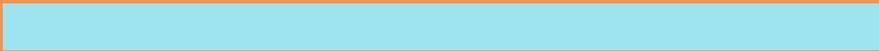




**VIBRANT AND  
VIABLE CAMPUS:  
DESIGNING A  
CULTURE-LED  
RECOVERY**





**Vibrant and Viable Campus:  
designing a culture-led recovery**



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**We know that developing a healthy and vibrant knowledge ecosystem is critical to forming the leaders of tomorrow. Togetherness plays a critical role in transitioning young adults into maturity, and the place for human connection is the campus environment, which fosters socialisation and collaboration. The campus is the theatre setting for life.**





# INTRODUCTION

## As the post pandemic dust settles on university estates and students and academics seek community in all its forms, the role of the campus – its vibrancy, viability and value – returns to focus.

### Global context

The last four years have been tumultuous for the university sector. The global pandemic dramatically changed how universities imagine, evolve and manage the delivery of tertiary education. The upheaval dramatically impacted the relationship between universities, students, academics and communities, ultimately prompting many to question the viability of traditional campuses in the long term.

Reflecting on years of online and hybrid learning and the rise of the 'dark university', we shine a spotlight on campus culture, asking, without a vibrant and viable campus, can universities create the leaders of tomorrow?

### Disruption and change

The global pandemic presented the higher education sector with myriad challenges that forced institutions to adapt, innovate and re-evaluate their strategies. These challenges

fundamentally altered the higher education landscape, demanding swift and agile responses.

Loss of funding across the sector, heightened for many by the closure of the Australian border prohibiting the entry of international students, left many institutions grappling with budget shortfalls. Moreover, disruptions to project funding and capital works programs compounded these woes, necessitating financial restructuring, redundancies and severe cost-cutting measures.

The shift to online learning and remote work was a seismic transformation. While it enabled flexibility for academic and professional staff, concerns arose about students missing the social aspects of university life, which are integral to personal and intellectual growth.

Responding to all the disruption demanded extraordinary agility. Universities had to make rapid decisions in response to evolving circumstances, balancing short-

term and long-term priorities, all while undergoing concurrent internal structural changes.

### Our survey respondents

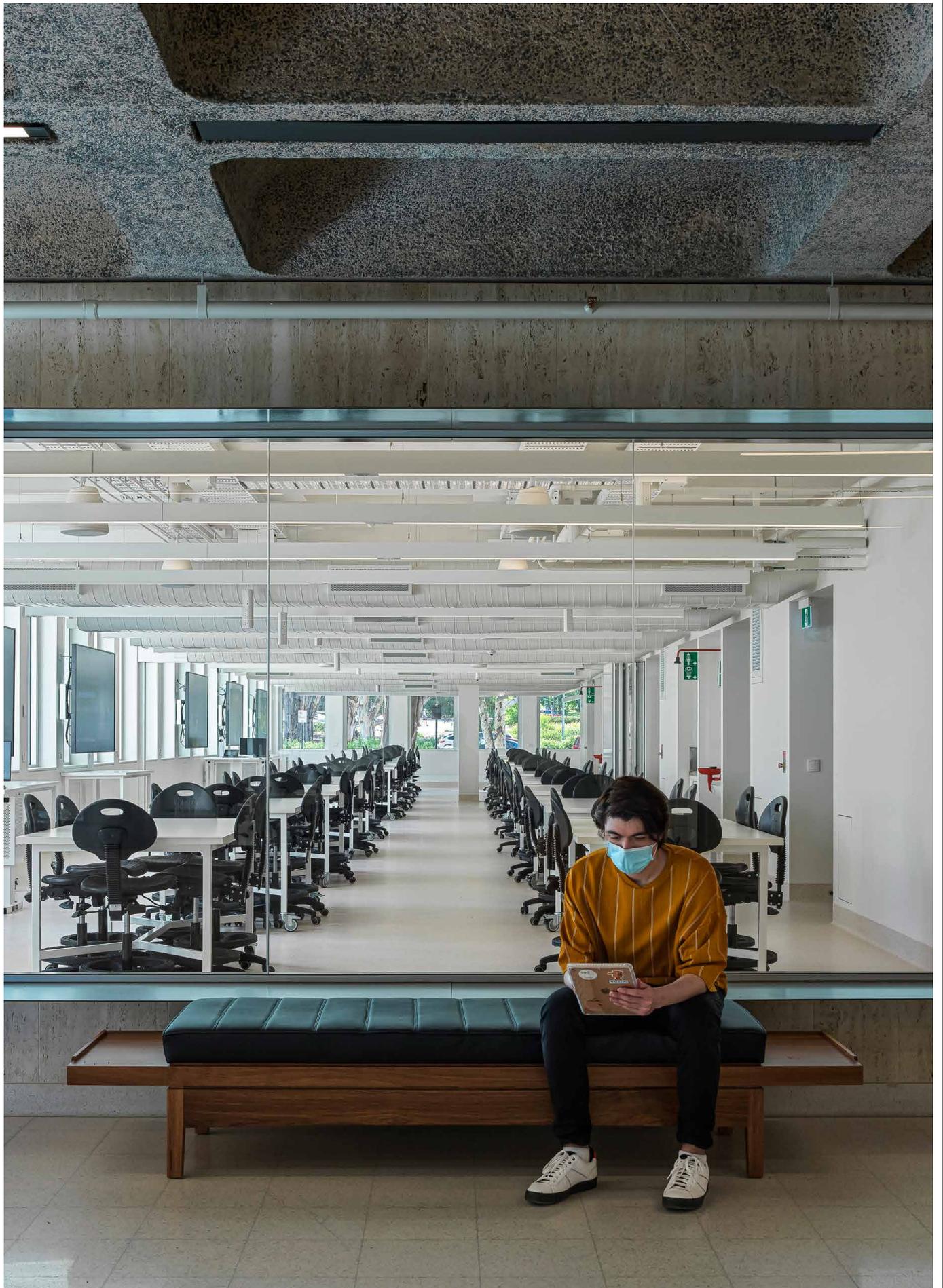
During 2023, we surveyed senior property and facilities leaders from 16 higher education institutions across Australia. We asked them questions ranging from how the pandemic impacted their campus, the immediate and longer-term priorities for their estates and current and future partnering opportunities.

The people we spoke with have, on average, more than ten years of experience in the higher education sector and have been with their current institution for over five years. The higher education institutions represent a broad cross-section of the sector, encompassing Group of Eight, regional universities and TAFE/VET.

**"It was a period of people not knowing what the future would hold."**

🗨️ Survey respondent

Image: ANU Birch, Canberra, Australia.  
Photography by Mark Syke



# KEY THEMES

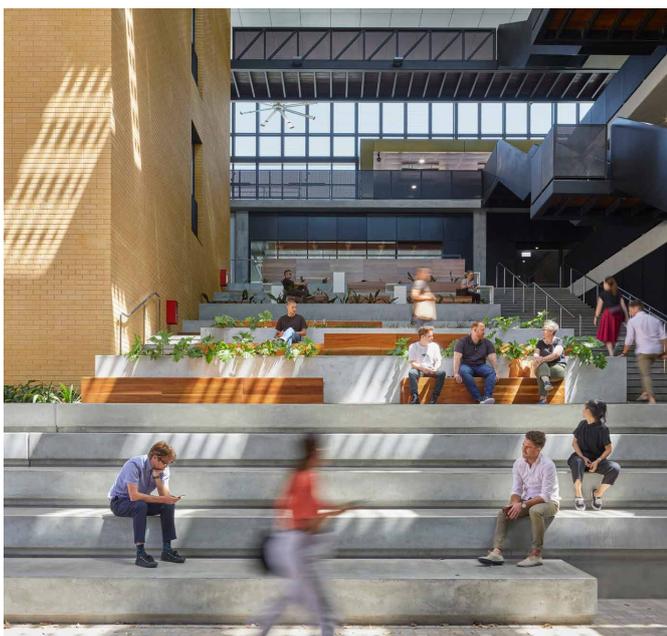
The survey findings reveal four key insights into the current and emerging states of play, informing the future planning of university assets and campuses around Australia. They provide valuable guidance for tertiary institutions trying to navigate the way ahead. These recommendations highlight the significant opportunities for universities to future-proof assets and build resilience – economic, social, cultural and environmental – into the campus master planning process. The report demonstrates that the key to revitalising university campuses lies in designing a culture-led recovery to support the university’s mission and vision.

## 1. Work smarter, make your assets work harder

- Decisions must be based on thorough analysis and understanding of your university’s estate.
- Next-generation strategic planning goes beyond the technical asset audit and considers real human needs and the role that facilities and campuses play in meeting those needs.
- A clear and sustainable policy position on re-living, re-use and rationalisation will support a cohesive campus reshape.

## 2. Revive campus culture

- Bringing people back together on campus should be a top priority for tertiary institutions.
- Delivering the best teaching, learning and research experiences alongside the most magnetic spaces on campus goes hand in hand with driving engagement.
- Welcoming and fostering a depth of experience will create a vibrant campus community.



The University of Western Australia’s EZONE, Crawley, Australia.  
Photography by Douglas Mark Black



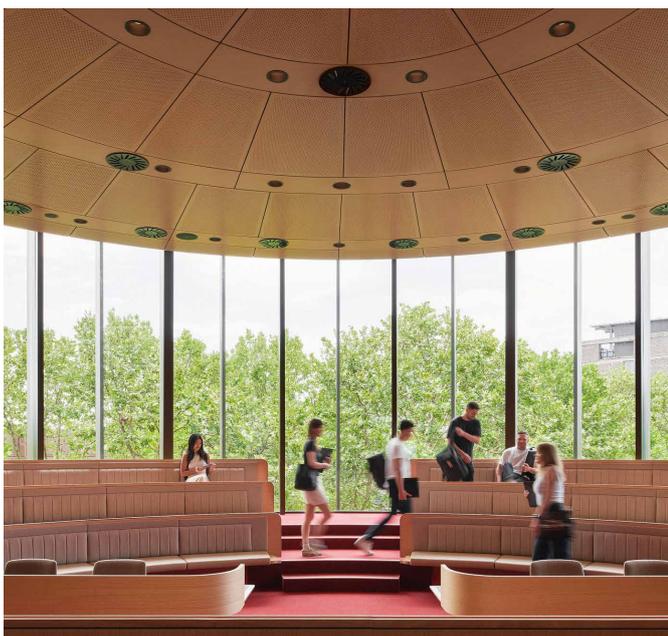
UQ Student Central, Brisbane, Australia.  
Photography by Scott Burrows

### 3. Widen the sustainability lens

- Seeking out diverse, equitable and inclusive participation is key to progressive strategy development and estate planning.
- Campus projects of all scales must welcome and celebrate consultation, engagement and co-design processes with First Nations peoples.

### 4. Broaden your circle of friends

- Progressive universities consider a range of delivery models, including commercial partnerships in their redevelopment and experience toolkit.
- Bringing partners onto campus needs to be undertaken in a planned and coordinated way to ensure reciprocal benefits for the university and the commercial partner.
- Having the right people to advise on potential commercial relationships and their structures is critical to understanding the benefits and risk profile for the university.



Michael Kirby Building Macquarie University Sydney, Australia.  
Photography by Nicole England



NAB Place, Melbourne, Australia.  
Photography by Nicole England

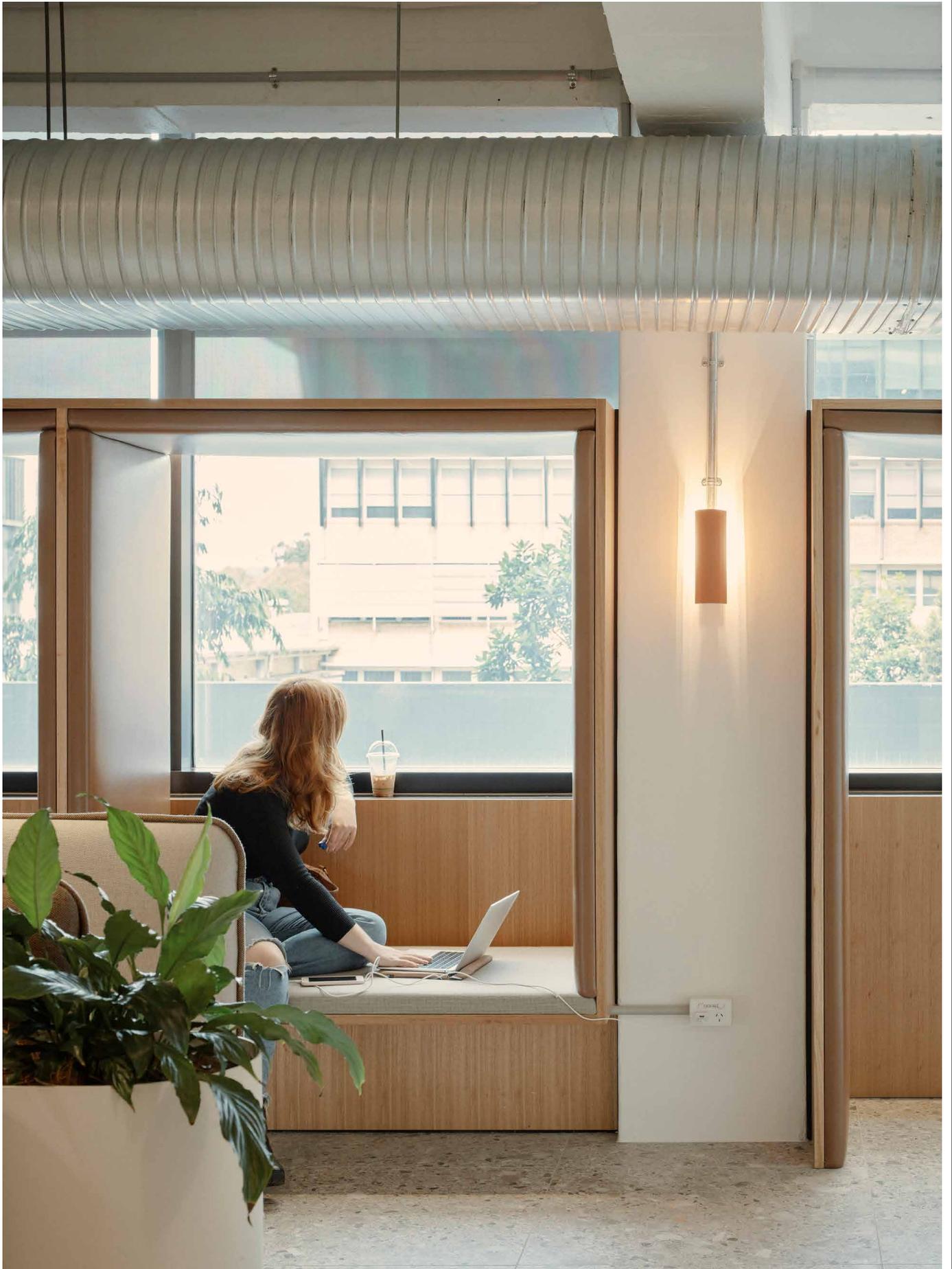
# UNIVERSITY OF SUNSHINE COAST, MORETON BAY, AUSTRALIA.





# **1. WORK SMARTER, MAKE YOUR ASSETS WORK HARDER**

**The new mantra, to work smarter, will ensure universities deliver efficiency, utilisation and financial sustainability outcomes while giving the space and energy to what matters: a cohesive campus community. To do this, universities must deeply understand how their facilities and campuses can contribute to core business and a holistic campus experience.**



UQ Student Central, Brisbane, Australia. Photography by David Chatfield

# Imagine, then plan

The survey reveals that institutions are exploring and assessing university real estate in new ways, including divestment, investment (in new locations), rezoning and repurposing.

The process of strategic campus planning plays a central role in supporting transformational change at the highest level of university leadership. Conversely, high-

level visioning is critical to inform the strategic planning of campuses and assets.

Key focus areas for many institutions are:

- Embracing future-focused thinking to envision entrepreneurial campuses and exploring the potential for new research, industry engagement precincts and innovation hubs.
- Optimising land use and rationalising the built environment in alignment with target

- offerings and student markets.
- Assessing master plans and campus strategies to support the business of better tertiary education.

**"Cultural change needs to be driven from the top, not by the space team."**

□ Survey respondent



## CASE STUDY

### Estate Master Plan, The University of Melbourne, Melbourne

In 2023, in a strategic move to enhance its position as a world-class centre of academic excellence, The University of Melbourne launched its Estate Master Plan, emphasising its commitment to meeting long-term education and research needs. Interconnected green

corridors, more pedestrian-friendly thoroughfares, improved accessibility and the renewal of education and research spaces form part of The University of Melbourne's bold new vision for the revitalisation of its campuses.

The Master Plan has five key areas of focus:

- Improving the campus experience by providing a diverse range of places that encourage opportunities to connect, celebrate and come together.

- Enhancing efficiency by focusing on finding ways to do more with less.
- Regenerating an ageing estate by supporting the aspirations of each campus and the overall estate ecosystem.
- Creating world-class, contemporary teaching and research spaces.
- Creating new partnerships by offering unique opportunities to collaborate with industry and government.

Image: Estate Master Plan, The University of Melbourne, Melbourne, Australia

# Re-life, repurpose, rationalise

A recurring theme in the survey revolved around optimising and utilising learning and social spaces across campuses.

The traditional notion of constructing new buildings in response to space needs is waning, replaced by a focus on creating flexible, collaborative and engaging learning environments. Institutions are strategically re-evaluating their existing infrastructure, renovating ageing facilities and exploring innovative ways to repurpose spaces for efficient use. For many, there is a sharp focus on ensuring that every square metre serves its purpose efficiently.

A consistent strategy involves repurposing, renovating and upgrading existing spaces. Through careful planning, older buildings are being renovated and repurposed to enhance space utilisation. This initiative is further bolstered by consolidating existing space and emptying older buildings, aligning with the university's strategic goals.

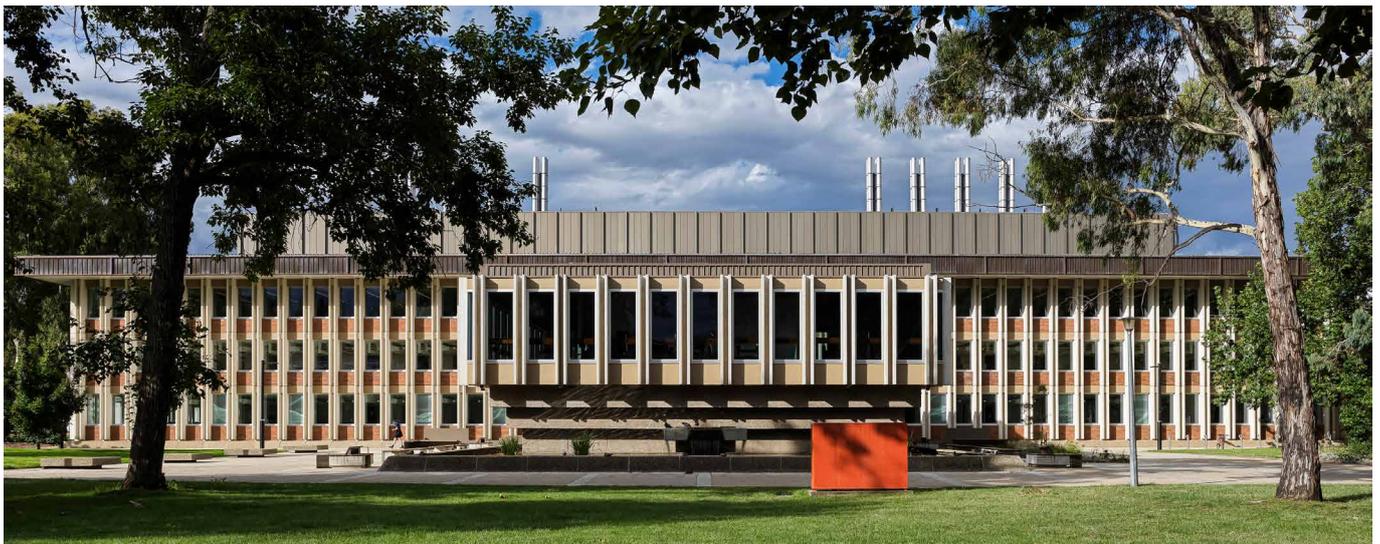
Other strategies being pursued include:

- Collecting data on space usage and occupancy, utilising better tracking and recording tools to drive decisions about efficient space allocation.
- Making buildings work harder, converting underutilised areas and transitioning from traditional layouts to more flexible, open and collaborative spaces.

- Optimising the use of existing spaces to improve financial efficiencies while prioritising investment in ageing infrastructure to maximise the longevity of existing assets.

**"Changing ways of working and delivering curriculum has permanently shifted, and the days of building new buildings when there is a need for space is gone."**

□ Survey respondent



## CASE STUDY

### Birch Building, The Australian National University, Canberra

The regeneration of the modernist Birch Building for the Australian National University (ANU) in Canberra is a celebration of preservation, adaptation and forward-thinking sustainability features. A key challenge was designing laboratories and workplaces for an expanding faculty whose specific needs

were still emerging, which is why the interior is inherently flexible with reconfigurable office and lab benching and service spine systems. New collaboration and kitchen spaces surround and activate the central staircase to encourage students and staff to come together and exchange ideas at the heart of the college.

By integrating leading sustainability practices, performance requirements and state-of-the-art engineering, teaching and laboratory spaces, the refurbishment of the ANU

Birch Building ensures this campus asset can be valued for a whole new life cycle.

**"The College truly wanted to reimagine our future, and the Birch Building is key to this future; a flagship building for our students, our staff and our story."**

Professor Nick Birbills, Interim Dean of Australian National University (ANU) College of Engineering and Computer Science.

Image: ANU Birch Building, Canberra, Australia. Photography by Mark Syke

## How to work smarter

### Imagine, then plan

Make informed decisions based on thorough analysis and an understanding of the university's estate:

- Evaluate assets against alignment to the university's mission.
- Provide the proper physical infrastructure to support a holistic campus experience.
- Recognise the importance of strategic asset management planning.
- Take an asset-based approach when making critical infrastructure decisions.

### Dig deeper

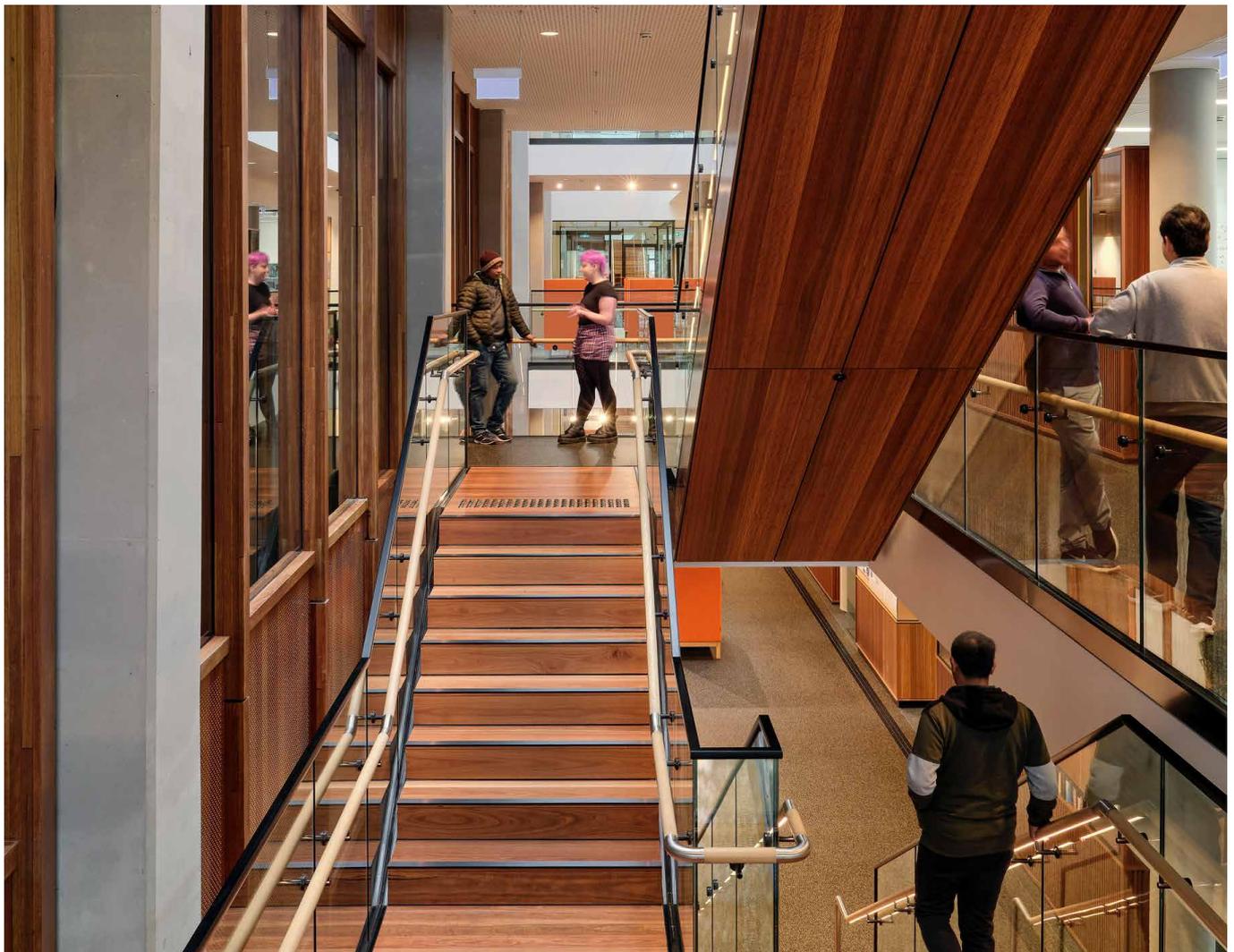
Next-level strategic planning must go beyond the asset technical audit to include:

- Place and urban design (location and setting) and place for people (user-centric).
- High-level asset review (covering heritage, architecture, interiors, landscape and public realm).
- Functional efficiency (fit for current and future needs) and adaptability (potential for change).
- Utilisation and occupation (space and use efficiency).
- Code compliance (fit for use).
- Deferred maintenance (maintenance requirements and costs).
- Infrastructure analysis (condition, asset life and replacement).

### Do more with less

Develop a clear policy position on re-living, re-use and rationalisation to shape the campus by:

- Addressing the overburden of excess space in universities.
- Adapting facilities to modern university needs.
- Anticipating future university needs and plan re-living and re-use.
- Setting clear targets for strategic direction, delivery and needs.
- Considering adopting no net increase or reductions in floor areas.
- Prioritising flexible, changeable facilities for a better experience.



ANU Research School of Physics, Canberra, Australia. Photography by Mark Syke

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**Do more with  
less: prioritise  
robust and flexible  
facilities for a  
better experience.**

# UQ STUDENT CENTRAL, BRISBANE, AUSTRALIA

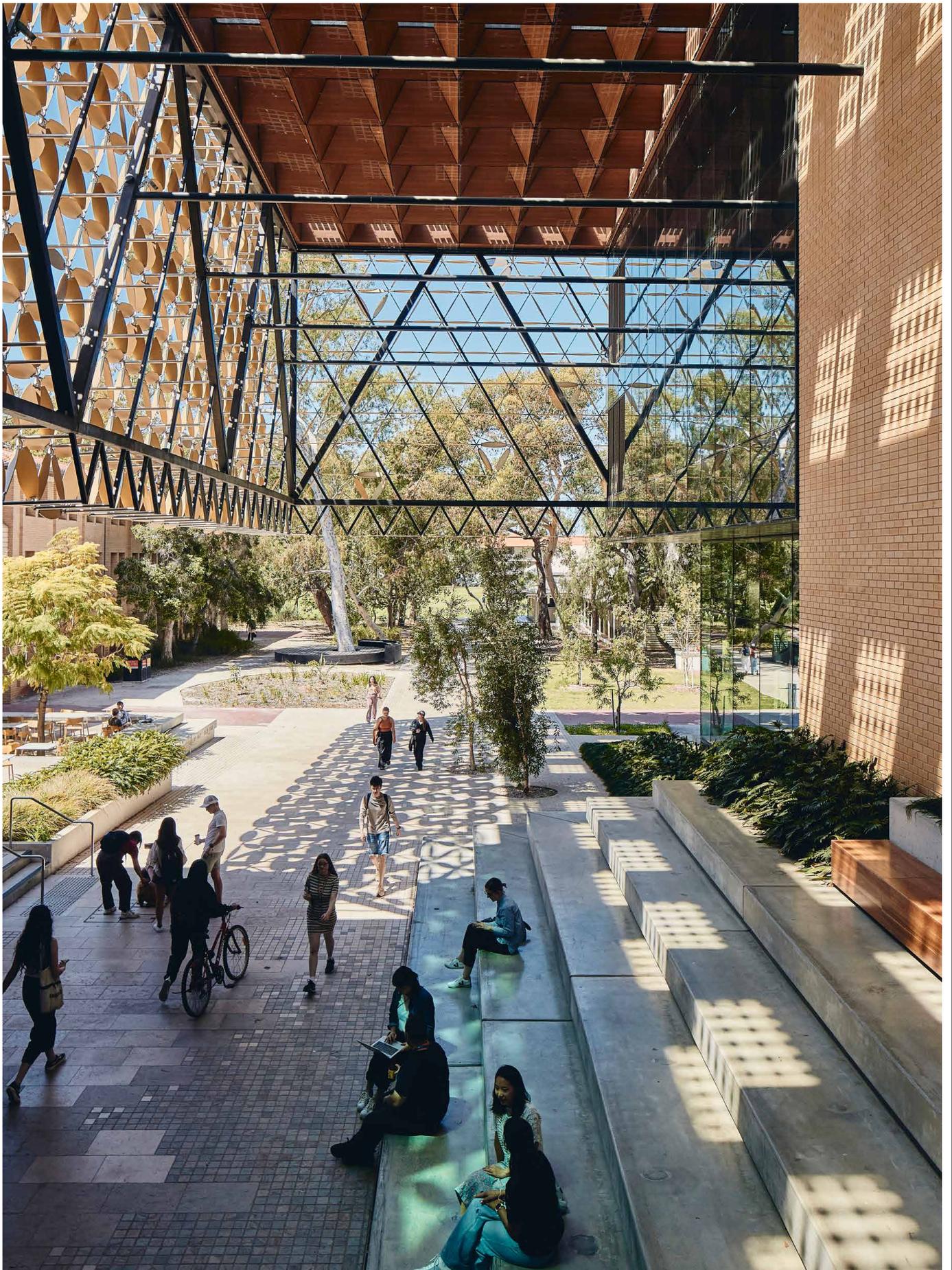




Security

# 2. REVIVE CAMPUS CULTURE

**We must refocus our attention on the campus's role in attracting and retaining talent. The conversation must include the campus experience and the role that teaching and learning, research facilities and student infrastructure play in getting people back on campus more often and keeping them there longer.**



The University of Western Australia's EZONE, Crawley, Australia. Photography by Peter Bennetts

## Dial up campus community

The discussion's overarching theme underscores the campus environment's profound significance. Students yearn for the unique engagement, social connections and memories cultivated through a physical presence on campus.

This sentiment is mirrored by the strategic vision of university leaders, who prioritise face-to-face education as a cornerstone of their mission.

Student engagement is integral to the campus experience. Universities need to provide compelling reasons for students to attend campus events. Creating vibrant environments and

curating events that resonate with students can significantly enhance their connection to the university community. This extends to fostering collaboration with industry partners, amplifying Work-Integrated Learning (WIL) opportunities and promoting shared ownership between the university and the surrounding community.

Specific approaches being undertaken include:

- Focusing on enhancing the student experience by consolidating subjects into purpose-built facilities, diversifying subjects and expanding student accommodations.
- An emphasis on industry engagement to attract students and partners, with a drive to

create vibrant spaces that support collaboration and community engagement.

- Recognising the importance of industry connections, career pathways and industry-sponsored projects.

**"Our students really want to come back onto campus and have the campus experience as part of their time with the university."**

Survey respondent



### CASE STUDY

## UQ Student Central, The University of Queensland, Brisbane

As both a refuge for students and an attractive pathway into The University of Queensland's St Lucia campus, UQ Student Central connects the counselling, learning and staff areas located in the refurbished rooms of three adjoining buildings.

Student Central extends a warm welcome to students and helps dismantle the physical barriers to seeking help. The collection of outdoor rooms, collaborative support spaces and private focus areas create accessible and lively student-centred places that are inviting, inclusive and calming. From delivering more efficient and accessible services to hosting seasonal events and ceremonies, Student Central supports the diverse spectrum of university life.

**"The project affords a relaxed fit-for-purpose setting while contributing to sustainable social, environmental and economic outcomes that enhance the quality of life for students."**

Jury citation on UQ Student Central's 2022 AILA Landscape Architecture Award for Health and Education

Image: UQ Student Central, Brisbane, Australia. Photography by Scott Burrows

# Find balance in a digital world

The global pandemic influenced an acceleration of remote learning and remote work practices. Campus leaders reported their institutions swiftly shifting to online learning to accommodate diverse student needs, including mature learners seeking flexible learning hours.

This shift also spurred discussions on the viability of online education while highlighting the significance of in-person experiences for fostering a robust sense of campus community.

Amid the ongoing evolution of learning methodologies, the

theme of flexibility emerges prominently. Achieving a balance between online and in-person education is challenging, and hybrid models may be ineffective. While flexibility is appreciated, cultivating a holistic and multi-dimensional learning experience that accommodates various learning styles in a physical and digital environment is paramount.

Designing physical spaces that offer a mix of options, from quiet study corners to collaborative hubs, will cater to the diverse needs of both students and educators.

The areas that campus leaders are focusing on include:

- Supporting both on-campus and online learning

- experiences effectively.
- Seeking ways to improve the digital interface for off-campus learning and promote accessibility and choice for digital students.
- Exploring the future of informal learning spaces, digital-enabled areas and asynchronous teaching spaces.

**"There is a place for digital education, but the university hasn't found the right balance with that so far."**

Survey respondent



## CASE STUDY

### A community kit of parts, University of the Sunshine Coast (USC), Moreton Bay

The University of Sunshine Coast engaged FreeState to help understand how USC can break down barriers and deliver opportunities for broader engagement as a community

asset, create a place that is engaging and energised from day one, and develop insights and methods for ongoing refinement of the 'USC experience'. FreeState developed a high-level experience vision and a strategic framework to guide all university stakeholders in creating one holistic experience.

FreeState developed a range of recommendations, concepts and activations to support the experience vision. These were

developed into design briefs, developed designs, and business cases to be implemented at the campus to enhance the experience as an ongoing 'kit of parts'. The final deliverable was the USC Experience Guidebook that weaved together the experience vision, the sense of place and live program pillars, the experience principles, and enablers. This guidebook will be the north star for all design and collaborative partners to follow.

# How to revive campus culture

## It takes a village to bring students back to campus

Bringing people back together on campus should be a priority for learning institutions. This is not the sole responsibility of the estate or student services teams and must be seen as the whole organisation's priority. Experience, in its broader sense, seeks to deliver a better whole of university experience that encompasses service development, branding, useability, function and design.

High-performing organisations are investing heavily to understand

their staff and customers better and establish numerous pathways to connect with people and develop deeper relationships through strategic experience processes and targeted design interventions.

## Creating engaging and stimulating learning in great environments must be a primary ambition of the campus experience toolkit.

Before the pandemic, the development and implementation of new methodologies for pedagogical practice were high on the agenda for many universities. Now the predominant discussion

is about attracting people back to the campus by focusing on providing the right environment for community gatherings.

However, discussions about teaching and learning are noticeably absent from many conversations. Hybrid and digital learning were a required response during the pandemic. But is this mode of learning meeting the requirements of all users, particularly students entering straight from school? We need to re-engage this debate to ensure this next phase provides the depth of experience to foster more rounded graduates. Universities must think beyond the food truck and provide a more comprehensive student-oriented learning ecosystem.



Learning Hub, Australian Catholic University, Melbourne, Australia. Photography by Trevor Mein

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**Bringing people  
back together on  
campus should be a  
priority for learning  
institutions.**

# MICHAEL KIRBY BUILDING MACQUARIE UNIVERSITY SYDNEY, AUSTRALIA





# 3. WIDEN THE SUSTAINABILITY LENS

**Progressive policies and programs concerning individual well-being, inclusivity and diversity are high on the agenda for universities. Campuses need well-designed environments that deliver equity and inclusivity outcomes.**



Life Sciences Building, Melbourne, Australia. Photography by Earl Carter

## Sustainability and social value

Historically, 'sustainability' has been dominated by energy and resources, but we are seeing a broader approach where the emphasis is placed on social value.

Driven in part by the pandemic, but also by rising inequity, housing affordability, declining social cohesion and other broader societal issues, there is increased focus on well-

being and the social value created by organisations and institutions. The Commonwealth Government's recently released Measuring What Matters Framework aims to supplement economic measures with social and environmental outcomes by focusing on five well-being themes: healthy, secure, prosperous, cohesive and sustainable. Hassell, in partnership with the GBCA has also looked to tackle ways to embed and measure social value in the paper [Social Value in the Built Environment](#).

Sustainability and environmental concerns are still at the forefront of most institutions' agendas, driven partly by ranking criteria and student attraction. Institutions are prioritising sustainable practices and incorporating them into their infrastructure development. Clean energy initiatives and harnessing research innovation are critical focal points, driving efforts towards a greener economy.



### CASE STUDY

## Michael Kirby Building, Macquarie University, Sydney

The Michael Kirby Building at Macquarie University in Sydney tells a story of sustainable adaptation and growth, crafting new gathering spaces that encourage interaction and

promote the exchange of ideas. An existing 1985 concrete-framed administration building was repurposed, with a new three-storey timber structure built on the existing footprint, repositioning this vital corner site to create a new focus for the campus.

The new, light-filled spaces provide flexibility for workplace, research and teaching, as well as allowing adaptability for future change.

The building adopts a holistic approach to sustainability by reducing its carbon lifecycle footprint through the adaptive reuse of the former building and its new cross-laminated timber addition.

Image: Michael Kirby Building, Macquarie University Sydney, Australia. Photography by Nicole England

# Connecting with country, community and culture

Alongside sustainability and social value, inclusivity, diversity and Indigenous engagement are becoming central themes. Institutions are committed to addressing reconciliation, accessibility and equity, incorporating First Nations peoples' perspectives, including connecting with Country, cultural and community outcomes and

ensuring engagement with diverse communities and students. These efforts highlight a commitment to creating a campus environment that is inclusive, culturally sensitive and responsive to the needs of various communities.

Furthermore, community engagement is becoming a cornerstone of university planning. Institutions actively involve local communities and stakeholders in campus development, fostering a sense of ownership and belonging. This collaborative approach ensures that the university's growth aligns with the needs and aspirations of the surrounding community, creating a mutually beneficial relationship.

**"The pandemic put a lot of focus on the spaces between buildings; these spaces became an asset for the university but also for the communities in which they operate."**

Survey respondent

## CASE STUDY

### QUT Campus to Country, Queensland University of Technology, Brisbane

The Queensland University of Technology's (QUT) Campus to Country strategy articulates the university's commitment to becoming a reflective institution deeply rooted in its local culture, both past and present. The strategy emphasises the significance of connecting to Country and provides guidelines for designing culturally sensitive buildings and spaces that respond to the needs of the campus community. This framework extends to future engagement,

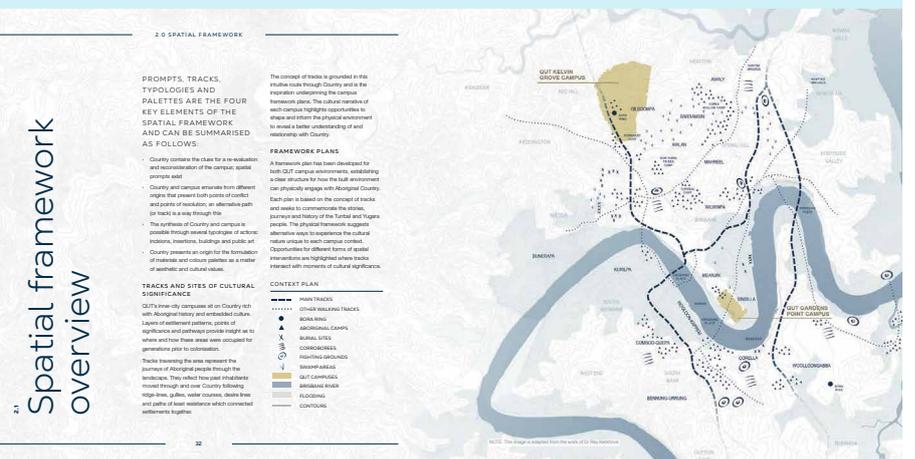
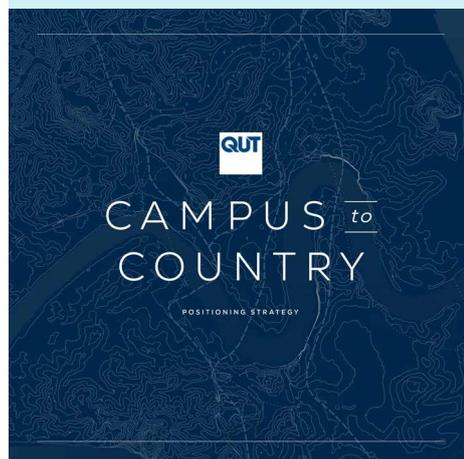
decision-making processes, project delivery and built environment outcomes, including public realm, new buildings and refurbishments.

The strategy recognises the profound relationship between Indigenous Australians and the land and seeks to foster a deeper understanding of this connection, particularly in relation to the land where QUT stands. It introduces spatial prompts that consider Aboriginal perspectives, multiculturalism, technology, colonial history, the unique campus context, and global connections in the planning of future developments.

Six guiding principles underpin the strategy, focusing on grounding people in Country, utilising

place for shared knowledge, supporting Indigenous Australian culture, creating a responsive physical environment, expanding integration with the wider community, and ensuring campus engagement is shaped by and for Indigenous Australian voices and knowledge systems. Overall, QUT's Campus to Country strategy outlines a holistic approach to campus development that respects and integrates diverse cultural, historical, and geographical layers into the university's fabric.

QUT's Campus to Country was a collaboration between QUT Office of the Pro Vice-Chancellor (Indigenous Strategy), QUT Facilities Management, Kevin O'Brien, BVN and Simone Wise.



## How to widen the lens

### Environmental and social impacts are interconnected

The higher education sector has been a beacon for progressive sustainability action for many years. Carbon positive targets, environmental and biodiversity health, economic and financial sustainability and social policies relating to equity, diversity and inclusion are now commonplace.

Seeking out diverse, equitable and inclusive participation is a key area of progressive strategy development and estate planning.

Master planning processes that lead to safe, inclusive outcomes across campuses must be a top priority.

Projects should seek to understand:

- Choice and voice – do students have choices and agency over spaces?

- Connection – how is the connection to peers, technology and nature enhanced by design choices?
- Comfort – is the space physically accessible and culturally appropriate?
- Security and well-being – do spaces support occupants' physical, social and emotional well-being?
- Signage and direction – can students locate, navigate and understand how to use a space?

### Inclusive and sustainable design

The Australian design industry has been taking significant steps towards more inclusive and sustainable design over recent years, and this must continue.

A key component is a greater awareness of the value of First Nation Peoples' concept of Country and other cultural concepts that enable better design approaches. Campus projects of all scales must include

consultation, engagement and co-design processes that aim to:

- Centre Australian First Nations Peoples' perspectives, priorities and knowledge.
- Facilitate information exchange and design input to establish an inclusive and equitable brief.
- Consider Australian First Nations Peoples' comprehension of space and spatial connections.
- Implement culturally responsive and meaningful engagement processes.
- Provide a vehicle to promote inclusiveness, equality and economic and social prosperity.
- Embed information exchange and agreed confidentiality in a credible, ethical and transparent way.
- Document participation in decision-making as a process of self-determination.

## Social value in the built environment

**Embedding social value into our built environment to create spaces that enhance wellbeing and strengthen our communities is essential, now more than ever.**

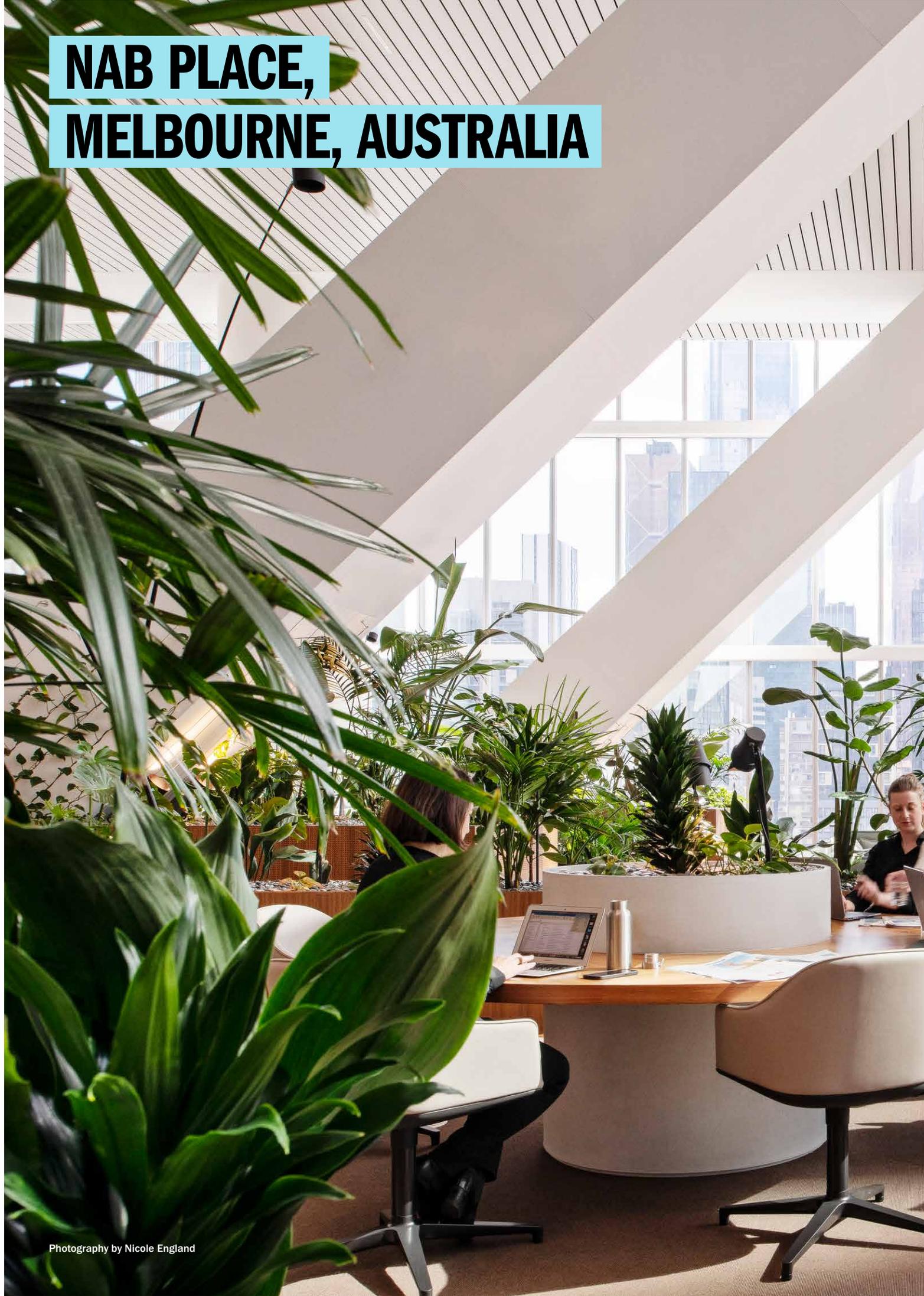
Social value in the built environment refers to the positive impact on people's quality of life when buildings, places, and infrastructure support their environmental, economic, and social wellbeing.

While the creation of social value through built environment projects is not new, significant attention is now being directed to measuring the value created. By taking a systematic approach to the design, creation, and measurement of social value, we can ensure projects are delivering more benefits than they might have done otherwise.

[Download the GBCA x Hassell Social Value Discussion Paper](#)

**Campuses need  
well-designed  
environments  
that deliver equity  
and inclusivity  
outcomes.**

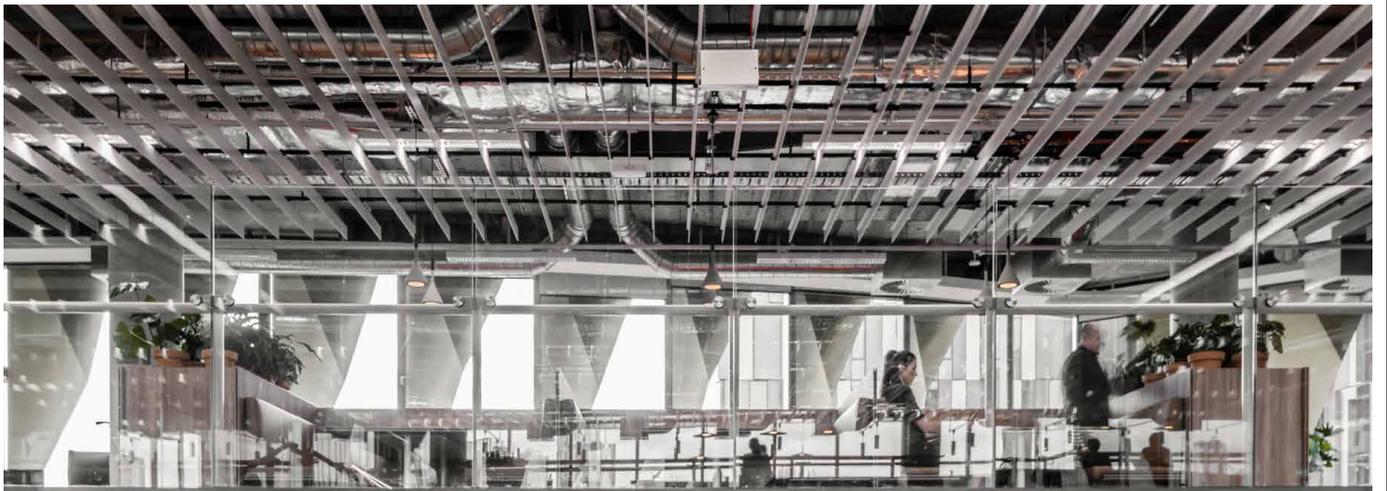
# NAB PLACE, MELBOURNE, AUSTRALIA





# 4. BROADEN YOUR CIRCLE OF FRIENDS

**Increasingly, universities need to be more financially self-sufficient. Commercial partnerships are firmly on the agenda to provide alternative funding options. Understanding risk and reward and sound partnership-forming practices are crucial to success.**



FEIT @ Melbourne Connect, Melbourne, Australia. Photography by Tom Blachford

## Better together

A prominent theme among the interviewees is the keen focus on industry engagement and partnerships. Institutions are increasingly recognising the value of synergising academic expertise with industry insights.

These collaborations extend beyond traditional models, encompassing research, training and infrastructure development. However, universities approach this avenue cautiously, aiming to maintain their identity and long-term vision.

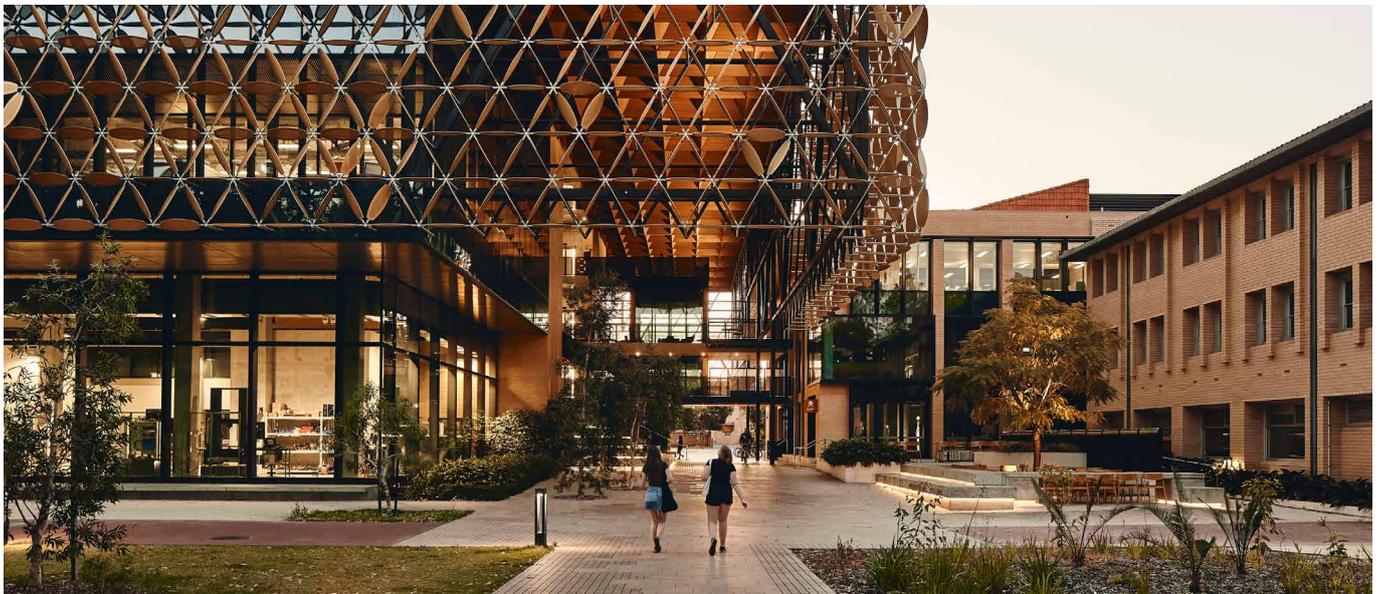
The survey underscores many universities' health and medical

focus, with initiatives like health and translational research hubs gaining prominence. These hubs are vehicles for catalysing research and clinical collaborations, often funded by the private sector. The emphasis on health mirrors the expanding horizon of research-industry partnerships.

Amid these shifts, universities reflect on their evolution and transformation. They acknowledge the need to revamp traditional funding models, adapting to the demands of innovation and expansion. Overcoming challenges, such as bureaucracy and slow decision-making, is integral to unlocking the potential of collaborations.

**"[There is] a lot to be gained from good collaboration – the future of all research is collaborative either with other universities or industry – the majority of successful bids for grants will be collaborative bids."**

Survey respondent



### CASE STUDY

## EZONE Student Hub, The University of Western Australia, Perth

A world-class learning space, an incubator for collaborative innovation and an investment in the knowledge economy—EZONE is a dynamic centre for engineering and mathematical science education and a new western gateway to The University of Western Australia's (UWA) Crawley Campus. With space for students, alumni, researchers

and industry partners to come together and thrive, EZONE has been built to connect people and facilitate the exchange of ideas.

State-of-the-art facilities include engineering labs, advanced education workspaces, learning studios, a cafe and various outdoor areas for socialising and learning. The beautifully sculptured 'learning steps' are a 24/7 central gathering point that encourage physical movement, social connection and informal learning.

Image: The University of Western Australia's EZONE, Crawley, Australia. Photography by Peter Bennetts

**"[EZONE] enables our students, staff and industry partners to come together and collaborate on the big challenges that we face and to work on socially responsible and sustainable solutions... Our industry partners have helped us with events such as addressing the post-Covid employment market, they've worked on case studies with our students, and helped shape the university's engineering specialisations and new programs."**

Dianne Hesterman, Associate Professor, School of Engineering, The University of Western Australia

# Prioritise partnerships

How do universities arm themselves and prepare to discuss funding with the private sector? There are a few 'rules of thumb'.

Financial considerations permeate the decision-making process as universities explore risk transfer, value release from property, and access to capital. A crucial aspect driving potential partnerships is the consideration of commercial

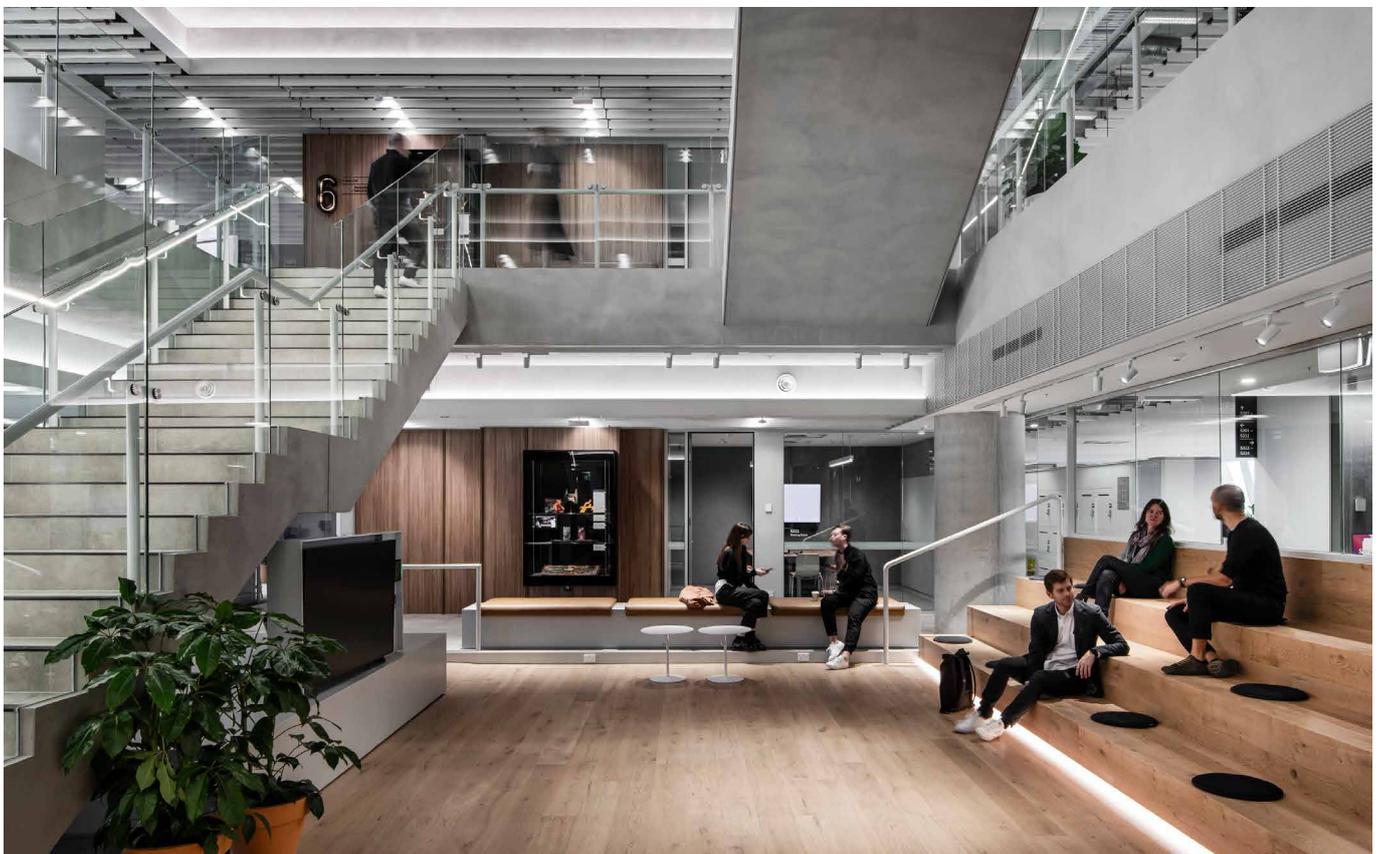
relationships and funding. Recognising the limitations of conventional funding sources, universities are exploring ways to tap into private sector resources. However, universities remain vigilant, emphasising the necessity of maintaining control and aligning values with industry partners.

Real estate and property management discussions reveal universities' evolving approach to campus infrastructure. A growing inclination by some towards co-funding facilities and leasing options

reflects a shift away from direct ownership. A growing cohort of universities seek innovative ways to utilise and activate underutilised spaces, leveraging partnerships to balance risk and make the most of available capital and expertise.

**"The only way it works successfully is by having an alignment of values."**

Survey respondent



## CASE STUDY

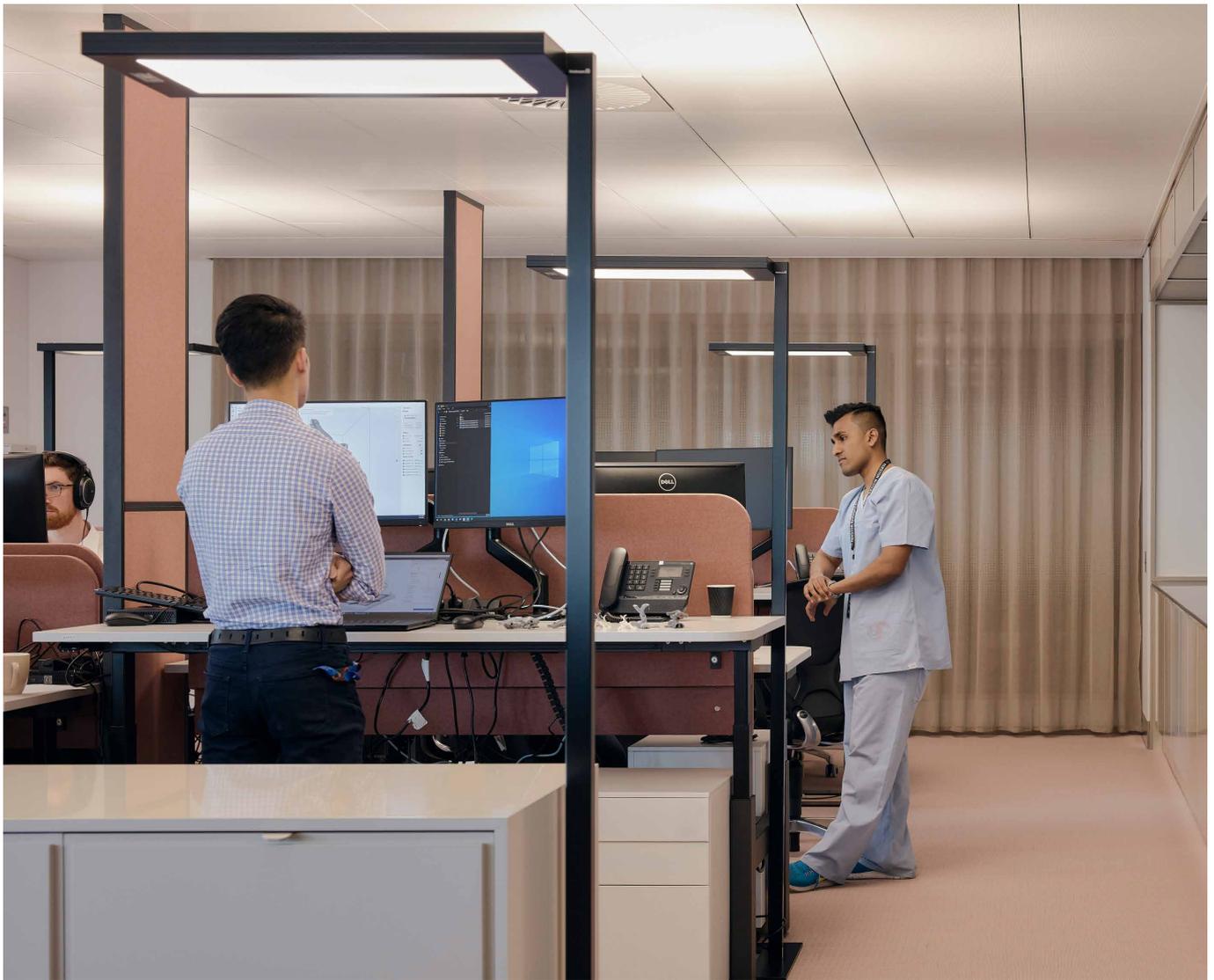
### Melbourne Connect, The University of Melbourne, Melbourne

Melbourne Connect is a place where different types of companies, from start-ups to major corporations, work together with researchers and academics

from The University of Melbourne to create new ideas and technologies. It's a hub for digital talent, connecting skilled graduates with businesses. Led by The University of Melbourne and partners like Lendlease, Melbourne Connect uses research and technology to solve big societal problems like food security and healthcare. It's all about collaboration between different fields to develop innovative

solutions. Melbourne Connect also offers various amenities like student housing, retail and event spaces. It's where the best minds from research, academia and industry come together to make new discoveries and build a strong network for innovation.

Image: FEIT @ Melbourne Connect, Melbourne, Australia. Photography by Tom Blachford



## How to broaden your circle

### Know your partnership ecosystem

Many universities are now starting to engage more deeply in the development of commercial partnerships both on and off campus.

Bringing partners onto campus needs to be undertaken in a planned and coordinated way to ensure reciprocal benefits for the university and the commercial partner. This

includes using models such as sponsored spaces through to leasing and other emerging commercial engagement approaches.

Critical to this is reviewing the physical estate and campus to understand the types of commercial partnerships that may be possible under complex tenure, planning and university-specific legislation.

### Assemble the right expertise

Many universities are investing heavily in the right skills within their internal teams and through specialist consultancy commissions.

Having the right people to advise on potential commercial relationships and their structures is key to properly understanding the benefits and risk profile for the university, as well as working with executive leadership and university councils.

Establishing the right commercial terms is critical to success, which also includes the requirements for the benefit and ongoing relationship between the commercial entity and the needs of the university, including research, workforce training and ecosystem forming and nurturing.

Image: Herston Biofabrication Institute, Brisbane, Australia. Photography by David Chatfield

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**Increasingly,  
universities  
need to be more  
financially  
self-sufficient.**

# RECAP: THE VIBRANT AND VIABLE CAMPUS

## 1. Work smarter, make your assets work harder

- Decisions must be based on thorough analysis and understanding of your university's estate.
- Next-generation strategic planning goes beyond the technical asset audit and considers real human needs and the role that facilities and campuses play in meeting those needs.
- A clear and sustainable policy position on re-living, re-use and rationalisation will support a cohesive campus reshape.

## 2. Revive campus culture

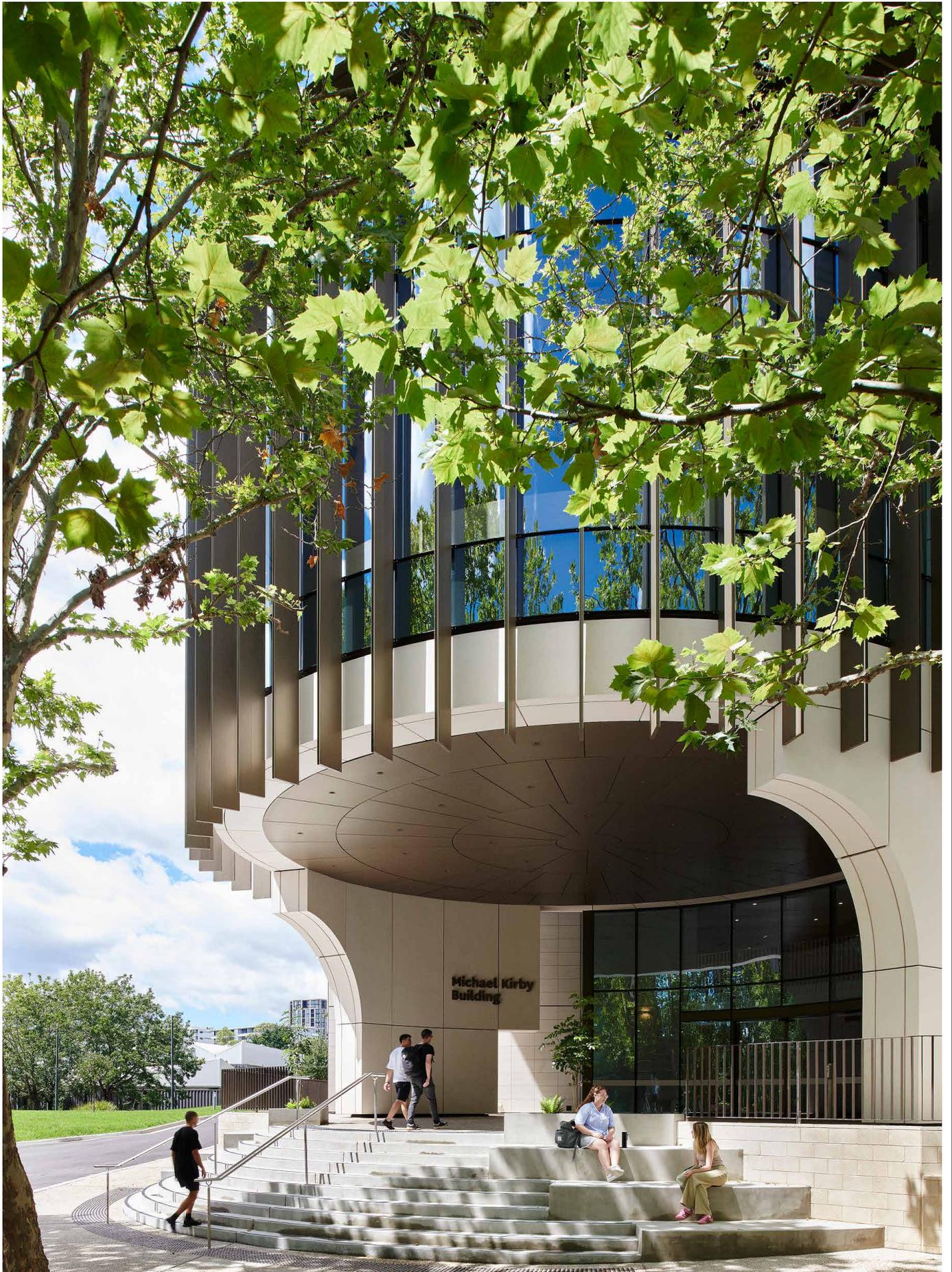
- Bringing people back together on campus should be a top priority for tertiary institutions.
- Delivering the best teaching, learning and research experiences alongside the most magnetic spaces on campus goes hand in hand with driving engagement.
- Welcoming and fostering a depth of experience will create a vibrant campus community.

## 3. Widen the sustainability lens

- Seeking out diverse, equitable and inclusive participation is key to progressive strategy development and estate planning.
- Campus projects of all scales must welcome and celebrate consultation, engagement and co-design processes with First Nations peoples.

## 4. Broaden your circle of friends

- Progressive universities consider a range of delivery models, including commercial partnerships in their redevelopment and experience toolkit.
- Bringing partners onto campus needs to be undertaken in a planned and coordinated way to ensure reciprocal benefits for the university and the commercial partner.
- Having the right people to advise on potential commercial relationships and their structures is critical to understanding the benefits and risk profile for the university.



Michael Kirby Building Macquarie University Sydney, Australia. Photography by Nicole England

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