

# Case Study

## QUT's Bridge Program Fostering Collaboration



Left: The official launch of the Bridge Program live streamed from Sydney. Photo by Stephen Reinhardt, Snappr. Right: The closing of the 2017 Bridge Program in Adelaide.

The inaugural Bridge Program is making its mark - with an abundance of partners on board such as MSD, AbbVie, Amgen, Medical Research Commercialisation Fund (MRCF), Pfizer and QUT. Eager Australian participants networked and shared their experiences at the Bridge Program's official launch in June 2017, Residential Training Program in October 2017, and official close in November 2017.

Boosting the value of Australian pharmaceutical research is one of the Bridge Program's goals; as they collaborate to improve the quality and quantity of commercial deals that arise from Australia's pharmaceutical research sector. The Bridge Program filled 101 places this year with participants ranging from diverse backgrounds including Australian mid-career scientists, academics, industry related professionals and entrepreneurs. Participants completed a six-month online training course and a three day face-to-face residential training course in the disciplines of scientific, legal, financial, clinical, regulatory and reimbursement that contribute to research translation and the commercialisation of medicines.

The eagerness of the applicants and the participants have amazed the Bridge Program's Project Director, Professor Lyn Griffiths.

*"The Bridge Program has progressed very well with 101 participants," Professor Griffiths explained. "The significant involvement of its 15 consortium members makes this a unique and engaged program for the participants and one we expect to ultimately make an important difference to research commercialisation in Australia."*

In line with MTPConnect's 10-year Sector Competitiveness Plan (SCP), The Bridge Program addresses translating research ideas and products to commercial outcomes, and developing the skills the participants need for

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success in the sector. Through innovative training and collaborative engagement with the pharmaceutical sector, participants increased their confidence in applying to the job market and developed their industry knowledge. The Program engaged its participants in commercialisation and collaboration pathways, shared specific, detailed and practical know-how, which provided them with the tools to achieve success and network with international top-tier pharmaceutical companies.

## The Course

Extremely high interest was generated in the program with academic and professional communities, receiving 149 expressions of interest. Participants enrolled in four online modules, via the QUT Learning Management System (LMS), BlackBoard, where Module 1 covered 'sector characteristics, pathways and players', Module 2 covered 'research commercialisation planning', Module 3 covered 'navigating regulatory and reimbursement pathways', and Module 4 covered 'entrepreneurial skills to optimise commercialisation.' Organisers of the Bridge Program observed a common theme in their first cohort, which was a desire to work collaboratively and to facilitate growth within the Australian research sector. Throughout the program, participants from Sydney and Melbourne arranged their own networking events and shared information via BlackBoard to enhance the collaborative experience. Participants' online commentary has helped to inform the courses' content and encouraged increased participant engagement. For example, QUT has responded to the participants' wish to address additional topics such as phenotypic drug discovery in their 2018 cohort.

## The Residential Training Program

In October 2017, 89 participants completed the three-day residential training program in Adelaide, which included presentations and panel sessions with industry experts. The program gave participants exposure to representatives from more than 20 industry organisations with global pharmaceutical industry experience with an overarching biotech commercialisation and collaboration focus.

*"I think the (residential training) program was well designed and well executed. I also feel the biotech commercialisation and collaboration experience provided a way to cement the ideas presented over the program. I will definitely be recommending this to my colleagues and students for next year," said a participant.*

Participants listened to presentations from prominent speakers from the pharmaceutical industry and academics within the sector. These presentations varied from providing insights into pharmaceutical development pathways to case studies and reflections from industry experts. The presenters and the panelists tasked the participants with an interactive simulation activity to oversee a fictional pharmaceutical start-up. Over the three-day program, the teams pitched their ideas to the pharmaceutical experts.

Participants were surveyed at the end of the Residential Program and the results demonstrated an increase in confidence (80 percent up from 40 percent), knowledge in commercialisation outcomes (80 percent up from 30 percent); and the ability to build strong professional networks (60 percent up from 30 percent). The Bridge Program selected four recipients to receive travel scholarships to visit the facilities of Collaboration Members in America in January 2018.

Expressions of interest for the 2018 cohort are currently open, and close on 2 February 2018. For more information, or to apply visit: <https://www.qut.edu.au/health/bridge-program>.

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## Project details

<b>Project name</b>	The Bridge Program
<b>Consortium lead</b>	Queensland University of Technology (QUT)
<b>Consortium members</b>	AbbVie, Amgen, Australian Private Equity and Venture Capital Association, Bristol-Myers Squibb, Boehringer Ingelheim, Celgene, CSL, Janssen-Cilag, Macquarie University, Medical Research Commercialisation Fund, Medicines Australia, Merck Sharpe & Dohme, Mundipharma, Novartis, Pfizer
<b>MTPConnect grant</b>	\$540,000
<b>Industry contribution</b>	\$540,000
<b>Project duration</b>	January 2017 – December 2018
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