

# Medical School Student Aspirations and Support Strategy 2024-2026



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## Introduction

The University of Queensland (UQ) Medical School Student Aspirations and Support Strategy (2024-2026) aims to enhance the culture, pathways, and support processes for Medical School students. It delineates the services provided and approach taken by the Medical School Student Support Team, Academic Guidance Leads, Personal Advisor Network and Medical School academic and professional staff.

**Our overarching goal is to enable all students to reach their full potential by facilitating a culture of sustainable proactive and reactive student support. We present the following key focus areas for 2024-2026.**

## Key focus areas

### 1. Medical School organisation, planning and policy

Our students are part of a community of collegiate support. Student support and guidance is embedded as core business throughout the Medical School. Excellence in student support is central to our culture and curricula.

Academic guidance, remediation, and individualised learning, as well as career advice, mentoring, reactive support, and specific targeted proactive support at key transition points is provided. We also provide specific support for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, international students, and students with disabilities.

#### Focus and objectives 2024-2026

Student support and academic guidance has been successfully embedded within the Doctor

of Medicine (MD) program with increased engagement in support activities since the introduction of the Medical Student Support Strategy in 2018.

In January 2023, the services provided by the Medical Student Support Team were broadened. The team, now known as the Medical School Student Support Team (MSST), provides dedicated support to all coursework students enrolled in Medical School programs, including students in the MD, postgraduate Medicine (Skin Cancer) and Mental Health programs.

The Medical School is committed to providing targeted, high impact and quality student support and this work will continue with key areas being to:

- Further refine, explore and strengthen regular communication with students through the Learn.UQ course sites, newsletters, face-to-face webinars and tailored email communications (when appropriate).
- Support the development and management of local engagement events and activities that foster a strong sense of belonging for students.
- Continue to improve clarity for staff and students about the role of student support and guidance services and reiterate the separate and confidential nature of the MSST from academic guidance, career advice and mentoring services.
- Continue to develop and implement professional development opportunities for staff, especially those in clinical schools/units, to enhance the culture, structures, and processes of providing support to students.
- Collaborate with students to actively investigate and implement strategies aimed at enhancing equity, diversity, and inclusion within our community where all people are encouraged and able to be their authentic selves. Work together to explore innovative approaches and initiatives that promote a more inclusive and equitable environment for everyone.
- Improve awareness of the support available to survivors of sexual assault and harassment, facilitate access to sexual misconduct training for both staff and students, and cultivate a cultural shift in the clinical environment to discourage normalising abusive behaviour.

## 2. Supporting student wellbeing

To support the mental health and wellbeing of students, the Medical School engages Student Services to provide targeted support services through the MSST. Established in 2018 as part of the Medical Student Support Strategy, the MSST provides dedicated support to Medical School students for all wellbeing needs, including education and resources on preventative mental health strategies, and refers to other services as required. The MSST plays no role in the provision of academic advice or academic progression decision making and safeguards student confidentiality. This is key to removing any perceived barriers to students seeking support.

### Focus and objectives 2024-2026

#### The MSST will:

- Normalise help seeking behaviours and assist students to develop skills and resources to manage stress and improve wellbeing.
- Support students during the identified key transition periods: commencement of the program, commencement of full-time clinical placement and in preparation for internship upon graduation.
- Raise awareness in the student cohort about the services and resources available through Student Services including the Student Advice Team who assist with the provision of student access plans, the UQ Learning Advisors who assist students to build key skills to support their learning, and the UQ Counselling Team and crisis line.
- Develop and provide a range of tailored, proactive activities and resources designed to improve the mental health of students and to assist students to develop skills in identifying and responding to peers who may be experiencing a mental health challenge.
- Continue to improve and develop strategies to improve the health and wellbeing of students, including self-care and wellbeing resources focussing on preventative mental health strategies and signposting where to access support.
- Collect and report de-identified appointment data on presenting conditions of students seeking support to assist in informing quality reviews and planning proactive education programs.
- Support individual students through appropriate triage and referral to relevant

services in response to the student's individual needs, e.g. students returning to study after a period of ill health, interruption to studies, personal crisis, etc.

- Provide targeted information and support to assist students who may be exposed to bullying, harassment and/or discrimination.
- Respond to critical events and crises, e.g. provide support to students following critical incidents, perform welfare checks on students as referred by the community, and support students impacted by natural disasters and global events.
- Promote trauma informed pathways of support available for staff and students.

### 3. Academic guidance

Our aspiration is to enable all our students to reach their full academic potential. Academic guidance and support are offered to students experiencing difficulties with their studies. Guidance and advice on enrichment

opportunities are also provided to high achieving students. Academic guidance is provided by many stakeholders across the Medical School including specific Academic Guidance Leads, supported by the Deputy Heads of the Learning Communities in the MD program, and Course Coordinators in other Medical School programs.

We use a collaborative and embedded stepped-care model of academic guidance and support. Evidence-informed strategies, matched to the level of need, are utilised. This stepped-care model ensures that:

- Leadership and culture underpin support for our students.
- Consistent advice and resources are provided to students.
- Student support is embedded in the curriculum.
- Students have access to personal advising, support and mentoring.



- There is proactive academic guidance for students identified as requiring extra assistance and for high achieving students.
- Students may be referred by a staff member, identified through their performance in their studies or may self-refer for academic guidance and support.

In keeping with the principles of a stepped-care model, academic guidance is best provided to medical students within the clinical unit of the Learning Community supported by the Deputy Heads of each year group. Specific guidance is provided, as needed, by the relevant Course Coordinator and Clinical Educator both within the MD program and across other Medical School programs. The Academic Guidance Leads provide case management support for MD staff and students in situations where there are complex needs.

## Focus and objectives 2024-2026

### All Medical School programs

- Empower students to be self-directed and lifelong learners.
- Encourage students to seek advice and support early.
- Proactively reach out to students and provide support and referrals to appropriate services tailored to a student's situation (e.g. students returning from an interruption of studies or students facing challenges either due to unforeseen/extenuating circumstances or ill health).
- Support clinical unit academic staff, Course Coordinators and clinical teachers to support individual students.
- Continue a proactive approach to provision of academic enrichment opportunities and career guidance.





### MD program

- Actively contribute to monthly Student Wellbeing and Success Team meetings to support and guide at-risk medical students.
- Work in partnership with our clinical units, to develop and enhance clinical site-based academic guidance and support initiatives for medical students.
- Increase involvement of clinical unit staff in proactively identifying academically at-risk medical students and the provision of academic guidance and support.
- Academic Guidance Leads, in collaboration with the MSST, will provide case management in cases where there are complex needs.

## 4. Medical careers

The Student Enrichment and Employability Development Team promotes and coordinates a number of initiatives which seek to strengthen the range of global, professional and leadership experiences offered to UQ students. The team provides a range of experiences and support services with the aim of enhancing employability, including student leadership, professional and practical experiences and careers support. Further information about these services can be found on the [Careers and Employability](#) website.

In addition to the careers information, advice and opportunities provided to all UQ students, Medical School students are provided with the following additional specific careers advice and guidance.

- The [Building Your Medical Career](#) website, developed in 2019, is a platform to disseminate career information and resources and promote career opportunities to medical students. This website was updated in 2023, following input from the Mayne Academics.
- Careers information is delivered in a consistent approach across the programs.
- Individual careers advice and opportunities are provided to students.

### Focus and objectives 2024-2026

#### All Medical School programs

- Develop a dedicated Medical Careers network for all Medical School students.
- Continue to support student-led initiatives such as careers events.
- Continue to develop, maintain, and update online medical careers resources.



- Work in partnership with the UQ Employability Team.
- Support the “spotlight on” campaign focussing on role models in science, technology, engineering, mathematics, and medicine (STEMM).

#### **MD program**

- Work in partnership with the Heads of Mayne Academies and Ochsner Clinical School Medical Society Heads to provide careers advice to medical students and recruit career mentors.
- Work with the clinical schools to identify local medical career champions with a particular focus on rural and regional careers.
- Ensure tailored careers advice is provided for our international medical students.

## **5. Equality, diversity, disability and inclusion**

We are committed to providing a welcoming, respectful, and inclusive workplace and learning environment that is safe, where all people are encouraged and able to be their authentic selves. Our program values diversity and inclusion. Students with disability are valued

and supported. The Faculty of Medicine and Medical School’s firm and proactive commitment to supporting efforts for greater diversity and inclusion is reiterated in the statement below.

*Diverse perspectives, abilities, experiences and backgrounds inspire creativity, encourage innovation, and enrich our communities.*

*Members of our broad community are valued and respected for their individuality. UQ strives to create a culturally safe, welcoming and inclusive workplace, with strong community connections and partnerships.*

### **Focus and objectives 2024-2026**

- Promote visibility in the workplace and Learning Communities by providing options for staff and students to identify they are an ally by displaying visible organisational support on persons and in places and spaces.
- Support the implementation of the preferred names and pronouns network across internal forms and/or systems.
- Ensure that age, creed, disability, ethnic origin, gender, nationality, race, sexual orientation, social standing or any other factor is no barrier to connecting people with supports, flexibility, development opportunities and networks in line with the Declaration of Geneva.





- Facilitate access of staff to UQ LGBTQIA+ Inclusion training.
- Promote visibility of UQ support available for trans and gender diverse students.
- Support staff and student participation in the Bi-Annual Gender Equality Forum.
- Support students who may require ongoing or temporary reasonable adjustments to access equitable learning with student access plans.
- Continue to review and improve the processes of communication of student access plans to relevant Medical School stakeholders.
- Promote and encourage staff to complete the Supporting Students with Reasonable Adjustments online training module.
- Explore ways to support an increased number of students from low socioeconomic backgrounds to join and thrive, including connecting with the Young Achievers Program.

## 6. Supporting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students

As set out in the UQ Reconciliation Action Plan, *“Our vision is to build a strong sense of belonging in an inclusive UQ that works respectfully with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, staff, and communities in teaching, learning, research and collaboration – embracing and enhancing the best of our nation’s and the world’s diversity.”* Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students are linked with the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies Unit at the time of admission into our programs to enable provision of integrated and transformative support.

### Focus and objectives 2024-2026

#### All Medical School programs

- Continue to work with the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies Unit to provide support to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students from the time of admission.
- Work with the Associate Dean (Indigenous Engagement) and their team to foster respectful relationships and an environment of cultural safety that is free of racism and discrimination.

- Facilitate participation of students in the annual Australian Indigenous Doctors' Association (AIDA) conference.

### MD program

- Continue to provide support to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander medical students, including the additional pre-orientation program, tutoring in Years 1 and 2 through the Indigenous Tutorial Assistance and Retention (ITAR) program and Objective Structured Clinical Examination (OSCE) preparation activities.

## 7. Personal Advisor Network and Personal Advisor Rural Network

The Personal Advisor Network (PAN) provides targeted and individualised support for medical students to help foster a spirit of community and connectedness. Each student entering the MD program is invited to join the PAN and be assigned a personal advisor, who plays a valuable role in guiding and shaping the experience of medical students. The Personal Advisor Rural Network (PARN) is a subset of the PAN. The PARN has been established with the specific purpose of encouraging medical students with a rural perspective and supporting rural origin medical students or those interested in pursuing a medical career in rural and remote communities. While it is not mandatory for medical students to participate in the PAN, it is strongly encouraged.

Personal advisors are members of UQ staff or have a formal UQ affiliation and have experience in medicine or in working with medical students. From 2023, Year 1 medical students will be allocated a personal advisor from their Learning Community with the aim of further facilitating and supporting these community connections and sense of belonging.

With the establishment of the Learning Communities in 2023, the administration of the PAN has transitioned to the Greater Brisbane Clinical School and the administration of the PARN has transitioned to the Rural Clinical School. While day-to-day administration will be managed by the Learning Communities at a local level, the Medical School Executive Administration Team remain a central point of contact and support for the Learning Communities to ensure a consistent experience is provided to medical students and personal advisors.



## Focus and objectives 2024-2026

- Continue to offer all MD students a personal advisor.
- Continue to recruit personal advisors, and further refine personal advisor training and resources.
- Conduct formal evaluation of the PAN and PARN schemes, including the role of Chronus.
- Support a natural environment for mentorship connections to be formed within the Learning Communities.
- Consider expanding PAN to the postgraduate Medicine (Skin Cancer) and Mental Health programs, noting mentorship is currently offered to Master of Medicine (Skin Cancer) students.

## Conclusion

The focus areas and objectives described in this Strategy outline our philosophical approach to student support and clarify the ways in which we commit to providing our students with support and guidance to enable them to achieve their full potential. Our goal is excellence in student support, and we will embed evaluation and ongoing improvements to maintain high standards.



**For more information**

[medical-school.uq.edu.au](http://medical-school.uq.edu.au)



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