and feel
- ✓ Established development and alumni office
- ✓ More efficient use of resources. Will continue streamlining process
- ✓ Reduce intercampus travel

The Griffith Project and beyond

Five years ago we embarked on the *Griffith Project*. It was a response to the need to reawaken the potential of this great university by seeking to lift performance to become a top 10 university. Underpinning this goal was a recognition that the world in which Griffith operated was increasingly competitive. The top 10 goal was expressed as a university goal, and measured against indicators which operated at the university level – but were not scaleable at the Group or School level.

In 2005 we reviewed our progress, and recognised that much remained to be done. The revised strategic plan sharpened the strategic agenda by clearly articulating our research and learning goals and created targets that were at the group and sub group level. We report twice a year to University Council on our progress. As is evident from the above summary we have made significant progress on this path.

But as Griffith has changed so too has the sector and the context in which we operate. These contextual changes necessitate further focusing of our agenda as we plan for the next decade to forge a distinctive and sustainable identity. I have detailed these challenges below.

The major contextual challenges

Declining demand: For the first time in a generation, universities are facing declining demand. There are a number of reasons for this including (in some states) demographic change and a strong labour market. This fall in demand coincides with a major increase in available tertiary places. Universities have historically been producer focused with limited attention to consumer need or demand.

Declining resources from government: Over the past fifteen years universities have become increasingly reliant on student contributions and student fees. As costs have risen and the dollars per student declined in real terms, staff student ratios have increased dramatically. We have been cushioned from this decline in recent years because of our capacity to charge an additional 25% of HECS, and the Commonwealth addition of 2.5% per year to the operating grant in return for meeting governance and employment requirements. The full impact of these changes come to an end in 2009 placing further pressure on the budget.

Increased national competition: The higher education market is highly competitive. Universities such as Griffith face increased competition from both the top and bottom. The sandstone universities offer prestige, quality and brand. At the other end of the market the introduction of fee help has enabled private providers to compete on price, offering programs which are high volume and low cost. Every university will need clarity about its value proposition.

Uncertain international environment: The future for international enrolments is uncertain because of increased competition from Australian universities, from university exporters from other countries such as the UK and a rebounding US, and from developing countries such as Singapore, Malaysia, China and India which are investing heavily in higher education both for their domestic students and to attract international students. Problems with travel, health, terrorism or conflict may emerge which would reduce parents' and governments' willingness to send students overseas for their education. The Pro Vice Chancellor (International) in collaboration with Academic PVCs is actively exploring opportunities for offshore partnerships, focussing on 'the big 3': China, India and the Middle East.

Growth: Our strategy has been underpinned by a commitment to grow the student load of the University. There have been a number of reasons for this strategy. First we are committed to meeting the educational needs of the Gold Coast community – an area which is still significantly underprovided in government funded places. Secondly, growing our load has allowed an expansion in the university's disciplines and programs. The growth of the Gold Coast campus and our move into new program areas has meant that in recent years Griffith has faced issues from growth rather than decline. However with the apparent fall in demand it is timely to ask whether Griffith should continue to seek growth, and where it should occur. There is concern in some areas of the University this year that OPs scores may be too low in some programs. If this is the case, it may be that we should put a floor under the OPs in some programs and accept the consequences (including the implications for staffing numbers).

Rankings: The emergence in the last three years of local and international rankings is impacting on the positioning and reputation of all universities.

(<http://www.griffith.edu.au/conference/university-rankings/>) While our performance on the Williams and Van Dyke rankings is pleasing, our failure to make the Shanghai Jao Tung rankings and our omission from the Times Higher Education Rankings is of considerable concern. The available evidence suggests that we are within striking distance on each of these rankings, but achieving a ranked performance will take focused attention, resources and time. Our non appearance impacts on our future ability to attract significant overseas grants, government scholarships, students and potentially staff in some domains. The DVC (Research) has developed a rankings strategy to address this issue.

Research Quality Framework and the Australian University Quality Agency: In 2008 Griffith faces RQF and a Quality audit. Both will impact on the reputation of the University and both will require significant internal investment of time and resources to ensure positive outcomes for Griffith.

Diversity: Since her appointment Minister Bishop has argued that there is space for only a limited number of “comprehensive research intensive universities”. She has challenged universities to differentiate their missions, focus and programs. Regardless of the outcome of the forthcoming federal election the diversity debate is a live one and Griffith needs to be clear about how we differentiate ourselves from our local competitors and the sector.

Location: Griffith is a multi-campus university. This is a strength in that it locates us across the fastest growing corridor in the country. It is also a challenge requiring clarity about the value of each campus, and how we best leverage those.

Capital: A number of our significant competitors have substantial long term investments. This provides them with great financial flexibility. Griffith is not so positioned. We must leverage our existing income strategically to take advantage of opportunities. We must also strongly promote our development activities so that they can provide funding support for our long term aspirations.

The pace of change is increasing in higher education. To prosper and succeed in this environment we need to play to our strengths and assets. This requires the University to shift its gaze beyond 2010 – which is almost upon us – and plan for the next decade.

Our strengths

Griffith has 6 major institutional strengths.

- *Our ethos:* Innovative, engaged and entrepreneurial ethos reflected through a history of innovative programs, social dividend research and activity, knowledge transfer and community engagement.
- *Our peaks:* ‘peaks of excellence’ in research and learning.

- *Our interdisciplinary orientation* –finding solutions without boundaries.
- *Timely*: We have great strengths in the key issues of our time: globalisation, the economy, society and the environment.
- *Health*: Our investment in the health area is auspicious given the impact of changing demography.
- *Our location* – the bookends and presence in the fastest growing corridor in the country. South Bank - the heart of the cultural precinct in Brisbane, and the Gold Coast – the fastest growing part of the country.

We need to be *distinctive and excellent* (note - distinctive does not equal excellent) and we need to play to those strengths and assets.

Griffith 2015

Five years ago Griffith embraced the top 10 objective with a 2010 planning horizon. As a university we have made great progress, but as discussed above there are still major challenges ahead. With 2010 in sight, it is important to extend our planning horizon into the years beyond the end of this decade as well as consider whether top 10 remains an appropriate ambition.

My proposition is that we build on our achievements and strengths to further differentiate Griffith. In so doing we will continue to promote both our distinctiveness and excellence. Put simply we must further refine our strategy by capitalising on our peaks of excellence and leveraging the strengths of our multi-campus university. The core elements of our future strategy involve promoting and projecting the peaks of the university – our peaks in research and learning – and focusing our campuses to ensure that each offers a distinct value. Careful execution of this strategy should allow us to seize the initiative rather than engage on territory defined by others.

We aim to be recognised as one of Australia’s great universities. Currently this is expressed through our “top 10” commitment. As we plan beyond 2010 it is necessary to consider whether “top 10” is still an appropriate indicator of our aspirations or ambitions. There are very few universities in the world that are ranked highly in all disciplines, but all top ranking universities have one or more fields in which they are widely recognised as being amongst the best in the world. In Australia, top 10 means only that we are in the top third (or half in some discipline areas) of universities in Australia. For Griffith to achieve international recognition, we need selected fields that are in the top 3 or 4 in Australia and in the top 200 to 300 in the world. In these peak areas we should aspire to be the destination of choice for students and staff. Recognition as a great university necessitates aiming beyond top 10 in a number of selected fields.

This does not mean that we should totally drop our top 10 goal; rather we need to recognise that it is not ambitious enough at one level to achieve our purpose. It remains relevant as an overall quality measure where we can easily benchmark with the sector – and thus I do not propose that we abandon existing targets and timelines.

The second element of the strategy is to focus our campuses. We have not taken full advantage of our multiple campuses. Each campus provides us with the opportunity to identify and project its distinct focus or flavour – its distinct value to different communities of interest.

On closer examination South Bank, Mt Gravatt, Logan and the Gold Coast already have greater or less focus – a particular flavour. We need to identify Nathan’s focus, develop program and research profiles that reflect each campus’ flavour and promote each campus’ distinctive claims to excellence. One way of characterising campuses in the future *might be*:

Brisbane – South Bank – the creative and performing arts campus;

Brisbane - Mt Gravatt – social interventions: education, psychology and criminology;

Brisbane - Nathan – we need to identify, focus and build on Nathan’s strengths to establish and project a distinctive position for the campus. In addition we should continue to attract external activities on campus.

Logan – a truly community campus;

Gold Coast – our comprehensive campus with a key responsibility as the major public provider in the region. We should take full advantage of the potential offered by the co-location of the Gold Coast hospital on campus. Griffith should be embraced locally as *The Gold Coast’s University*.

Within this suggested framework, each campus would have distinct claims to excellence and offer a distinct value proposition which we systematically project.

Such an approach would capitalise on our strengths – and our realities as a multi-campus institution. It will clearly differentiate us from the rest of the sector and at the same time ensure we continue the push for distinctive and well recognised areas of excellence.

Griffith 2015 – getting there

The adoption of this vision of *Griffith 2015* will require some short and long term thinking and strategy.

Peaks of excellence

Moving from generic top 10 to peaks of excellence will require several steps:

1. Achieving and projecting benchmarked performance in peaks. This requires the identification of peaks which are internationally competitive and replacing top 10 with quantitative targets necessary for international discipline rankings.
2. Focusing campus profiles around their strengths.
3. Projecting program profiles in peaks.

4. Aligning our resources to support strategy. We must continue to attract and retain the best staff.
5. Aligning our marketing and communications with this strategy.

Campus focus

Promoting and projecting the focus of each campus will also require a number of steps:

1. Identifying the distinctive focus/ flavour of each campus and commencing the process of reflecting the campus focus in future academic planning for each campus.
2. In the short term identifying, launching and promoting distinctive Griffith teaching programs – programs for a new world – for the 2008/ 2009 intake primarily based at Nathan which reflect the distinctive strengths of this campus.
3. Leveraging our investment in the Gold Coast so that we are the preferred destination for Gold Coast students.
4. Planning for the expansion of health, education, science, environment, engineering and technology at the Gold Coast to leverage the opportunity presented by the co-location of the Gold Coast University Hospital.
5. Investing in the student experience on each campus to support students' clubs and activities.

Projecting profile and distinctiveness

Projecting the profile and distinctiveness of each campus will require the following:

1. A comprehensive, strategic communication, marketing and industry engagement strategy with leadership and accountability to lead implementation.
2. We need to market and communicate our peaks and promote campuses.
3. We must promote the international positioning of Griffith by seeking opportunities to forge partnerships that enhance reputation such as our relationships with Peking University and other prestigious partners.

In summary, the University needs to:

- take the steps as outlined above immediately and commence the process to formalise the strategy;
- move from the *Griffith Project* to *Griffith 2015*, further accelerating and sharpening the strategy;
- move from the generic *top 10* to peaks of excellence (while retaining top 10 as a quality benchmark against the sector where appropriate);
- establish a *distinctive* focus for each campus reflecting its peaks;
- *project the program profile* in peaks;
- project Griffith as the *Gold Coast's University*; and
- invest more in the student experience.

Where to from here?

The University is operating in a competitive and changing environment. We need to create our own future in a tight resource environment. This paper proposes a strategy to position the University for the long term. I have raised the issues in campus meetings and I invite your feedback on the central strategic propositions:

- that the University makes the transition from aiming for top 10 across the board to developing peaks of excellence;
- identify and project those peaks of excellence;
- embrace our multi-campus identity by identifying, focusing and projecting campus focuses/flavours externally.

It is not my intention at this stage to revise the Strategic Plan, which will serve us well to the end of the decade. However, it is my view that the implementation of the Strategic Plan should, subject to views expressed in response to this paper, be informed by the priorities it identifies.

As immediate actions I have requested that:

1 the Deputy Vice Chancellor (Research) lead implementation of the Griffith Rankings strategy.

2 the Director, External Relations, develop a comprehensive, strategic communication, marketing and industry engagement strategy and that she report to me by August 2007.

3 the Deputy Vice Chancellor (Academic) lead a consultative project on the academic future of the Nathan Campus, consistent with the strategy outlined above and that he provide an interim report to me by August 2007.

4 on my recommendation, the May meeting of Council appointed the DVC(A) as the Provost of the Nathan Campus.

5 the Deputy Vice Chancellor (Academic) assume responsibility for campus academic planning, and in consultation with campus provosts provide advice on any necessary changes to the strategic, academic and research plans that might result from the proposals above.

6 Over the past two years the scope of the DVC (Academic) position has increased substantially. Dealing with the Nathan issue in the short term and the campus planning as part of the academic planning processes will require significant attention over the next few years. On my recommendation, the May meeting of Council established a new full time senior leadership position (*Pro-Vice Chancellor, Learning and Student Outcomes*) which will be responsible for assisting the DVC(A) to implement key strategies concerning learning and teaching, the student experience and student outcomes including graduate employment. The position will also be responsible for student equity initiatives including the GUMURRII Student Support Unit. The PVC (Learning and Student Outcomes) will report to the DVC(A) and will be funded in 2007 and 2008 out of the Vice Chancellor's strategic development fund.

7 Additional supports for student based activities will be addressed in the University Budget. The Pro Vice Chancellor (Administration) to bring forward recommendations on this project.

8 The PVC International will continue to pursue opportunities for international partnerships which enhance the standing of the University.

I will report progress on these matters to Council and the University community in August.

Ian O'Connor
Vice Chancellor and President
May 2007