31 March 2020

To our student and parent community,

At the moment it seems we wake every day to a fresh sense of dread about the tragic spread of COVID-19. Beyond the health impact of the virus, it’s setting off a ripple-effect that is destabilising many of our economic and social norms. The plight of those who have lost their jobs or are battling the virus is always foremost in our thoughts.

As we’ve seen in other countries, most Australians are now faced with the prospect of spending a long period at home. The implications of this will be different for each of us, depending on our individual work, family or household circumstances. However, we know this will be particularly challenging for our students who are ‘putting on hold’ many of the freedoms that come with university life.

Students across the globe are facing multiple challenges. Our students are concerned about the loss of their casual jobs, studying in an online environment, and only able to socialise with friends and peers within the constraints of physical distancing.

As a university we too are unable to do what we normally do. Right now, we cannot influence employment arrangements for our students, and nor can we provide an equivalent social experience for them. But what we can do — and are doing — is fulfilling our commitment to keep students on track with their studies and prepare them to be the next generation of leaders and innovators equipped to respond to global challenges just like this. And, as much as we can, we will keep them connected to one another and the University.

I am proud of our students. They have taken the Government’s advice seriously. They have accepted that their study experiences this semester will be different. I applaud their commitment to hunker down and get through this very difficult period. By doing so, they are able to progress their futures in a meaningful way.

To every UQ parent — none of us could have envisaged this would be the experience for our students during Semester 1. Every measure we have put in place and every difficult decision taken has been to protect the safety and wellbeing of our students, staff and the broader community. We must all do our bit.

Personally, I miss walking around the Great Court and watching these amazing students absorb all the opportunities a university education provides. I miss the casual interactions at coffee shops or overhearing our students talk about their day-to-day experiences.

I want our students and the broader community to hang in there. Even though there is a great deal of uncertainty right now, UQ is determined to make this year a pivotal moment in our history.

As an institution, it is a time to demonstrate what we stand for. We are focused on owning the unknown. Our researchers are leading the way in creating a vaccine for COVID-19. Our teachers are focused on ensuring every student can continue to reach their potential.

In the coming decades, such leadership will be expressed through our students and future graduates. Seeing our way through the current difficulties together, will mean we come out the other side of 2020 stronger for the lessons that the coronavirus pandemic has taught us.

We are passionate, proud and unwavering in our collective pursuit of knowledge leadership for a better world and I thank our UQ community for their contribution to this worthy aim.

Yours sincerely

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Vice-Chancellor and President

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