Identity, Well-Being, and Work Outcomes in Early Career Academics: Project Recommendations

Contents

Tables

Figures

Appendices

1. Executive Summary

University Early and Mid-Career Academic (EMCA) staff, usually in their first 8-10 years post-PhD, are key in delivering the high-quality research and education expected in the university sector. Previous research has documented the significant challenges that working in the sector poses, particularly for EMCAs. Findings from our own study of these issues, in the Identity, Well-Being and Work Outcomes project, extends on this work to show the contribution that work team and group belonging make to staff outcomes. In this report we document outcomes from the Recommendations Phase of the project.

In this phase, three workshops were conducted with EMCAs who reviewed a summary of study findings. EMCAs were then asked to develop solutions to the challenges raised. In a separate and final workshop, these solutions were reviewed and rated by staff in human resource, research, and line management roles for their acceptability and feasibility.

Through this process, numerous solutions were identified. Among these, five received the highest ratings for both their importance to staff and their implementation potential.

1. Enhanced supervisor training.

2. Identification and support for working on high value tasks.

3. More active engagement in forward planning.

4. Introduction of a structured EMCA program.

5. Enhanced opportunities for meaningful service role engagement.

The nature of the suggested solutions and ratings are summarised in the report, with the top 5 detailed in the Recommendations section of this report. Also included in the report is a summary of the Design Thinking process and the exercises and activities undertaken to reach these solutions.

2. Project Background and Aims

The purpose of the Identity, Well-Being and Work Outcomes project was to investigate the contribution that university workgroup memberships (e.g., workgroups in one's discipline, laboratory, and wider university groups) play in early and mid-career academic (EMCA) well-being, work, and career outcomes. The impact of the pressures and challenges of academic work, particularly on the development and retention of early career staff, is well documented in previous findings (e.g., Christian et al., 2021; Shaw et al., 2015; Signoret, 2019). To date these surveys have focused largely on individual drivers of these outcomes. In this project we extend these findings to examine the contribution that the *workgroup* culture and context makes to early career staff outcomes. Given the extent to which academics engage in group-based work — as leaders and members of research groups, teaching teams, and service committees — it is important to both understand and manage the workgroup contribution to staff experience and outcomes.

Two research studies with EMCAs were conducted as part of this project. The first involved 57 semi-structured interviews and the second was a survey study with 210 respondents. The findings were documented in two separate reports (Qualitative Study Report, Survey Study Report) with both highlighting the key role played by workgroup culture, leadership and mentorship in shaping EMCAs experience, well-being and intentions to remain in the sector. Importantly, feeling a sense of belonging to local and central workgroups that were positive, supportive, effectively led, and lacked toxicity contributed to more positive staff outcomes. Specifically, feeling a sense of belonging to local workgroups (i.e., those within one's School or Institute) contributed to enhanced psychological health and work satisfaction. Belonging to central workgroups (typically comprising faculty or university groups and committees) contributed to a stronger sense of career progression opportunities.

In this report we document the outcome of the project's final stage in which the recommendations from the studies were presented to, and evaluated by, EMCAs and managers. The overall aim of this final phase of the project was to work collaboratively with workshop attendees to identify improvements that hold promise for their potential efficacy in enhancing the EMCA experience.

This final phase was designed with three core objectives in mind.

To leverage the outcomes of quantitative and qualitative studies on the experiences of ECMAs conducted as part of the Identity, Well-Being and Work Outcomes Project.

To co-create potential solutions with both potential beneficiaries (EMCAs) and providers (Central Management).

To deliver workable recommendations to improve the experience of EMCAs at UQ.

In this report we describe the approach taken to meet these objectives and present the findings that have informed the recommendations generated and rated by workshop attendees to improve the EMCA experience arising from this process. For quick reference, Table 2 (pp. 14-17) summarises the solutions generated, and Section 4 of the report (pp. 26-35) summarises recommended solutions arising from the process.

1. Method

1.1 Project Stages

The project followed a structured approach, informed by Design Thinking, comprising three stages (shown in Figure 1) with outcomes from each stage informing subsequent activity.

Figure 1: Three-Stage Project Approach

Guided by findings from the Identity, Well-Being, and Work Outcomes Project, the first stage involved three workshops that took place in October 2023 with representatives from UQ's early and mid-career academics. These workshops aimed to foster collaboration in generating ideas and developing solutions to address the issues and opportunities that arose from the two research studies. The solutions developed were subject to evaluation and voting within the workshops, and attendees were asked to provide two brief statements capturing a single action that should be prioritised above all else and a single action of what should be avoided (i.e., "Do" and "Don't do").

The ideas, solutions, and outputs derived from the three EMCA workshops were analysed and categorised. The highest ranked solutions were adopted to inform the Strategic Planning Session held in November 2023 involving human resource, research (e.g., Office of Sponsored Research, School and Institute Directors of Research), and other line manager representatives. Specifically, the Strategic Planning session concentrated on examining the solutions proposed by the EMCAs, assessing their practicality, undertaking a vote, and again concluded with the "Do" and "Do Not Do" task.

A final round of analysis was conducted focusing on the most popular, feasible, and valuable solutions that emerged from the Strategic Planning Session. This report details the key findings from this process and the project recommendations.

1.2 Design Thinking

Given the nature and constrained timescales of the project, design thinking was adopted as the preferred approach. Design thinking is a valuable, human-centered approach to problem solving and innovation that's highly solution focused. It's an iterative process that usually has 5 stages:

1. **Empathise** - Gain insights into experiences and perspectives.
2. **Define** - Define the core problems, challenges and opportunities.
3. **Ideate** - Generate new ideas to address the problems, challenges and opportunities.
4. **Prototype** - Develop representations of potential solutions.
5. **Test** - Evaluate the solutions and provide feedback to improve design.

The Empathise and Define stages of the process were informed by findings from the UQ Voice and Pulse Surveys, and the key findings from the Identity, Well-Being, and Work Outcomes project

studies. Consequently, the three EMCA workshops and Strategic Planning Session focused on the Ideate, Prototype and Testing phases of the process. To balance the importance of the task with the project's constraints, Design Thinking techniques were selected that were likely to produce the maximum output in the limited time available for this process.

2.   EMCA Workshops

Early and Mid-Career Academics were recruited from across the university using advertisements in high traffic locations in university buildings at the St Lucia Campus (see Appendix A). Digital versions of the advertisements were also distributed via email by the EMCR Committee representatives. EMCAs were invited to attend a 2-hour workshop to share their ideas and insights, collaborate with fellow academics, and co-create ideas on how to improve their academic experience. A QR code linked potential attendees to a sign-up form. The link also led them to a short survey that gathered demographic data. All workshops were held in October on three separate days at different times to enhance opportunity for participation.

2.1 Attendees

A total of 36 EMCAs participated in the three workshops, representing a range of roles, career stages, Faculties, and Institutes (see Figure 2). The majority (64%) primarily held research roles, followed by those engaged in teaching and research (33%), with 95% at Level A or B stages of their academic careers. The group represented five faculties and three Research Institutes.
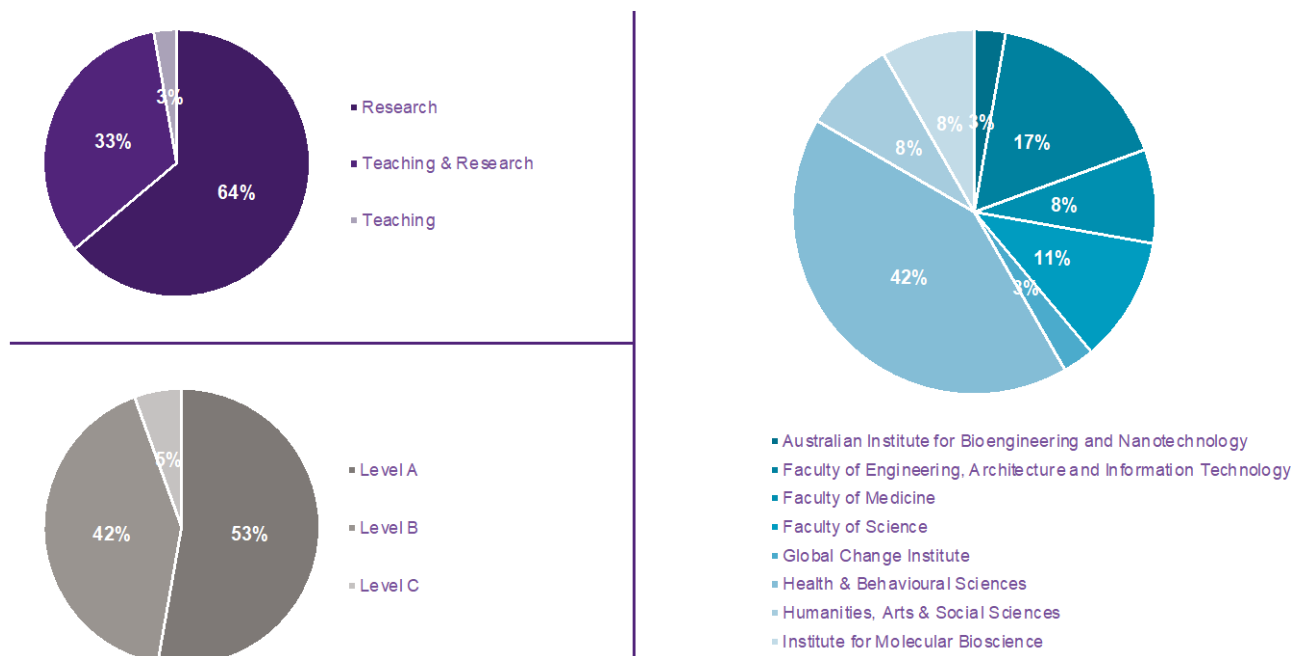
Figure 2: Demographic Profile of EMCA Workshop Attendees

2.2 Activities

Following a brief introduction to the Identity Well-Being and Work Outcomes program of research, attendees were taken through seven progressive design thinking exercises. The first three exercises covered the Ideation stage of the design thinking process and focused on generating ideas to address the issues and opportunities identified in the two project studies. In the first two of the Ideation exercises, nine factors from these studies known to affect the experiences of EMCAs (Table 1) were used as prompts. The Prototyping phase comprised Exercises 4 and 5 and related to refining solutions, while the last two exercises focused on Solution Testing. Below we describe briefly the different activities undertaken, as a function of each phase.

Table 1: Question Prompts Based on the EMCA Study Findings

Category	What can be done to…
Early Career Inhibitors	1. *Reduce Job Precarity?* 2. *Provide Clearer and Less Demanding Expectations?* 3. *Support A More Valued Identity?*
Enabling Capacity of Group Memberships	4. *Improve Workgroup Fit and Number?* 5. *Improve Workgroup Culture?* 6. *Increase Group Memberships Outside Work?*
From Management to Mentorship	7. *Provide Effective Management?* 8. *Enhance Leadership: Supporting Group Membership Creation?* 9. *Enhance Mentorship: Supporting Career to Personal Development?*

IDEATION PHASE

Exercise 1 | 8 In 8

In the initial exercise, each attendee was provided with a large A3 sheet headed by one of the nine questions shown in Table 1, a pad of sticky notes, and a stack of prompt cards to stimulate thinking. They were then tasked, working alone, with generating 8 different ideas to address the issue or opportunity contained within the question on their sheet. Each idea was written on a separate sticky note and affixed to the A3 sheet provided. Eight minutes were allocated to the exercise.
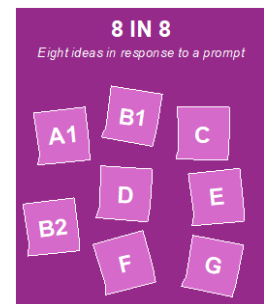
Exercise 2 | Brainwriting

Following the 8 In 8 exercise, attendees collaborated in pairs to enhance idea generation in response to the issue or opportunity question. Each pair was asked to generate a minimum of another 6 ideas for each of their question sheets. These could be either a new idea, a combination of ideas, or a modification or addition to the ideas already on the sheet. Again, to encourage focused work and avoid overthinking, the task was timed, with 15 minutes allocated to complete the exercise. Attendees were encouraged to use the stack of prompt cards provided to stimulate their thinking and diversity of thought.
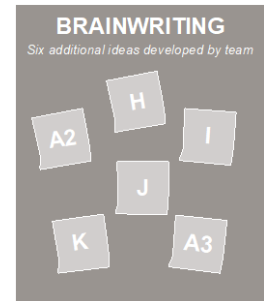
Exercise 3 | Card Sorting

The third and final exercise in the Ideation phase was a card sorting task. All A3 worksheets addressing the same initial question were compiled including the generated sticky notes of ideas. Again, working in pairs, attendees grouped similar ideas together, moving each idea group to a separate A4 solution sheet. Each solution sheet therefore comprised groups of similar and complementary ideas. Once a solution had been identified it was also given an appropriate solution name. The card sorting task was limited to 10 minutes.
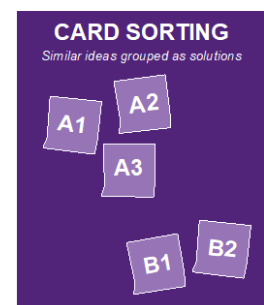
PROTOTYPING PHASE

Exercise 4 | Decision Matrices

The Prototyping phase began with a structured consideration of each solution generated. Each sheet focused on a single solution that was rated against 9 criteria (i.e., effectiveness, usability, flexibility, scalability, adaptability, cost-effectiveness, feasibility, sustainability and user satisfaction); each using a 7-point scale. A decision matrix was used to collate the ratings for each solution, with a total possible score of 63 for each solution. On completion, each group chose their preferred three solutions based either on an overall score or the shared perception of likely success. The time allocated for this exercise was 15 minutes.

DECISION MATRICES
Solutions evaluated and highest scoring selected

A1 A2 A3 B1 B2

✓ Effectiveness
✓ Usability
✓ Flexibility
✓ Scalability
✓ Adaptability
✓ Cost-Effectiveness
✓ Feasibility
✓ Sustainability
✓ User Satisfaction
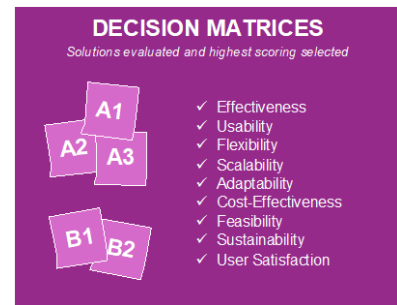
Exercise 5 | Mind Mapping

After selecting their top three preferred solutions, attendees collaborated in pairs, using marker pens and butcher paper to craft a detailed solution mind map. The solution name was placed at the centre of the page, with branches representing each individual idea. These branches were then systematically expanded to address questions encompassing the who, what, when, where, why, and how aspects of each idea, to produce a more detailed depiction of the proposed solution. Attendees were allotted 20 minutes for this task.

MIND MAPPING
Highest scoring solutions further elaborated
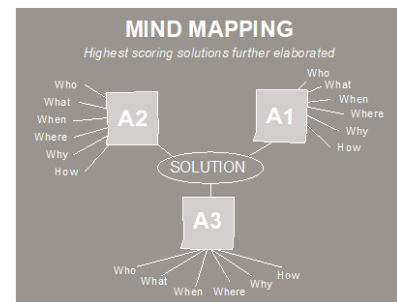
TESTING PHASE

Exercise 6 | Solution Casino

Once the solution mind maps from all groups were completed, each attendee was given five poker chips to vote independently for the solution or solutions that they believed were most likely to improve the experience of EMCAs. They were allocated 15 minutes to review the solution mind maps and place their poker chips in voting boxes beneath the maps using an allocation voting method. This voting method allowed attendees to distribute their chips among the solutions according to their preferences. They could either concentrate their chips on one solution or spread them across several. Finally, the total votes for each solution were tallied.

SOLUTIONS CASINO
Preferred solutions identified using allocation voting

SOLUTION A   SOLUTION B

A   B
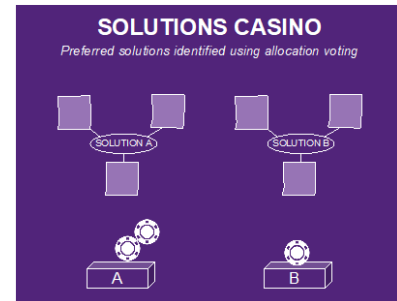
Exercise 7 | Reverse Brainstorming

The final exercise provided attendees with the opportunity to express their individual opinions on how improvements should and should not be made to improve the experience of EMCAs. This was done using a reverse brainstorming technique where each attendee was asked to write one 'Do' and one 'Don't do' on each of two sticky notes. These could be pertinent to the ideas already developed in the workshop or completely unrelated. The sticky notes were placed on either side of a piece of butcher paper divided into "Do" and "Don't do" zones as attendees left the room at the end of the workshop.

REVERSE BRAINSTORMING
Solution parameters established using paired choice

DO   DO   DO   DON'T   DON'T   DON'T
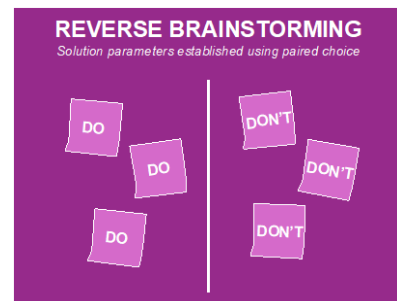
All ideas generated, solution sheets, decision matrices, mind maps, and reverse brainstorm were retained to maximise data capture.

2.3 Analysis

All workshop outcomes were recorded in a purpose-built database, with separate tables for the generated ideas, solution mind maps, and reverse brainstorm. The initial analysis focused on the data relevant to ideas employing an iterative clustering method to allow for the identification of categories and sub-categories within the ideas as well as the frequency of each idea type.

The same cluster analysis process was then applied to the solutions data. The outputs from both cluster analyses were reviewed and refined iteratively, culminating in a set of categories and sub-categories that applied universally to both ideas and solutions. Next, the overall popularity of each solution was determined by weighting the votes received based on individual workshop attendees.

The "Do" and "Don't do" statements provided during the reverse brainstorming exercise were then classified using the same categorisation system. Finally, descriptive statistics were computed to facilitate the communication of workshop outputs.

Cluster analysis was chosen for its capacity to classify the ideas and solutions. By examining the content and frequency of the data, significant factors impacting the EMCA experience can be identified, highlighting what really matters to EMCAs, their priorities, and their perceptions of effective strategies. In essence, it provides a practical understanding of the factors influencing EMCAs and their perception of the most important aspects of their work environment.

2.4 Results

The results presented comprise the analysis outputs from the three data sources: (a) the categorisation and sub-categorisation of the ideas generated, (b) a breakdown of solutions by category and sub-category complete with solution specifications, and (c) an overview of the "Do" and "Don't do" statements.

2.4.1 EMCA Ideas

The ideas generated by the EMCAs fell into five primary categories, with the majority (over 70%), concentrated in the first three (see Figure 3). **Work Culture**, the first category, encompassed ideas aimed at enhancing the working environment for EMCAs, and constituted 28% of the total ideas generated. Following closely, **Career Development and Support**, focused on specific ideas for professional growth, representing 24% of ideas generated. The third category, **Workload and Expectations**, accounted for 22% of the total ideas generated, and pertained to the roles and tasks performed by EMCAs in their work. **Communication, Collaboration, and Connection**, involving EMCA relationships and interactions, comprised 16% of the total ideas generated. Lastly, **Finance and Resources**, the smallest category at 10% of ideas generated, revolved around the various financial and resource-related aspects impacting the EMCA role; including grants and funding opportunities. Within these five categories, there were a number of sub-categories that we describe below.

Work Culture 28%	Career Development & Support 24%	Workload & Expectations 22%	Communication Collaboration & Connection 16%	Finance & Resources 10%

Figure 3: EMCA Ideas by Category

Work Culture

Work Culture ideas were divided into seven sub-categories, each highlighting ways to enhance the work environment (see Figure 4). The first sub-category, *Developmental ideas* (25%), emphasised skill enhancement and training opportunities for staff; ranging from informal skill-sharing within workgroups to formal workshops and courses. Solutions suggested were of two types: (i) academic development, focusing on improving domain-specific skills, and (ii) management training, focusing on improving supervision and mentoring capability, but also workgroup culture and well-being.

| Developmental 25% | Inclusive 17% | Progressive 17% | Supportive 15% | Professional 12% | Innovative 9% |
| | | | | | Positive 7% |

Figure 4: EMCA Work Culture Sub-Categories

The next sub-category of solutions focused on fostering a more *inclusive work culture* (17%). Suggestions included the provision of more training and support to supervisors on issues of inclusion, enhanced EMCA involvement in departmental committees, team social activities, and more frequent team and informal meetings. Ideas on creating a more *progressive culture* (17%) centred on extending work practices to allow time to engage in team-building and ongoing discussions to ensure progressive work practices.

Efforts to cultivate a more *supportive culture* (15%) centred on backing EMCA proposals and fostering an open and supportive environment encouraging exchange of feedback. Solutions also centred on enhancing *professional practice* (12%) with EMCAs suggesting reprioritization of policy to favour research quality over quantity, and practices that support reflection and more integrated and unified objectives. Suggestions aimed at fostering *innovation* (9%) encouraged greater idea sharing, innovation promotion, and collaborative brainstorming. Finally, the sub-category aimed at fostering a *positive work culture* (7%) stressed the importance of active listening and raising awareness of what constitutes negative behaviour.

Career Development and Support

Career Development and Support ideas fell into five sub-categories (see Figure 5). The largest of these, *career opportunities* (40%), encompassed ideas targeting career advancement within and outside academia. Suggestions here focused on exploring ways to extend contracts, providing more and diverse role opportunities in areas of teaching and service, and improved notification systems to alert staff to open positions.

| Career Opportunities 40% | Skills Training 27% | Mentoring 21% | Career Guidance 7% |
| | | | Independent Research 6% |

Figure 5: EMCA Career Development and Support Sub-Categories

Suggestions relevant to the second sub-category, of *skills training* (27%), focused on increasing the number of programs and workshops open to staff to enhance academic skills — in areas of grant writing, industry-specific training, and personal development workshops. *Mentoring* (21%) was a popular third sub-category, with attendees raising the importance of developing comprehensive mentoring programs across the university, and a particular focus on finding and establishing effective mentor-mentee pairings and enhancing access to mentoring skills training.

Suggestions in the sub-category of *career guidance* (7%) concentrated on career counselling to aid the transition from PhD to ECA, and exploring ways to support staff on fixed contracts,

particularly as they conclude their contracts. Lastly, ideas around fostering *independent research* (6%) to increase staff competitiveness for future work centred largely on securing adequate time and resources for personal research projects either that extend upon, or add to, contractual work.

Workload and Expectations

Work expectations dominated the Workload and Expectations category (38%, see Figure 6). In this sub-category attendees emphasised the importance of spending sufficient time to clarify role expectations, contractual arrangements from the point of commencement, workload priorities, and support in managing role transitions. The Well-Being sub-category (28%) primarily included ideas that related to the importance of work-life balance and ways to manage work-life balance more effectively. Within the *Working Hours* sub-category (15%), ideas raised included improving leave management systems to ensure sufficient support and planning to take leave, openness to discussion around setting limits on working hours, and openness to discuss flexible ways of working that meets contractual and personal obligations. Finally, suggestions in the *performance* sub-category (12%) focused on streamlining staff assessment procedures for the benefit of both staff and appraisers, and having greater acknowledgement and recognition of all the work that staff undertake.

Expectations 38%	Well-Being 28%	Working Hours 15%	Performance 12%

Figure 6: EMCA Workload and Expectations Sub-Categories

Communication, Collaboration and Connection

Among the ideas generated about Communication, Collaboration, and Connection, the significance of *social connection* stood out (see Figure 7). Within this area, connection ideas (36%) revolved around allowing more time to (a) develop and embed peer-to-peer connections, and (b) to network with UQ and non-UQ collaborators, through (c) increased opportunities to attend conferences and symposia. *Collaboration* (25%) emerged as another key priority, with EMCAs seeking openness to explore with their line managers incentives and opportunities to extend collaboration within work teams and across multidisciplinary settings to invigorate the work environment.

Connection 36%	Collaboration 25%	Social Engagement 22%	Supervisor Communications 17%
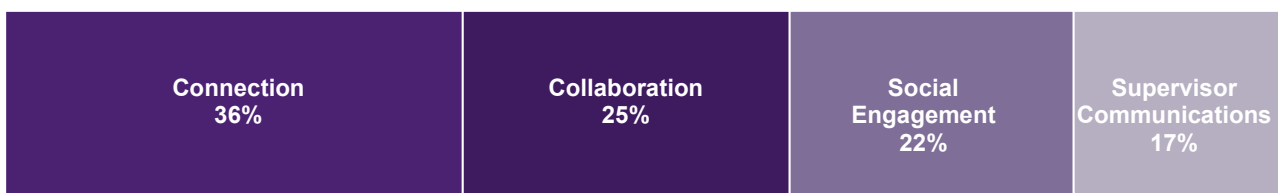
Figure 7: EMCA Communication, Collaboration and Connection Sub-Categories

Social engagement ideas (22%) centred on work supporting social and cultural exchange, hobbies and sports events to further extend interaction opportunities. Lastly, suggestions around *supervisor communication* (17%) related to improvements to the frequency and nature of supervisory meetings, from informal check-ins to enhancements of the quality and regularity of these meetings.

Finance and Resources

Ideas in the Finance and Resources category primarily centred around *grants* (59%), chiefly around support in identifying and applying for grant funding with more guidance and aid in navigating the grant application processes (see Figure 8).

Grants 59%	Funding 27%	Resources 14%

Figure 8: EMCA Finance and Resources Sub-Categories

Ideas within the *funding* sub-category (27%) focused on the importance of supporting research and research-related travel, while the *resource*-related ideas (14%) centred on more effective support and sharing of resources around funding among EMCAs (e.g., faster notification of opportunities, budget development, examples of successful applications).

Summary

The above ideas generated by EMCAs highlight key areas that can be targeted to enhance the staff experience at UQ. These include:

- creating an inclusive and supportive work culture that prioritises skill development,
- improved career opportunities and support structures,
- more effective work and well-being management,
- enabling greater connection and interaction, and
- introducing more finance and resource process supports.

2.4.2 EMCA Solutions

Workshop attendees extended these ideas to formulate solutions they felt could enhance their experience. These solutions evolved through three structured activities.

1. Card Sorting: grouping related ideas and assigning solution names;
2. Decision Matrices: assessing solutions against nine criteria and selecting preferred ones;
3. Mind Mapping: detailing the essential aspects of each solution.

Due to the volume of solutions generated across the three workshops, only those receiving the highest number of votes were retained as inputs to the subsequent Strategic Planning Session.

Notably, over 90% of the votes were allocated to just three categories: Work Culture (26%), Career Development and Support (39%), and Workload and Expectations (23%) (see Figure 9). Work Culture solutions were mainly in the sub-categories of creating opportunities for development (12%) and improving the professional work environment (7%). Career Development and Support solutions were primarily related to mentoring (13%), career opportunities (12%) and guidance (6%), while Workload and Expectations solutions focused on improving expectation clarity (9%) and increasing working hours flexibility and workload management (7%).
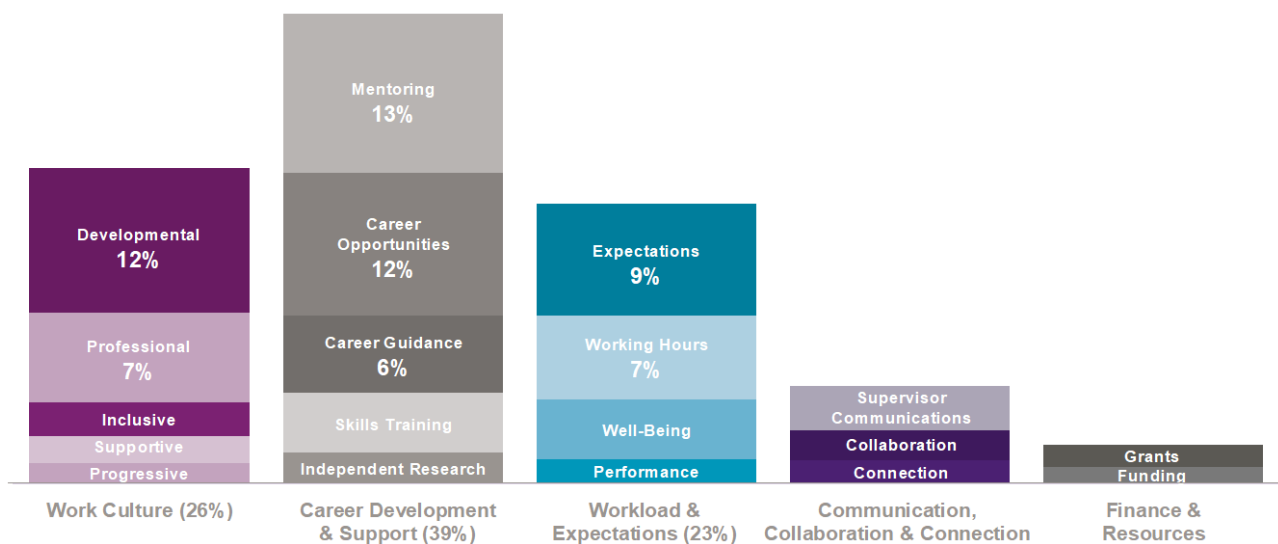
Figure 9: EMCA Solutions Share of Vote by Category and Sub-Category

A summary of key solutions and suggestions generated by the EMCA workshop attendees is provided in Table 2, according to category and sub-category. Each solution proposed is independent and presented as suggested. All are labelled and accompanied by a brief description and a percentage value corresponding to a weighted share of the attendee votes from the three EMCA workshops.

Table 2: EMCA Preferred Solutions by Category and Sub-Category

WORK CULTURE SOLUTIONS

Developmental	
Supervisor Training (7.5%)	Training opportunities and resources should be provided in-house to group leaders to support them to engage in best practice in managing their work groups. This can be part of initial onboarding to management positions and be provided on an ongoing basis. The training and resources can be embedded at all organisational levels to provide appropriate tailored support.
Training Incentives (3.1%)	The university should invest in training incentives with dedicated funds to support the ongoing training of team members.
Professional	
Forward Planning (3.5%)	To improve communication, efficiency, and accountability, senior academics and research stream leaders would benefit from developing with EMCAs and supervisory staff a calendar of planned work using a project management tool whenever grant, projects and opportunities arise.
Supportive	
High Value Tasks (2.8%)	Workload responsibilities could be better negotiated to support EMCA development. Prioritising higher value tasks would be more beneficial in building EMCA careers e.g., whether to engage in collaborative vs. non-collaborative research. High value tasks could be identified and prioritised in a formal or informal brainstorming session with the supervisor. Prioritising high value tasks could maximise output value when resources and time are limited.

Progressive	
Team Profile Sharing (2.4%)	To improve inclusion, well-being, belonging, career opportunities and team building, individual staff goals, ideas, skills, and areas of research should be documented and shared using email lists, in informal meetings, on Padlet, Google docs, or in a group management folder. This information should be gathered from all staff including EMCAs, HDRs and casuals and should be at discipline and sub-area level.

CAREER DEVELOPMENT AND SUPPORT SOLUTIONS

Mentoring	
Mentoring Program (7.1%)	A mentoring program should be further developed for EMCAs that would incorporate informal and formal mentoring as well as existing schemes (e.g., EURAXXE International Mentoring Program, Industry Mentoring Network in STEM (IMNIS)), with time allocated in workloads to support engagement. Mentorship would be provided by senior researchers who could be internal or external to the department or university. Meetings would comprise open and confidential conversations to discuss goals, strategies, outputs, barriers, and opportunities. The meetings could be held online or in-person adhering to a schedule suiting both mentor and mentee and should begin as early as possible in the EMCA's employment. A mentoring program would support EMCAs to build relationships, identify strengths and areas for development, increase their knowledge, improve their communication skills, and enhance their capacity and efficiency.
Mentor Matching (4.3%)	Identification and introduction of potential mentors should occur as early as possible in the EMCA's career path. Early connection with mentors will facilitate EMCAs cultivating new connections through an existing network.

Career Opportunities	
Service Role Opportunities (5.1%)	More opportunities should be provided for EMCAs to participate in meaningful service roles. In addition to providing valuable experience, it would also support institutional values.
Continuous Position Transfer (4.3%)	There should be a mechanism for EMCAs to transition smoothly from contract to continuous permanent positions at the university. This mechanism should be available and accessible to staff in all Schools and Institutes across the university and would provide increased job security and well-being.
Central University Appointments (3.1%)	EMCAs could be hired centrally rather than via schools and institutes. This could be funded via a grants tax system and boosted with student fee income, for example, to cover EMCA employee costs and training and would be managed by the heads of the finance and grants teams. The scheme would commence with new contracts and contract renewals, and then be ongoing and available university wide. Such an approach would allow increased work continuity, facilitate longer contracts, allow transitioning across departments, and reduce silo-ing.
Longer Term Contracts (3.1%)	Longer term contracts should be provided to EMCAs. Funding could be assigned specifically for EMCA contracts and provided at least in part from grant funding from schools as a form of grant tax. The contracts would be managed centrally and would commence with new contracts and contract renewals, and then be ongoing. Such an arrangement university-wide would provide increased job security and provide EMCAs with time to finish ongoing projects.

Career Guidance	
Structured EMCA Program (3.5%)	A structured program should be produced to guide the development of EMCAs. The program would detail expected goals and provide opportunities for skill development, collaboration, and engagement at UQ. The program could be supported by relevant research and teaching units in the university, and would run in person events throughout the year, with annual programs for each level, and EMCAs given time to attend. This would identify the skills and strengths of each EMCA, increase the likelihood of their success and impact, advance their careers, and provide opportunities for departmental succession planning.
Proactive Career Management (2.8%)	EMCAs should be encouraged to take a proactive approach towards their career via workshops and panels that share experiences of a variety of careers and career levels/external mentors (e.g., as in the IMNIS program). These meetings, workshops and symposia would be organised by supervisors and/or relevant units in the university. The events would be provided when and wherever suitable and would provide EMCAs ideas of available career options to identify those that align most with their needs and requirements.
Skills Training	
Training and Resources (7.1%)	The capabilities of EMCAs can be enhanced through training and industry linkage scholarships. This could include accredited courses relevant to industry e.g. management, research, commercialisation, or internships. The training and resources would be provided in the form of regular meetings, workshops, and experiential learning, and would include access to new and advanced research techniques and tools. A central body in the university could identify training opportunities, which may be provided by external contractors, and potential collaborators, including international organisations. A program of learning would be made available 3-4 times per year at UQ, in-house or externally, including international venues, as appropriate. Such training and resources would enhance the reputation of the university and its staff. The skills acquired would also enhance the career opportunities for EMCAs either vertically or laterally to support development and counter experiences of becoming 'stuck' in their role.
Independent Research	
Paid Project Day (3.1%)	EMCAs could have one paid day per week to complete prior projects to publication or work on ongoing projects. This arrangement would be based on a grant tax system plus central university funding. Contracts would automatically include one paid day per week or the prorated equivalent. EMCAs could also guest lecture to contribute as part of a reciprocity system or work on projects with undergraduates whose courses require research experience. This would be managed centrally, be available university-wide, and would commence with new contracts and contract renewals, and then be ongoing. A paid project day per week would provide scope to continue outstanding projects from previous positions to boost publication records and reduce prior research backlog blackholes.

WORKLOAD AND EXPECTATIONS SOLUTIONS

Expectations	
Clear Contract Criteria (4.3%)	Clear written requirements and performance criteria should be included as a component of employment agreements at the start of any contract. This would be achieved by changing university policy and contract requirements and would be the responsibility of the hiring manager. Providing clear requirements and performance criteria would improve the clarity and understanding of what is expected of EMCAs.

Working Hours	
4-Day Work Week (3.9%)	A 4-day work week could be implemented at UQ, comprising staff working 10-hours per day, 4 days per week. Individuals would opt to work Monday to Thursday or Tuesday to Friday. The arrangement could apply to all staff or to those wishing to work 4 days, with contracts amended to recognise the new arrangements. A 4-day work week would improve staff mental health.
8-Hour Day Normalisation (3.9%)	University policy and practice should recognize an 8-hour workday as the norm. This would be achieved by limiting access after set hours and would apply across the university to academics, HDRs, and professional staff. An 8-hour workday would become the expectation from the first day of the policy being implemented. Not working more than 8-hour per day would improve staff well-being and mental health.
Religious Holiday Observance (3.9%)	The enterprise agreement should be amended to incorporate different religious holidays. This would include the university being able to close over Christmas without requiring staff to take leave and allow staff of other religions to switch their public holidays. It would apply to all university employees throughout the year and would provide the benefit of equal family opportunities regardless of culture of religion.
Well-Being	
Well-Being Support (9.4%)	A suite of emotional, social, and financial supports should be made available to EMCAs. Emotional support could take the form of counselling, regular meetings and managers being more aware of the employee experience. Social support could be provided by having a more inclusive work environment and encouraging EMCAs to organise events. Financial support could be in the form of travel grants. Support would be available free of charge to all EMCAs and would help to improve their work performance.

COMMUNICATION, COLLABORATION AND CONNECTION SOLUTIONS

Connection	
Diverse Connections (5.1%)	A facility should be made available to all EMCAs to support them making connections to students and co-workers with diverse backgrounds.

FINANCE AND RESOURCES SOLUTIONS

Grants	
Collaborative Grant Inclusion (3.5%)	EMCAs should be included in grant applications they contribute to developing.
Funding	
Career Development Funding (2.8%)	Funding should be made available to support the career development of EMCAs. This could be provided centrally or in partnership with external organisations or government. Support should be made available on a continuous basis to EMCAs to allow them to take advantage of opportunities internally and externally as they arise. Career development funding would help equip EMCAs with the skills to progress their careers horizontally and laterally.

From the myriad solutions proposed across the various categories, Career Development and Support emerged as a priority, securing 26% of the votes. Within this category, the Mentoring Program solution (7.1%) gained substantial support, advocating for both informal and formal mentorship to foster relationships and enhance skills. Additionally, Training and Resources (7.1%)

stood out, emphasising the importance of skill and capability development through diverse training and industry linkage.

Career Development and Support received the lion's share of the vote at 39%, signifying its pivotal role in shaping the EMCA experience. The two most popular solutions within this category were enhanced Supervisor Training (7.5%) and Well-Being Support (9.4%). In the case of supervisor training, ideas included the provision of in-house resources and training to improve work group management. The focus on Well-Being Support (9.4%), highlighted a need for emotional, social, and financial assistance for EMCAs.

Workload and Expectations were also important, securing 23% of the total votes. Clear Contract Criteria (4.3%) stood out, advocating for transparent performance criteria within contracts, and emphasising the importance of clarity for EMCA expectations. The suggestion to introduce a 4-Day Work Week (3.9%) also had traction, underlining a desire for condensed work schedules.

In addressing Communication, Collaboration and Connection, the Diverse Connections solution (5.1%), advocated for a dedicated facility enabling EMCAs to forge connections with individuals from diverse backgrounds, highlighting the value of broadening networks. In the sphere of Finance and Resources, there was an emphasis on Collaborative Grant Inclusion (3.5%) raising the importance of involving EMCAs within grant applications. Similarly, the proposition for Career Development Funding (2.8%) highlights the need for continuous financial support to facilitate career growth through skill development.

These high-scoring solutions within their respective categories embody the collective aspirations and priorities of the EMCA community, reflecting a call for comprehensive support systems, skill enhancement opportunities, and measures aimed at fostering a conducive and balanced work environment at UQ.

2.4.3 Do and Don't Do Statements

At the end of each of the EMCA workshops, attendees were asked to state just one thing that they believed should happen (directive) and one thing they thought should not happen (caution against) to improve the EMCA experience. These directives and cautions were subsequently classified using the same categories as the ideas and solutions data, and the percentage refers to proportion of responses in each category (see Figure 10).
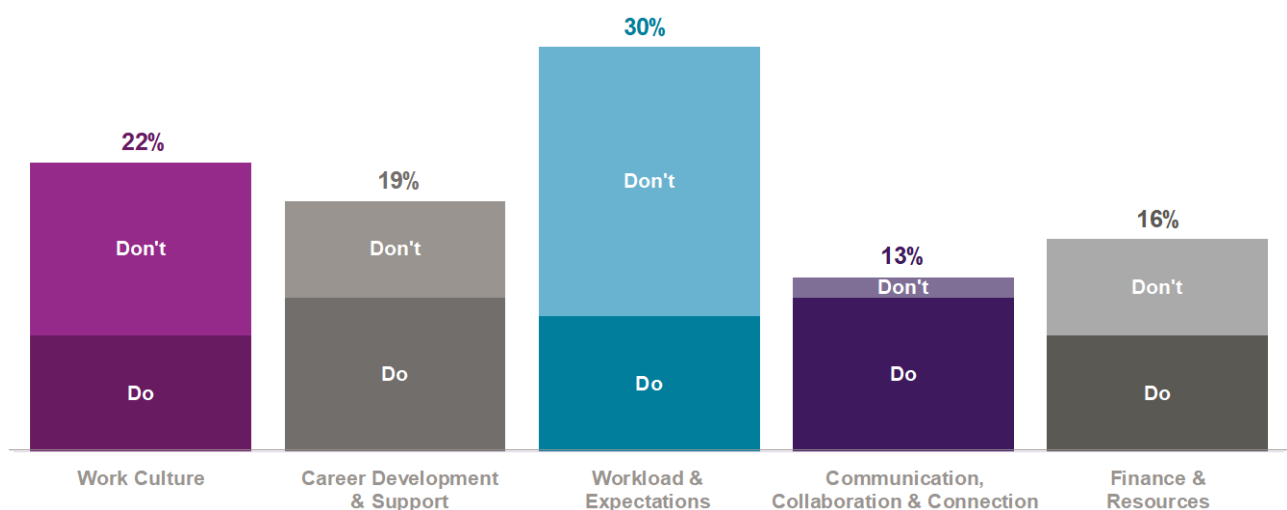
Figure 10: EMCA Do and Don't Do Statements by Category

The proportion of "Do" and "Don't do" statements across the categories presents a multifaceted perspective of the EMCA community's experiences and aspirations. The prevalence of "Don't do" responses (cautions) within Work Culture and Workload and Expectations may be a consequence of potential past actions, existing practices that have fallen short and been perceived as ineffective in these areas, or where there are ongoing challenges or unaddressed concerns. Conversely, the

greater proportion of "Do" (directives) statements in Career Development and Support, Communication, Collaboration and Connection, and Finance and Resources indicates a potential lack of prior action or insufficient attention, and a collective directive for proactive measures or enhancements within these categories. The overall distribution highlights the desire for considered interventions and strategies to improve the EMCA experience at UQ.

3. Strategic Planning Session

Following the three EMCA workshops in October and analysis of the outputs, a Strategic Planning Session was held in November 2023. This session focused on evaluating and prioritising the highest-voted solutions generated by attendees of the EMCA workshops. Staff in human resource, research, and line management roles across the university convened to assess the proposed solutions for their time to implement, value, practicality, feasibility, and favourability. The session aimed to establish preferred and actionable strategies to enhance the EMCA experience at the University of Queensland.

3.1 Attendees

Domains from across the University of Queensland were represented at the Strategic Planning Session, with active participation of staff from a range of Faculties, Institutes and areas of Central Management.
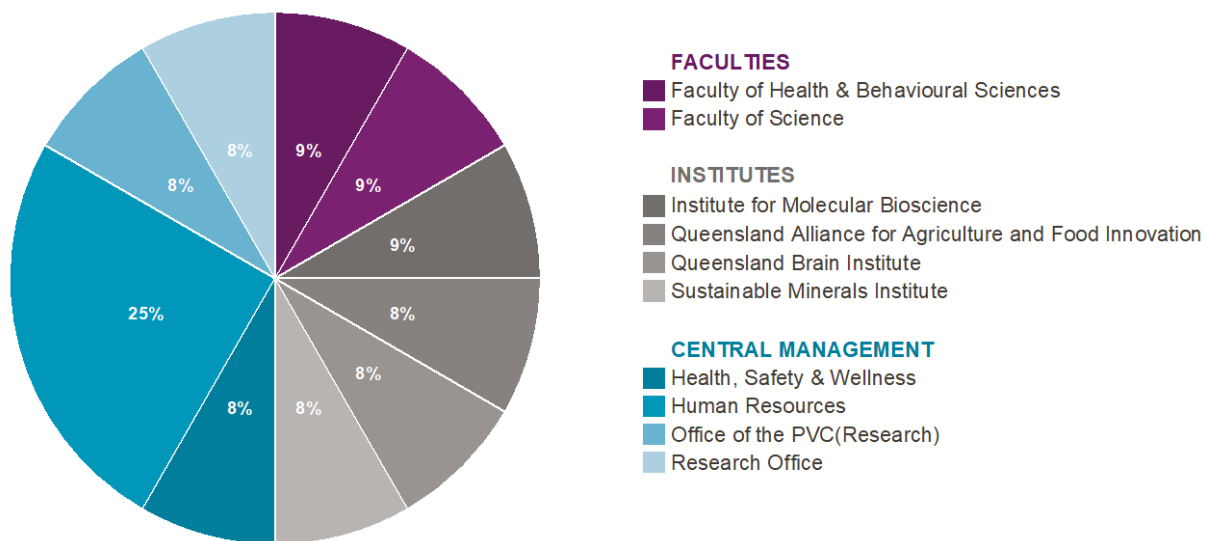
Figure 11: Strategic Planning Session Attendee Profile

As shown in Figure 11, there was representation from the Faculty of Health and Behavioural Sciences and the Faculty of Science. Among the Institutes, there was involvement of staff from the Queensland Alliance for Agriculture and Food Innovation, Queensland Brain Institute, the Institute for Molecular Bioscience, and the Sustainable Minerals Institute. Contributions were also made by Central Management units including Health, Safety and Wellness, Human Resources, Office of the PVC(Research), and the Research Office. Their collective engagement provided comprehensive and diverse perspectives to help shape strategic initiatives to enhance the EMCA experience.

3.2 Activities

The Strategic Planning Session commenced with a succinct overview of the findings from the project's research, followed by a concise summary of the EMCA workshops and their outcomes. This paved the way for a sequence of four progressive design thinking exercises structured to facilitate a systematic evaluation of the preferred solutions that emerged from the EMCA

workshops. The initial exercise involved a screening process based on implementation time and value to the university, followed by a more detailed review and assessment of the selected solutions. Subsequently, attendees engaged in a voting process to prioritise the solutions. The session was concluded with a reverse brainstorming exercise where each attendee contributed one directive ("Do") and one cautionary consideration ("Don't do") aimed at refining and enhancing the EMCA experience.

Exercise 1 | Solution Screening

The most highly voted solutions from the EMCA workshops were initially screened by attendees in the Strategic Planning Session. Each solution was evaluated by small groups of attendees against two criteria: timeframe for implementation [rated from 1 (fast) to 5 (slow)], and value to the university [rated from 1 (high) to 9 (low)]. These assessments culminated in live plotting of each solution within category clusters on a bubble matrix, using mean values of its screening scores (see x and y axes in right figure). The size of each bubble corresponded to the number of EMCA votes received (z). Solutions scoring high on both implementation timeframe and university value were designated as 'A', while those scoring highly on either criterion were labelled 'B'; solutions not meeting these criteria remained unlabelled. Only A and B solutions were progressed to the Implementation Evaluation stage.

SOLUTION SCREENING
Preferred solutions rated on value & time to implement
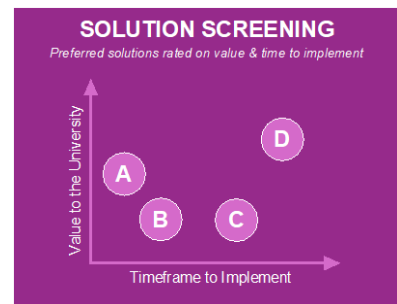
### Exercise 2 | Implementation Evaluation

Solutions classified as A or B then underwent an assessment of their implementation potential by individual teams of workshop attendees, using a structured approach based on nine distinct criteria. Each solution received ratings ranging from 0 (low) to 5 (high) across various facets: (i) alignment with UQ's goals and objectives, (ii) feasibility, (iii) likely effectiveness, (iv) level of impact, (v) risk, (vi) cost-benefit analysis, (vii) scalability and sustainability, and (viii) likelihood of acceptance and adoption, regulation and compliance. These evaluations were documented on Implementation Evaluation forms, featuring the listed criteria alongside descriptions, individual columns for rating each criterion, and a final section for comments and considerations pertinent to the evaluation process. Upon completion of the Implementation Evaluation, the cumulative score for each solution was calculated (with a maximum potential score of 45) and recorded at the bottom of the respective form.

IMPLEMENTATION EVALUATION
Highest rated solutions assessed on implementation practicalities

	A
Goal Alignment	4
Feasibility	3
Effectiveness	4
Impact	5
Risk	1
Cost-Benefit	4
Scalability & Sustainability	3
Acceptance & Adoption	4
Regulation & Compliance	4

Exercise 3 | Solutions Casino

The completed A2-sized Implementation Evaluation forms were subsequently mounted on the walls of the seminar room, each accompanied by a small wooden box. Attendees were then provided with ten poker chips to cast their votes for the solutions they believed would best enhance the EMCA experience. With the allocation voting method, attendees could distribute their chips across multiple solutions or concentrate them on a single solution based on their preferences. After reviewing the Implementation Evaluation forms, attendees placed their chips into the corresponding voting boxes beneath the solutions. Finally, the total votes for each solution were tallied.

SOLUTIONS CASINO
Preferred solutions identified using allocation voting
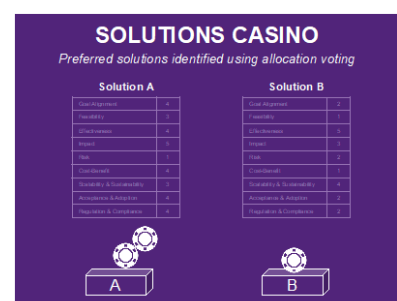
Exercise 4 | Reverse Brainstorming

Mirroring the approach used in the EMCA Workshops, in considering ways to enhance the EMCA experience, the final exercise allowed attendees to express directives ("Do") and cautions ("Don't do"). This involved a reverse brainstorming session where each attendee wrote one "Do" and one "Don't do" on separate sticky notes. These notes were placed on designated areas of a divided whiteboard as the Strategic Planning Session concluded.
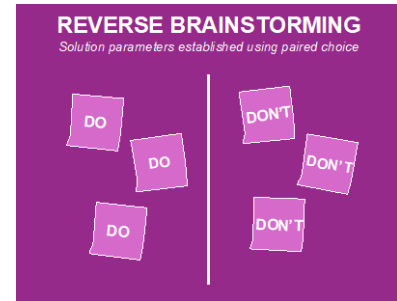
3.3 Analysis

All outputs generated during the Strategic Planning Session were retained to ensure comprehensive data capture. This encompassed the Solution Screening scores and zones, Implementation Evaluation scores along with their associated comments, and Votes for each solution. These details were documented in dedicated tables of the purpose-built database. Additionally, the "Do" and "Don't do" statements in this session were integrated into the existing database and tagged to differentiate them from the EMCA workshop data.

The Solution Screening analysis occurred in real-time during the Strategic Planning Workshop. It involved the calculation and graphical representation of average scores relevant to the timeframe for implementation, value to the university, and the EMCA weighted vote. These scores were plotted on bubble charts, to determine the categorisation of each solution as A, B, or unlabelled, based on their positions.

To determine the most viable solutions, an overall score was calculated for each solution that progressed to the final stage. This combined score comprised the Solution Screening score integrating EMCA votes, the Implementation Evaluation score, and the votes cast by attendees of the Strategic Planning Session. This amalgamation was used to identify the most practical and highly voted solutions overall, with the top five highest-scoring solutions being recommended.

Dedicated scorecards were devised for each recommended solution, summarising their suitability for implementation. These scorecards encompassed three key areas: Solution Screening, Implementation Evaluation, and Share of Votes. The Solution Screening area used gauge charts to visually represent the time required for implementation and the value to the university. The Implementation Evaluation area captured the content of the form completed during the Strategic Planning Workshop, encompassing comments, total scores, and the proportion of the maximum possible score. Additionally, the Share of Votes area highlighted the proportion of votes garnered from both the EMCA Workshops and Strategic Planning Sessions, offering insight into the solution's relative voting weight. To enhance comprehension, consistent colour-coded backgrounds were used throughout the scorecards: green for high scores, amber for medium, and red for low, providing a comprehensive breakdown of the recommended solutions and their potential for implementation.

3.4 Results

3.4.1 Solution Screening Bubble Charts
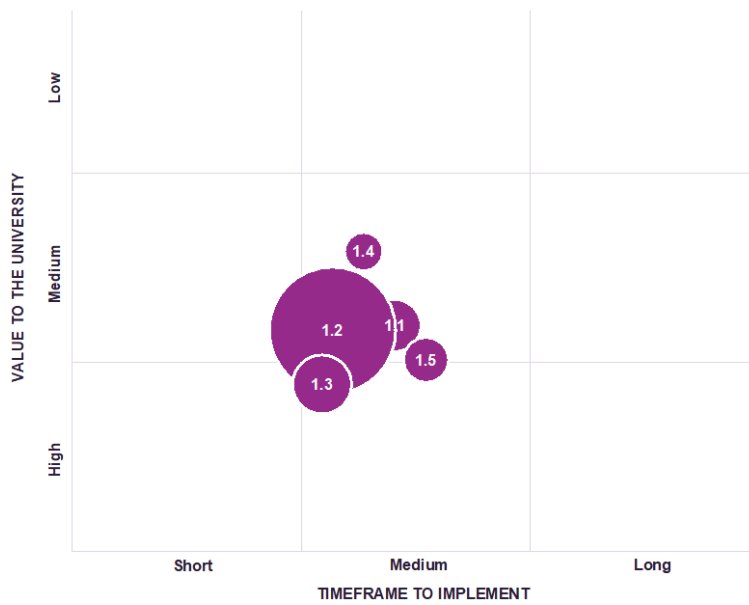
Figure 12: Work Culture Solutions Time to Implement, Value and Importance

WORK CULTURE

Work Culture solutions were clustered closely in the bubble chart, predominantly falling within short to medium timeframes, and high to medium value to the university. Notably, the most favoured solution generated by EMCAs was Supervisor Training (1.2), with its prominent bubble dominating the chart. All solutions were allocated A or B ratings:

1.1 Training Incentives (B)
1.2 Supervisor Training (A)
1.3 Forward Planning (A)
1.4 Team Profile Sharing (B)
1.5 High Value Tasks (B)

Figure 13: Career Development and Support Solutions Time to Implement, Value and Importance

CAREER DEVELOPMENT AND SUPPORT

In contrast to the Work Culture solutions, the Career Development and Support solutions varied widely, and fell mainly in the medium to long term timeframe and medium value to UQ.

2.1 Proactive Career Management (B)
2.2 Structured EMCA Program (B)
2.3 Service Role Opportunities (A)
2.4 Continuous Position Transfer (B)
2.5 Central University Appointments
2.6 Longer Term Contracts
2.7 Paid Project Day
2.8 Mentor Matching (B)
2.9 Mentoring Program (B)
2.10 Training and Resources

Figure 14: Workload and Expectations Solutions Time to Implement, Value and Importance
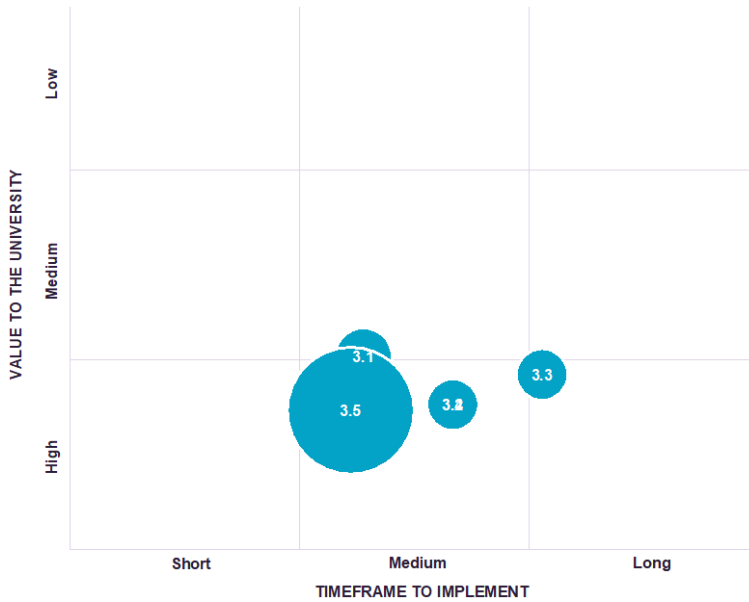
WORKLOAD AND EXPECTATIONS

Some of the highest value solutions were within the Workload and Expectations category, with Well-Being Support being the most highly voted EMCA solution.

3.1 Clear Contract Criteria (B)
3.2 8-Hour Day Normalisation (B)
3.3 4-Day Work Week
3.4 Religious Holiday Observance (B)
3.5 Well-Being Support (B)

Figure 15: Communication, Collaboration and Connection Solutions Time to Implement, Value and Importance
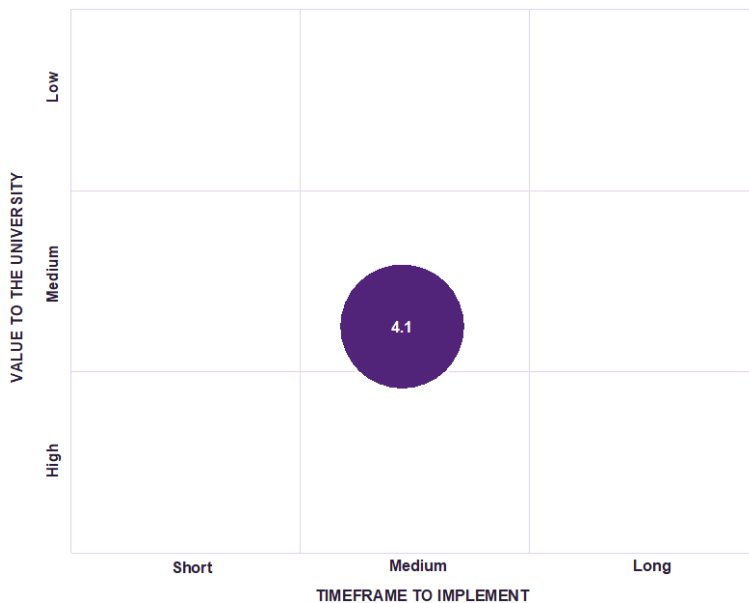
COMMUNICATION, COLLABORATION AND CONNECTION

The Communication, Collaboration and Connection bubble chart was unusual in that it contained only one solution: Diverse Connections. As this solution was neither fast to implement nor high value to the university, it was not labelled.

4.1 Diverse Connections
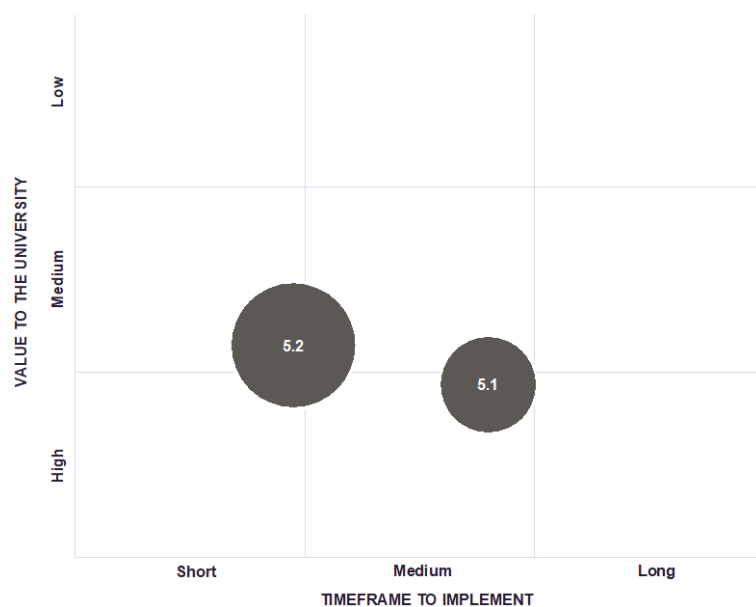
FINANCE AND RESOURCES

The Finance and Resources category was also lightly represented with just two solutions: Career Development Funding and Collaborative Grant Inclusion. The latter was categorised A rather than B due its much shorter timeframe to implementation and similar value to the university as the former.

5.1 Career Development Funding (B)

5.2 Collaborative Grant Inclusion (A)

Figure 16: Finance and Resources Solutions Time to Implement, Value and Importance

3.4.2 Implementation Evaluation Results

Following the Solution Screening task, evaluated solutions labeled as A or B underwent Implementation Evaluation across the nine criteria. This yielded a maximum possible score out of 45; with higher scores indicating greater implementation potential. The results — categorised into Work Culture, Career Development and Support, Workload and Expectations, and Finance and Resources — provide an indication of the EMCA generated solutions relative implementation potential (see Table 3).

Table 3: Solution Implementation Evaluation Results

WORK CULTURE		CAREER DEVELOPMENT AND SUPPORT	
Supervisor Training	37	Service Role Opportunities	37
Forward Planning	36	Structured EMCA Program	36
High Value Tasks	34	Mentoring Program	34
Training Incentives	17	Mentor Matching	17
Team Profile Sharing	15	Proactive Career Management	15

WORKLOAD AND EXPECTATIONS		FINANCE AND RESOURCES	
Religious Holiday Observance	44	Collaborative Grant Inclusion	35
Well-Being Support	34		
Clear Contract Criteria	25		
8-Hour Workday Normalisation	24		

Five solutions received scores of 80% or higher out of the maximum possible, while nine achieved over 75%. Among these, the Work Culture and Career Development and Support categories each had two high-scoring solutions: Supervisor Training and Forward Planning scored 37 and 36, respectively, while Service Role Opportunities and the Structured EMCA Program also scored 37 and 36 in their respective categories. Religious Holiday Observance led the Workload and Expectations category with a top score of 44, while Collaborative Grant Inclusion in Finance and Resources reached a score of 35.

3.4.3 Strategic Planning Session Votes by Solution

The results of the Strategic Planning Session attendee voting reflect key preferences and priorities for proposed enhancements to the EMCA experience. The vote prioritised solutions categorised under Work Culture, Workload and Expectations, and Career Development and Support (see Figure 17). Notably, the majority of the vote concentrated on four solutions, that collectively amassed 75% of the total votes: Supervisor Training (24%), High-Value Tasks (22%), Forward Planning (16%), and a Structured EMCA Program (13%).
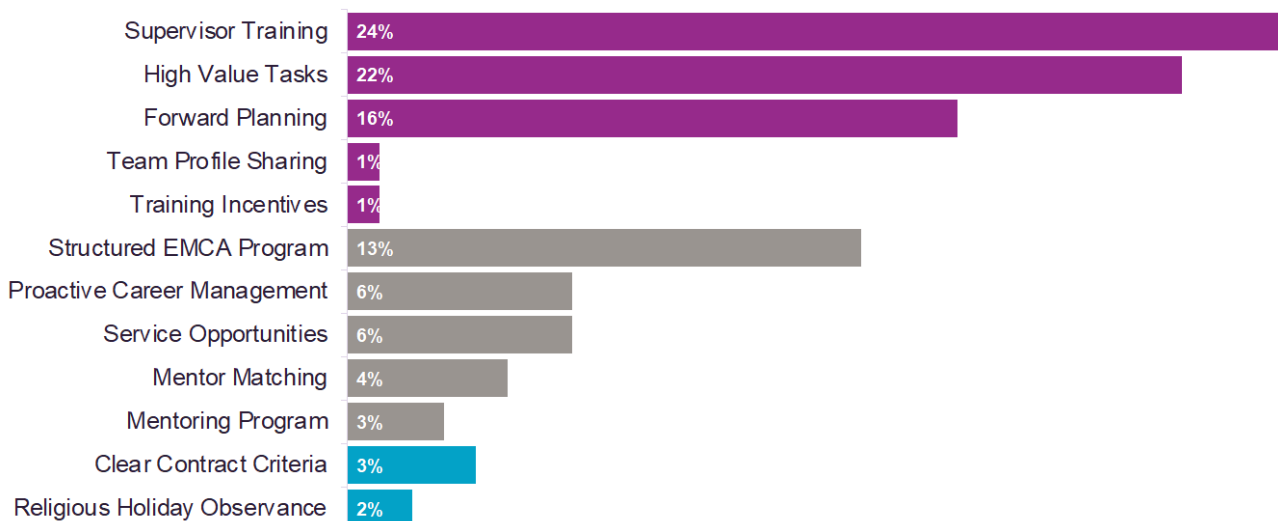
Figure 17: Results of Strategic Planning Session Votes by Solution

3.4.4 Do and Don't Do Statements

As noted above, the Strategic Planning Session mirrored the format of the EMCA workshops, inviting attendees to outline one directive ("Do") and one caution ("Don't do") to enhance the EMCA experience. These suggestions were categorised similarly to that applied in the EMCA workshop data. However, notable differences surfaced in the data (see Figure 18).
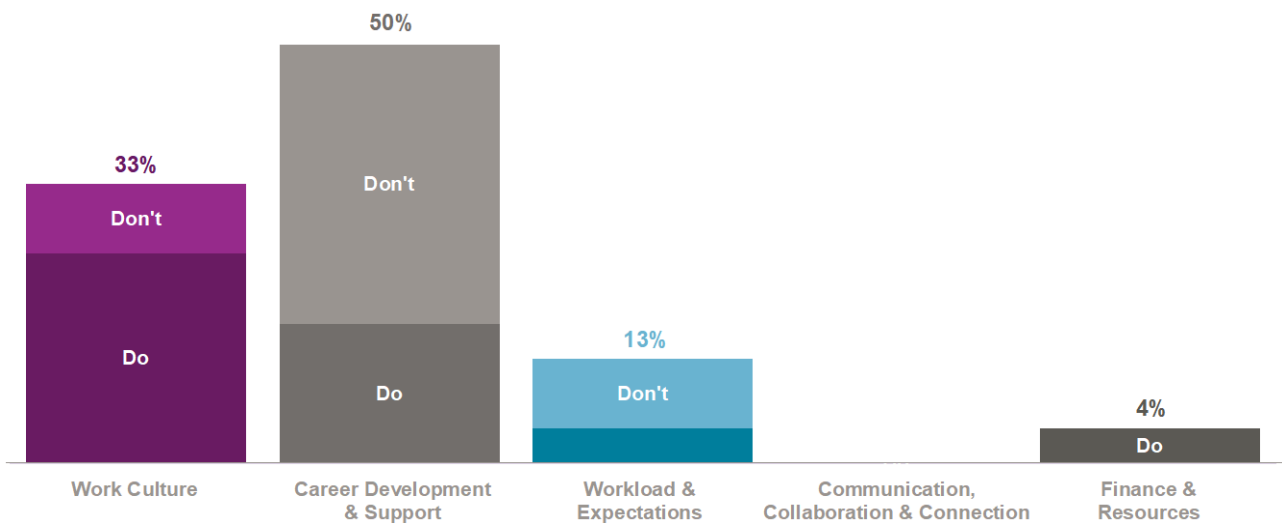
Figure 18: Strategic Planning Session Do and Don't Do Statements by Category

First, the directives and cautions were concentrated in the Work Culture and Career Development and Support categories, with a combined 83% allocated to these categories during the Strategic Planning Session, compared to 41% in the EMCA Workshops (see Figure 10). Second, there was a distinct focus on Career Development and Support solutions (50%) as opposed to a more even distribution across Workload and Expectations (30%) and Work Culture (22%) in the EMCA workshops. Finally, the EMCA workshops predominantly highlighted cautions related to Work Culture. In contrast, the data from the Strategic Planning Session indicated a complete reversal, emphasising directives and suggesting that enhancing work culture was a key priority for Strategic Planning Session attendees.

4. Recommendations

In order to determine the solutions to recommend, an overall score was calculated for each solution that progressed to the final stage. This score consisted of the Solution Screening score integrating EMCA votes, the Implementation Evaluation score, and the votes cast by attendees who took part in the Strategic Planning Session. This identified the most practical and popular solutions overall, with the top five highest-scoring solutions being recommended. Dedicated scorecards were then developed for each recommended solution, summarising their suitability for implementation and popularity with both the EMCA Workshop and Strategic Planning Session attendees.

4.1 Recommended Solutions

Among the solutions assessed, five stood out across two categories, with one solution notably prioritised given its score was ten points higher than the remaining solutions (see Figure 19).

1. SUPERVISOR TRAINING	Work Culture	86
2. HIGH VALUE TASKS	Work Culture	76
3. FORWARD PLANNING	Work Culture	75
4. STRUCTURED EMCA PROGRAM	Career Development & Support	72
5. SERVICE ROLE OPPORTUNITIES	Career Development & Support	71

Figure 19: Recommended Solutions with Final Scores by Category

Supervisor Training was the frontrunner, with 86 points compared to the second-highest voted solution, *High Value Tasks*, which scored 76 points. Within these top-scoring solutions, three belonged to the Work Culture category, namely Supervisor Training, High Value Tasks, and Forward Planning. Meanwhile, the remaining two solutions, implementing a Structured EMCA Program and increasing Service Role Opportunities, fell under the Career Development and Support category.

Detailed below are the five solutions that achieved the highest scores. Each solution is presented with its description developed by EMCAs in their mind maps, the anticipated benefits upon implementation, and its scorecard showcasing its ratings across Solution Screening, Implementation Evaluation, and Voting activities from both the EMCA Workshops and the Strategic Planning Session. Additionally, suggested next steps for implementation and relevant directives ("Do") and cautions ("Don't do") are provided.

4.1.1 Supervisor Training

Definition

Improving Work Culture by Enhancing Leadership Skills

Training initiatives tailored to enhance leaders and supervisors' abilities to guide and support EMCAs effectively should be provided. Comprehensive training would encompass how to:

- nurture positive staff relationships,
- foster teamwork, respect and a collaborative, inclusive work culture,
- promote diverse perspectives and idea exchange,
- manage academic pressures,
- address the professional and career needs of EMCAs.

Suggestions included targeting training at various career phases, adapting these continually to individual levels, roles, and team dynamics and delivering a combination of interactive face-to-face workshops and online resources.

Benefits

Supervisor Training was consistently prioritized by attendees in all project stages from EMCA workshops to final analysis, where it was rated above all other suggestions. The benefits of Supervisor Training identified by EMCAs comprised the following:

Best practice: Provision of more support to supervisors in implementing best practices for group management,

Access to tools: Equipping supervisors with tools to handle academic pressure and their roles effectively,

Teamwork: Cultivating an understanding of teamwork, respect, and appreciation for team members' input,

Connected Work Culture: Facilitating the establishment of a collaborative and connected work culture, and

EMCA Career Development: Catering to the professional and career needs of EMCAs.

Scorecard

IMPLEMENTATION EVALUATION

Criterion	Score	Comments
Goal Alignment	3	*Not directly aligned to values but important to building and retaining quality researchers, and research objectives*
Feasibility	5	*Very feasible. Actions already in place, just requires more time.*
Effectiveness	2	*Training not the primary intervention but still important*
Impact	3	
Risk	5	*No risk*
Cost-Benefit	5	*Good cost-benefit*
Scalability & Sustainability	5	*Once embedded, continuous improvement*
Acceptance & Adoption	4	*Mandatory but will still show in actions, and will lead to behaviour change.*
Regulation & Compliance	5	*Consistent with regulations*
	37 (82%)	

SOLUTION SCREENING

TIME TO IMPLEMENT — VALUE TO UQ

SHARE OF VOTES

7.5% — EMCA WORKSHOPS

29% — STRATEGIC PLANNING

Figure 20: Supervisor Training Scorecard

Suggested Next Steps

1. **Audit** the training level of current supervisory staff.
2. **Assess** current supervisor training in terms of content, level, frequency, and effectiveness.
3. **Engage** collaboratively with UQ leaders, supervisors and EMCAs to jointly define essential knowledge and skills required.
4. **Design** training to empower effective guidance of EMCAs and other staff covering positive staff relationships, teamwork, inclusivity, academic pressure management, and EMCA professional needs.
5. **Adapt** training to different career phases and team dynamics, employing interactive workshops and online resources for delivery.
6. **Deliver** training throughout; from the first supervisory appointment and on an ongoing basis.

Do and Don't Do

Supervisor training was prominent in the Reverse Brainstorming exercise completed by attendees in both the EMCA Workshops and the Strategic Planning Session.

DO

- ✓ Enhance and engage in supervisor training (6 statements).
- ✓ Enhance and engage in culture training.
- ✓ Engage in supervisor mentorship training.
- ✓ Consider the impact that supervisors have on EMCA outcomes.

DON'T

- ✗ Hire supervisors based solely on academic performance, without considering their workplace culture impact.

4.1.2 High Value Tasks

Definition

Improving EMCA Development with Focused Workload

The EMCA role often involves a variety of tasks, some of which may be routine or less impactful on career growth. Given this, attendees of the EMCA Workshops, highlighted the importance of shifting workload responsibilities to higher value tasks that can benefit career development (e.g., more collaborative over non-collaborative research).

High value tasks could be identified and prioritised in a formal or informal brainstorming session with line managers and supervisor. Prioritising high value tasks would maximise output value with limited resources and time.

Benefits

Professional Development: Shifting focus toward higher value tasks can advance professional development. Taking the example of collaborative research, this not only enhances the knowledge base of EMCAs, but it also fosters networking and skill development through teamwork.

Comprehensive Review: Identifying high value tasks offers a more a strategic career development process. A formal or informal brainstorming session with a supervisor would allow for a comprehensive review of tasks, considering factors such as potential impact, alignment with departmental goals, personal interest, and skill development.

Resource Maximisation: Prioritising high value tasks ensures that the limited resources and time available are maximised for the most impactful outcomes.

Personal and Departmental Progress: by allocating time and effort towards higher value tasks, in terms of innovation, strategic insights, or meaningful collaborations, EMCAs can significantly contribute to both personal career growth and the department's success.
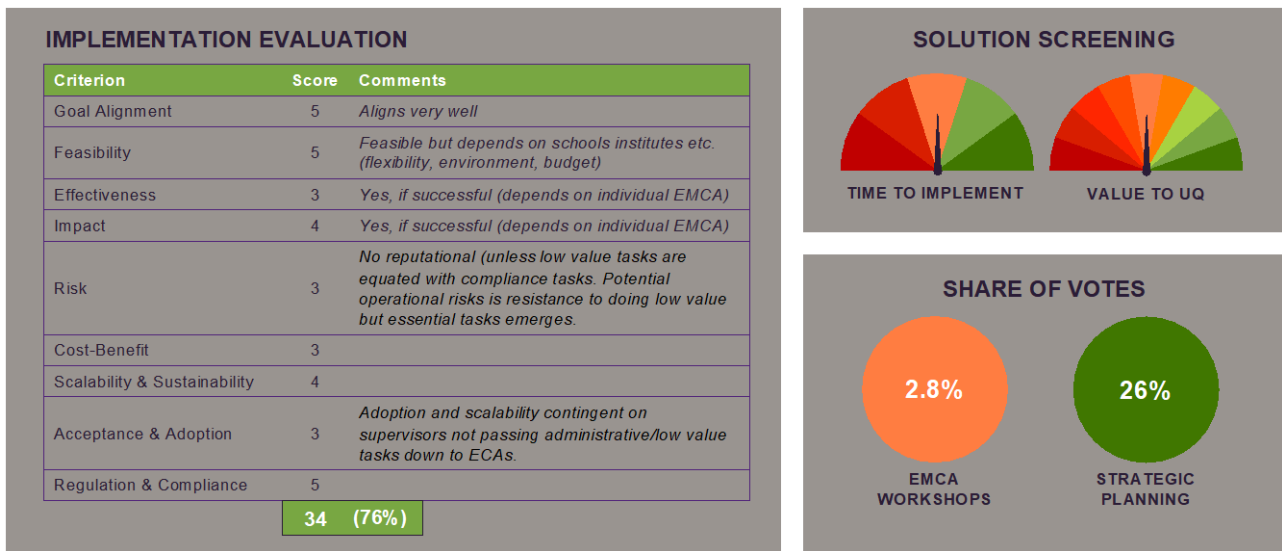
Scorecard

IMPLEMENTATION EVALUATION

Criterion	Score	Comments
Goal Alignment	5	*Aligns very well*
Feasibility	5	*Feasible but depends on schools institutes etc. (flexibility, environment, budget)*
Effectiveness	3	*Yes, if successful (depends on individual EMCA)*
Impact	4	*Yes, if successful (depends on individual EMCA)*
Risk	3	*No reputational (unless low value tasks are equated with compliance tasks. Potential operational risks is resistance to doing low value but essential tasks emerges.*
Cost-Benefit	3	
Scalability & Sustainability	4	
Acceptance & Adoption	3	*Adoption and scalability contingent on supervisors not passing administrative/low value tasks down to ECAs.*
Regulation & Compliance	5	
34	**(76%)**	

SOLUTION SCREENING

TIME TO IMPLEMENT · VALUE TO UQ

SHARE OF VOTES

2.8% EMCA WORKSHOPS · 26% STRATEGIC PLANNING

Figure 21: High Value Tasks Scorecard

Suggested Next Steps

1. **Engage** with EMCAs and supervisors to collaboratively define a high value task prioritisation process.

2. **Develop** short workshops for EMCAs and their supervisors to attend together to learn about the high value task prioritisation process and its implementation.

3. **Provide** online resources to support the process.

4. **Deliver** face-to-face workshops and provide online access to resources.

5. **Send** quarterly reminders to EMCAs and supervisors to ensure ongoing implementation.

Do and Don't Do

Prioritising high value tasks and managing EMCA workloads received more "Don't do" than "Do" statements in the Reverse Brainstorming exercises.

DO

✓ Channel high-value tasks to expand EMCAs' research and impact.

DON'T

✗ Give tasks to EMCAs simply to manage workload.

✗ Increase administrative burdens.

✗ Overload research and T&R EMCAs with excessive teaching.

✗ Overwhelm EMCAs with excessive or unattainable demands.

✗ Underestimate EMCA workloads and overlook their diverse roles.

4.1.3 Forward Planning

Definition

Improving Work Culture and Practices

Forward planning was identified as key, with the suggestion that research stream leaders and line managers should develop a calendar of planned work using a project management tool in conjunction with EMCAs and supervisory staff. This could occur in a workshop setting whenever grant, projects and other opportunities arise and would improve efficiency and accountability.

Benefits

Forward planning fosters a collaborative and structured environment, optimise resource allocation and maximise productivity. It promotes a culture of efficiency, adaptability, and continuous improvement, aligning with the goals of research excellence and academic advancement.

Streamlined Project Planning: Using project management tools to outline, assign, and track tasks for various ongoing and upcoming projects offers transparency whilst increasing the visibility of work undertaken and the progress of each task. This also ensures that everyone is on the same page regarding deadlines and responsibilities.

Team Integration: Involving others adds a dynamic element to the planning process. This might comprise interdisciplinary teams or individuals with diverse expertise, whose input may foster innovative ideas and strategies, improving the overall quality of the planned work.

Workshop Setting: Conducting workshops whenever new grants, projects, or opportunities arise allows for collaborative brainstorming and planning. In addition to facilitating communication, this encourages idea-sharing, and ensures that everyone understands the goals, timelines, and expected outcomes.

Adaptability and Flexibility: A calendar-based approach can facilitate more effective adaptation to changes. With a structured plan, adjustments due to unforeseen circumstances or new opportunities can be incorporated without major disruptions, maintaining productivity and focus.

Accountability and Evaluation: Clear task assignments and deadlines established through forward planning enable accountability. Regular check-ins and reviews can then ensure that progress aligns with the planned schedule. This also aids in evaluating effectiveness and identifying improvements.
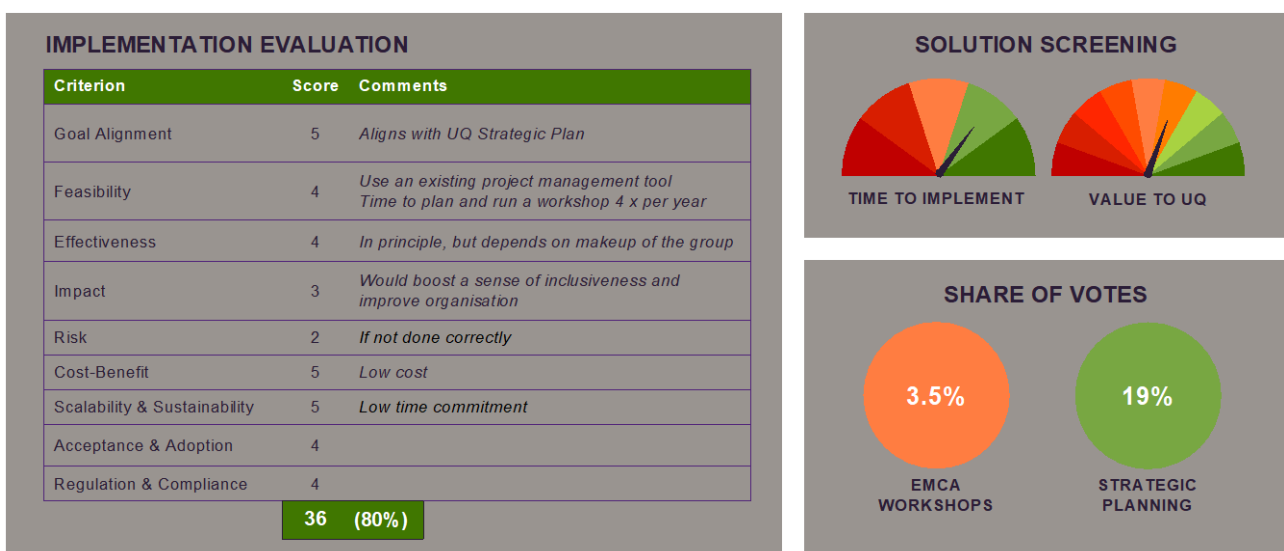
Scorecard

IMPLEMENTATION EVALUATION		
Criterion	Score	Comments
Goal Alignment	5	*Aligns with UQ Strategic Plan*
Feasibility	4	*Use an existing project management tool* *Time to plan and run a workshop 4 x per year*
Effectiveness	4	*In principle, but depends on makeup of the group*
Impact	3	*Would boost a sense of inclusiveness and improve organisation*
Risk	2	*If not done correctly*
Cost-Benefit	5	*Low cost*
Scalability & Sustainability	5	*Low time commitment*
Acceptance & Adoption	4	
Regulation & Compliance	4	
36	**(80%)**	

SOLUTION SCREENING

TIME TO IMPLEMENT VALUE TO UQ

SHARE OF VOTES

3.5% — EMCA WORKSHOPS 19% — STRATEGIC PLANNING

Figure 22: Forward Planning Scorecard

Suggested Next Steps

1. **Collaborate** with leaders, managers, supervisors, and EMCAs to understand their needs and requirements for a project management tool and planning process.

2. **Evaluate** and select a suitable project management tool.

3. **Design** an inclusive forward planning process.

4. **Deliver** training sessions on inclusive forward planning using the chosen project management tool to leaders and their work teams.

5. **Promote** the benefits of inclusive and integrated forward planning within Faculties, Schools and Institutes.

6. **Send** quarterly reminders to implement forward planning.

7. **Implement** an ongoing improvement program based on periodic review and feedback from users.

Do and Don't Do

All Reverse Brainstorming comments related to forward planning were proactive.

DO

- ✓ Develop systemic solutions and work designs.
- ✓ Provide clearer direction.
- ✓ Set realistic performance expectations.
- ✓ Provide the necessary support to meet expectations.
- ✓ Conduct realistic assessments of EMCA timelines and costs at the start of contracts.

4.1.4 Structured EMCA Program

Definition

Guiding the Development and Growth of EMCAs

A structured program should be produced to guide the development of EMCAs. The program would specify expected goals and provide opportunities for skill development, collaboration, and engagement at UQ.

The program would run in-person events to support greater networking opportunities. Annual programs for each level are suggested with EMCAs having designated time to attend. The aim would be to identify the skills and strengths of each EMCA, increase the likelihood of their success and impact, advance EMCA careers and provide opportunities for departmental succession planning.

Benefits

A structured EMCA program with these aspects in mind would likely support the development of a well-trained and connected academic community, nurture talent, and drive impactful contributions within the institution.

Expected Goals: Clearly defined goals would provide a roadmap for EMCA growth, aligning their efforts with institutional objectives.

Skill Development: Structured events and programs can focus on skill enhancement, fostering collaboration, and expertise essential for EMCA roles.

Engagement and Collaboration: Providing designated time to attend sessions in person encourages active participation, fosters engagement, and facilitates collaboration among EMCA peers.

Identification of Strengths: By identifying individual skills and strengths, the program can leverage and enhance these attributes, contributing to personal and professional growth.

Increased Success and Impact: Empowering EMCAs through targeted development can potentially increase success in their roles and amplify their impact on research and academic activities.

Succession Planning: By nurturing talent and identifying potential leaders, the program supports succession planning within departments or teams.

Networking Opportunities: Regular events provide networking opportunities, fostering connections beneficial for knowledge exchange and the increased group belonging.
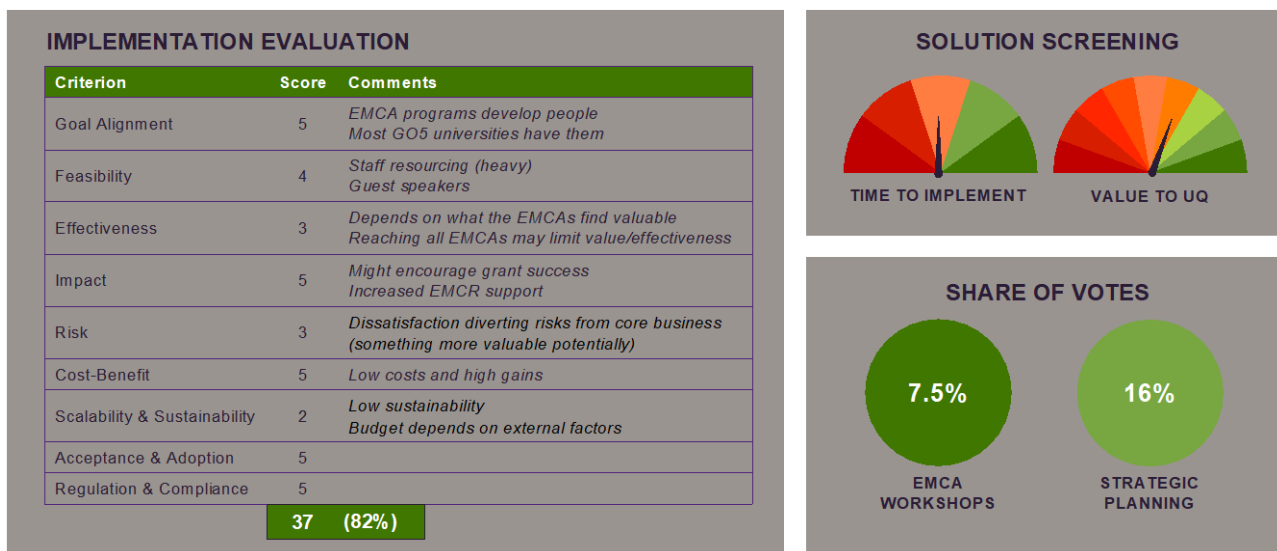
Scorecard

Figure 23: Structured EMCA Program Scorecard

Suggested Next Steps

1. **Audit** EMCA programs provided at UQ or elsewhere.

2. **Collaborate** with key stakeholders to design a structured EMCA program framework emphasising expected goals, skill development, collaboration, and engagement and creating tiered programs for different EMCA levels.

3. **Evaluate** existing EMCA resources using the structured program framework as a foundational guide.

4. **Define** a detailed implementation strategy for the structured program including a combination of online, face-to-face, and interactive elements.

5. **Deliver** the program throughout the year, ensuring sufficient time is allocated for EMCAs to participate.

6. **Communicate** the benefits of the program highlighting its advantages for all staff.

7. **Establish** a feedback loop to continuously improve the program based on EMCA and stakeholder input.

Do and Don't Do

Do's and Don'ts related to a Structured EMCA Program were evenly balanced:

DO

✓ Support EMCAs to help them thrive.

✓ Encourage EMCAs to focus on their career development.

- ✓ Invest in, and enhance, career guidance.
- ✓ Support EMCAs to explore non-academic career pathways.

DON'T

- ✗ Expect EMCAs to navigate the process alone.
- ✗ Focus solely on 'coping' solutions, but take a broader perspective.
- ✗ Rely on another online course as the only solution.
- ✗ Don't equate a formal training course with career development.

4.1.5 Service Role Opportunities

Definition

Supporting EMCA Development with Service Opportunities

Opportunities should be provided for EMCAs to participate in several service roles. In addition to providing valuable experience, it would also uplift institutional values.

Benefits

Offering opportunities for EMCAs to engage in wider and meaningful service roles not only aids personal and professional development, but also strengthens the institution by fostering a culture of collaboration, service, and mutual support among academic peers.

Professional Development: Service roles offer EMCAs a chance to develop leadership, communication, and organisational skills important for career growth.

Broader Skill Set: Engaging in service roles exposes EMCAs to diverse experiences, expanding their skill set beyond research, which can be valuable for overall career advancement.

Networking and Collaboration: Service roles often involve interacting with various stakeholders across departments or institutions, fostering networking and potential collaboration opportunities.

Enhanced Visibility and Recognition: Active involvement in service roles can increase visibility within the academic community, potentially leading to increased recognition.

Contribution to Institutional Values: EMCAs' participation in service roles aligns with institutional values of community engagement, collaboration, and shared responsibility, contributing positively to the institution's reputation.

Fostering Leadership Qualities: Service roles provide a platform for EMCAs to showcase leadership qualities, potentially positioning them for future leadership positions within or outside of academia.

Institutional Development: Involvement in service roles can bring fresh perspectives and innovative ideas to institutional decision-making processes, contributing to institutional growth.

Professional Satisfaction: Contributing through service roles can also offer a sense of fulfilment from participating in shaping the academic community and its future direction.
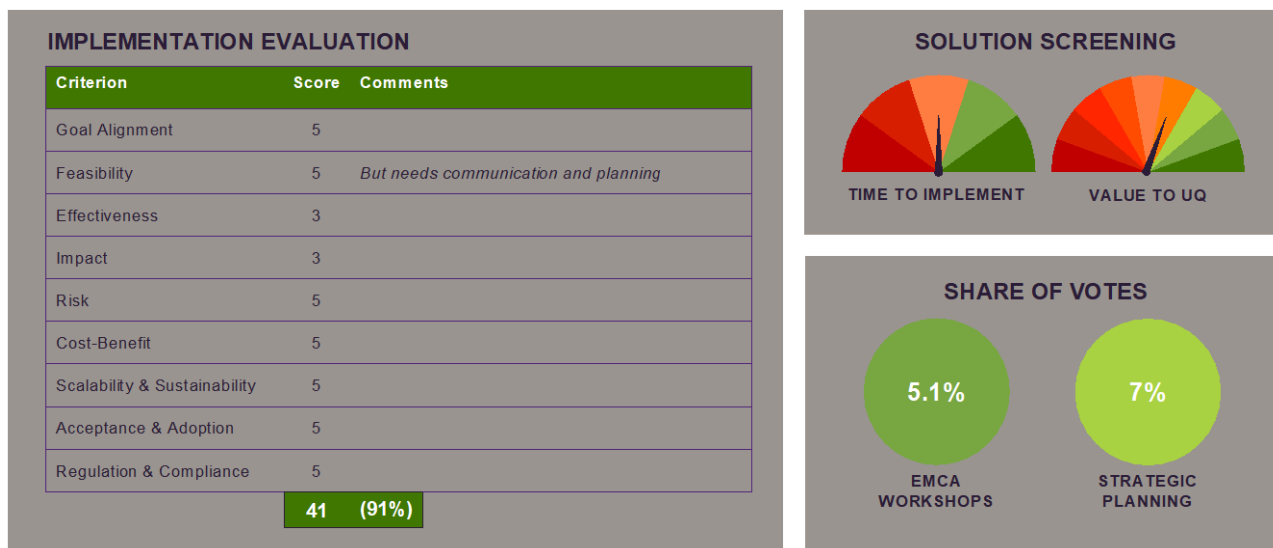
Scorecard

IMPLEMENTATION EVALUATION

Criterion	Score	Comments
Goal Alignment	5	
Feasibility	5	*But needs communication and planning*
Effectiveness	3	
Impact	3	
Risk	5	
Cost-Benefit	5	
Scalability & Sustainability	5	
Acceptance & Adoption	5	
Regulation & Compliance	5	
	41	**(91%)**

SOLUTION SCREENING

TIME TO IMPLEMENT   VALUE TO UQ

SHARE OF VOTES

5.1% — EMCA WORKSHOPS

7% — STRATEGIC PLANNING

Figure 24: Service Role Opportunities Scorecard

Suggested Next Steps

1. **Identify** service role opportunities most beneficial for, and meaningful to, EMCAs.
2. **Develop** clear role descriptions and guidelines ensuring they align with EMCA career growth.
3. **Create** a comprehensive proposal outlining the benefits, role descriptions, and anticipated impacts of offering service roles to EMCAs.
4. **Gain** approval and commitment from central management to endorse and promote these opportunities.
5. **Engage** individual Schools and Institutes to implement the service roles within their respective domains.
6. **Provide** training and resources required to prepare EMCAs for their service roles, ensuring they understand the expectations and responsibilities.
7. **Gather** feedback from EMCAs and stakeholders to continuously improve and expand service role opportunities.

Do and Don't Do

Reverse Brainstorming comments related to Service Role and other opportunities comprised predominantly Don't statements.

DO

✓ Provide more future career opportunities.

DON'T

✗ Restrict or reduce EMCA opportunities any further.

✗ Use existing university hierarchy structures to restrict EMCAs from making meaningful contributions towards university objectives.

✗ Give more opportunities to senior staff.

5. Final Points

5.1 Implementation Considerations

Included within the feedback provided by attendees of workshops EMCAs were some comments on implementation, which primarily comprised Don't Do statements.

DO

Value and Support EMCAs

- ✓ Encourage, support, value and enable EMCAs' ideas and their work.
- ✓ Incentivise supervisors to promote EMCA growth.

DON'T

Fail to Make Improvements

- ✗ Ignore the findings from this Identity, Well-Being and Work Outcomes project and do nothing.
- ✗ Stop at running surveys and getting feedback.
- ✗ Be hostile to ambitious or expensive ideas proposed.

Mistreat and Neglect EMCAs

- ✗ Undervalue EMCAs or lose them through neglect and toxicity.
- ✗ Create unnecessary competition between EMCAs.
- ✗ Apply improper competition and ranking.
- ✗ Rank EMCAs with a number in APD assessments.

Reduce or Remove Funding and Support

- ✗ Decrease funding.
- ✗ Sacrifice financial support of EMCAs for short-term budget goals.
- ✗ Hide information about grants, contracts, and feedback.
- ✗ Remove support services including support staff.

5.2 Acknowledgements

Invitations to participate in this project were consistently met with an enthusiastic response and frequent mentions of the importance of improving the experience of early and mid-career academics.

The project team extends its gratitude to all those who contributed to the project through attending EMCA Workshops and Strategic Planning sessions, developing ideas and solutions, and ranking these to form the recommendations arising from this final project phase.

5.3 References

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Appendix A **EMCA Workshop Advertising**

Appendix B **EMCA Workshop Decision Matrix**

Decision Matrix

QUESTION NUMBER & NAME:
SOLUTION NAME:

CRITERION		RATING (0 - 7)	NOTES
EFFECTIVENESS	How well does the idea address the identified problem or opportunity?		
USABILITY	Is the idea user-friendly and easy to use/do?		
FLEXIBILITY	Can the idea be varied and customized to meet the diverse needs of different schools and institutes?		
SCALABILITY	Can the idea be scaled to accommodate larger groups or increased usage without compromising quality?		
ADAPTABILITY	Can the idea be easily adapted to changing needs and circumstances?		
COST-EFFECTIVENESS	Does the idea provide a favourable cost-to-benefit ratio for implementation?		
FEASIBILITY	Is the idea feasible to implement given the available resources, technology, and timeframe?		
SUSTAINABILITY	Is the idea environmentally and socially sustainable in the long term?		
USER SATISFACTION	Will the idea overall enhance the academic experience?		
	TOTAL SCORE		

Appendix C **Strategic Planning Session Implementation Evaluation Form**

SOLUTION NO. & NAME:

CRITERION		RATING (0 - 5)	COMMENTS
GOAL ALIGNMENT	How well does the solution align with UQ's goals and objectives?		
FEASIBILITY	How feasible is the solution in terms of resources, technology, time, and expertise required to implement?		
EFFECTIVENESS	Would the proposed solution address the problem effectively and efficiently?		
IMPACT	What would be the impact on stakeholders, customers, and the organization? Will it improve processes, generate revenue, or enhance satisfaction?		
RISK	What are the potential risks including financial, operational, or reputational risks?		
COST-BENEFIT	Would the benefits outweigh the costs associated with implementation?		
SCALABILITY & SUSTAINABILITY	Is the solution scalable and able to be sustained in the long run without significant challenges?		
ACCEPTANCE & ADOPTION	What is the likelihood of acceptance and adoption?		
REGULATION & COMPLIANCE	Would the solution comply with relevant laws, regulations, and ethical standards?		
	TOTAL SCORE		

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