



## ***Strategic Direction Round Table Follow-Up Summary***

Centenary University convened more than **100 participants**, including students, faculty, staff, alumni, trustees, donors, parents and Hackettstown community members, for a series of Strategic Direction Round Table conversations. The purpose was to listen deeply, identify shared priorities, and shape a forward-looking vision rooted in Centenary's mission and values.

Across sessions, participants expressed **remarkable consistency, passion, and hope** for Centenary's future. This executive summary consolidates the insights, strengths, challenges, and directional goals that emerged.

### **1. Strengths of Centenary**

Participants identified Centenary's greatest strengths as deeply human, relational, and mission-aligned:

- **One-to-one support and genuine care for students**, with employees known for "going the extra step."
- A **tight-knit, collaborative community** grounded in trust and quick problem-solving.
- A **creative, flexible learning environment** that allows students to grow at their own pace.
- **Small size with big access** - to mentors, leaders, and opportunities for involvement.
- **Distinctive programs** and strong career outcomes for graduates.
- **Strategic location** and a 160-year historical legacy that continues to shape identity.
- **Resilience and perseverance** in the face of challenges, "we keep coming back to fight for the University."

These strengths form the foundation on which Centenary can build its future.

### **2. Challenges Facing Centenary**

Participants named several significant, but addressable, challenges:

- **Brand and identity inconsistency**, with fragmented communication internally and externally.
- **Lack of operational clarity**, including role ambiguity, process gaps, and knowledge loss due to turnover.
- **Financial pressure**, hiring freezes, and limited resources for investment.
- **Enrollment and retention concerns**, requiring stronger recruitment systems and student success pathways.
- **Outdated or inconsistent data systems**, with a need for training, integration, and standardization.
- **Insufficient student-centered spaces** and a need for modernization of facilities and technology.
- **Morale and staffing continuity**, including workload strain, visibility of decisions, and recognition.

These challenges represent key opportunities for alignment, modernization, and culture-building.

### **3. Goals and Strategies Aligned to Centenary's Strategic Imperatives**

#### **A. Student Success**

**Goal A1:** *Improve first-to-second-year retention to 80% within three years.*

Strategies include: a First-Year Success model, peer mentoring, reducing process friction, and expanding tutoring/support.

**Goal A2:** *Achieve 95% employment or graduate placement within six months of graduation by Fall 2027.*

Strategies: Career Development & Alumni Mentorship Program, employer partnerships, and integrated career readiness in curricula.

**Goal A3:** *Clarify and communicate all key student processes by Fall 2026.*

Strategies: mapping processes, standardizing service commitments, and transparent updates.

#### **B. University Vitality**

**Goal B1:** *Increase applications, yield, and enrollment by 15% by Fall 2027.*

Strategies: fully staffed Admissions team, persona-based marketing, financial aid optimization, strengthened onboarding.

**Goal B2:** *Strengthen brand identity and launch a unified mission narrative by AY 2026–27.*

Strategies: Story Council, consistent messaging, and expanded storytelling through students and alumni.

**Goal B3:** *Improve engagement, satisfaction, and retention among faculty and staff by AY 2026–27.*

Strategies: communication channels, org chart clarity, leadership development, wellbeing supports.

**Goal B4:** *Achieve operational efficiency and improve data integrity by June 2027.*

Strategies: Ellucian training, streamlining processes, data governance standards.

**Goal B5:** *Advance financial sustainability.*

Strategies: annual fund and endowment growth (10%/year), tuition strategy review, resource stewardship.

**Goal B6:** *Address deferred maintenance and upgrade campus property and equipment.*

Strategies: 10-year campus plan and long-term funding strategy.

#### **C. World Engagement**

**Goal C1:** *Increase alumni engagement by 15% and alumni communications by 20% by Fall 2027.*

Strategies: referral program, mentoring networks, storytelling tied to outcomes.

**Goal C2:** *Enhance service and regional partnerships locally, nationally, and globally.*

Strategies: school and employer partnerships, community-facing events, and service-learning initiatives.

### **4. Values for Centenary**

Participants identified seven values that consistently reflect the University's character and aspirations:

1. Respect, Community & Belonging
2. Student-Centered Support
3. Integrity & Accountability

4. Excellence
5. Innovation & Adaptability
6. Purpose & Service
7. Curiosity & Lifelong Learning

The values serve as guiding commitments for decision-making, culture-building, and student experience.

## **5. Indicators of Success**

Success will be measured through:

- Retention  $\geq$  80% and rising graduation rates
- 95% employment/graduate placement by Fall 2027
- Increased belonging, hope, and mattering
- Strong student satisfaction and reduced operational friction
- +15% enrollment and consistent brand identity
- Improved employee engagement, streamlined systems, excellent communication
- Annual fund and endowment growth
- More alumni engagement and stronger community partnerships

These indicators offer a measurable dashboard for progress.

## **Assessment: Where Interest and Energy Are Strongest**

Across all groups, the most passion emerged around:

- Personalized student support
- Belonging and community identity
- Career readiness and mentorship

## **The most urgent priorities identified include:**

- Clarifying and communicating Centenary's story
- Driving enrollment and retention
- Improving operations, data integrity, and consistency
- Strengthening morale and communication
- Building long-term financial sustainability

Together, these priorities form the backbone of Centenary's evolving strategic direction.

## **Near-Term Next Steps (90–180 days)**

1. Assign owners and timelines for retention, enrollment, and mission narrative goals.
2. Launch the Story Council and produce a unified brand/message guide.
3. Pilot the Career Mentorship Program in two academic areas.
4. Begin Ellucian training and data governance improvements.
5. Publish updated organizational charts and key student-facing process maps.

## **Conclusion**

The Round Table process affirmed that **Centenary's greatest strength is its people**—their commitment, creativity, resilience, and belief in the mission. The insights captured across these conversations provide a clear and hopeful direction. With focused action, strong collaboration, and shared purpose, Centenary University is well-positioned to thrive and shape a vibrant, student-centered future.

## **Next Steps**

1. **Invite University Community Feedback (January 26)**  
The entire University Community is invited to review the draft materials and provide feedback at:  
[www.CentenaryUniversity.edu/StrategicDirection](http://www.CentenaryUniversity.edu/StrategicDirection) (open on January 26)
2. **Integrate Additional Feedback (By January 31)**  
All feedback received will be reviewed and incorporated into the next draft.
3. **Prepare a Two-Page University Strategic Direction (By February 6)**  
A concise two-page summary of the University Strategic Direction will be written and shared with all Round Table participants for comment and feedback.
4. **Finalize Community Revisions (By February 11)**  
Any additional comments will be incorporated, and the refined Strategic Direction will be submitted to the Board of Trustees.
5. **Board Support and Community Release (By February 25)**  
Upon receiving Board support, the Strategic Direction will be shared with the entire University Community.
6. **Departmental Goal Alignment and Budget Integration (By April 15 or before)**  
All departments, programs, and teams will:
  - Develop goals and strategies aligned with the University Strategic Direction
  - Document related processes and procedures
  - Align their budgets with the Strategic Direction
7. **Board Approval of the FY Budget (By June 15)**  
The Board of Trustees will review and approve the University's budget to align with the new Strategic Direction.