



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- **Outdated or inconsistent data systems**, with a need for training, integration, and standardization.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 (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:

- o Develop goals and strategies aligned with the University Strategic Direction
- o Document related processes and procedures
- o 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.