Next SMI Staff and Student Q & A Session

1. Will industry support the research of SMI in future?

Stakeholders are interested in getting value for their investment. They are not interested in ‘supporting SMI’ per se, however they are interested in partnering with a world-class research institute which can help them improve their business outcomes.

2. When and how will Themes be defined and developed? What will be the criteria for forming Themes? How are Themes unformed/closed?

Themes will be defined by what we can resource and what people we have to lead them.

The process for defining Themes will be as follows:

The SMI Growth Strategy workshop (to be held 25-26 June) is a critical opportunity for input about both our business development strategy and to define how we position ourselves for growth in terms of what we offer and how we deliver what we offer to our industry partners and other stakeholders. The outcomes of this workshop will help us to define SMI’s Themes. The outputs from the workshop will be the basis for a consultative process with both staff and our industry and other stakeholders to determine our Themes. The first set of Themes will be decided by September, in line with the process for setting SMI’s 2016 budget.

In future, a Theme would be closed out if it was unable to maintain sufficient external funding and/or if it was unable to deliver on its agreed objectives. Please note that our intention is to set Themes and Theme Leaders up for success and to have regular discussions over time using agreed measures which will show how a Theme is tracking. Centre Directors and the Institute Director will provide guidance and support to Theme Leaders as needed. If over time and with guidance a Theme is unable to attract funding or unable to deliver on its objectives it would be closed out through a consultative process with both staff and industry. The SMI Leadership Team would then work with the Theme Leader to determine any transitionary arrangements, such as moving remaining projects into another Theme.

3. How do the changes affect named sub-centres within the Institute

Named “sub-centres”, for example the Anglo American Centre for Sustainable Comminution at JKMRC, are based on projects or programs of work. These may or may not be at the scale of a Theme on their own. To be considered a Theme, the SMI Leadership Team will need to see a portfolio of funded activity, which could include the relevant sub-centre, in order for it to become part of a Theme. (See Q2 response for details of how Themes will be established).

4. What accountabilities do Centre Directors and Theme Leaders have?

Please refer to the documents “Responsibilities of Theme Leaders” and “Responsibilities of Centre Directors” to explain the accountabilities of Centre Directors and Theme Leaders; these are available on the Next SMI Intranet page.

One of the shifts from our current arrangements is that Theme Leaders will manage the budget for their Theme. Centre Directors will line manage Theme Leaders however the Centre Directors will
not directly control the budgets for those Themes, because the Theme’s budget responsibility rests with the Theme Leader.

The Centre Director will oversee the overall viability and success of the Themes in their agreed areas of responsibility and will monitor Theme progress. Centre Directors will not be able to take funding from the agreed budget for one Theme and move it to a different Theme. Decisions regarding the movement of resources will be made by the SMI Leadership Team or by mutual, documented agreement between Theme Leaders.

5. Can Centre Directors be Theme Leaders?

No. Prior to the announcements made on May 29 it seemed possible for Centre Directors to also serve as Theme Leaders; however since the new leadership structure and planned role description for Centre Directors was developed it no longer seems likely that both roles could be held. Please refer to the documents “Responsibilities of Theme Leaders” and “Responsibilities of Centre Directors” for more information.

6. How can CDs effectively manage 2 disparate Centres; does it essentially mean they become Institute Deputy Directors?

Centre Directors will not manage the two Centres as one entity. They are providing oversight to two separate Centres, and also across the Institute as part of the SMI Leadership Team. The nomenclature of the roles is yet to be confirmed.

7. How will education and training be dealt with under the new leadership structure?

SMI will need a revised education strategy, and this is a documented work stream within the Next SMI plan. It is likely that education activities will be delivered from within Themes.

Professional support of education activities is likely to be centralised (as is the ‘current state’ model for support of our RHD program, and also in line with the overall shift towards centralised professional services).

8. How is the Institute planning to resource the cultural shift required to bring about change?

Cultural transformation is one of the work streams within the Next SMI plan, and is a key work area being overseen by Leonie Horrigan. Rather than having its own discrete set of activities, cultural change is embedded throughout a number of Next SMI activities. The changes to the SMI leadership structure is one mechanism through which cultural change will be facilitated.

9. Do Themes restrict collaboration?

A key driver of the Next SMI plan is to enable increased collaboration and integrated research activity. Themes are intended to enable integration and not to limit it. How this works in practice will depend in part upon the Theme Leaders. Theme Leaders can (and are expected to) share resources between Themes, and this is intended to mean that staff can move between Themes and projects as needed.

10. How does JKTech P/L fit in with this change process?

SMI and JKTech P/L have been working together this year as part of the Taskforce led by the University’s Provost to review the relationship between the two entities. In summary, the Taskforce has determined that in future: the strategies of SMI and JKTech P/L will be aligned; decisions will be
made by the two entities on the basis of what is best for UQ; and, further work will be undertaken to ensure greater unity and clarity in how SMI and JKTech P/L operate together.

11. What is the timeline for leadership change?

Current Leadership Group members are to provide expressions of interest in the three Centre Director positions to the SMI Director by 10 June. This short timeframe is to allow for a selection and interview process if required (i.e. if more than one person expresses an interest in any one role). The results of the EOI process and implementation arrangements will be announced by 2 July 2015. Our existing Centre Directors have committed to assisting with any transition arrangements, which is greatly appreciated.

12. How is it possible for any Theme to project three-year financial security?

We have always faced this challenge at SMI and it is likely that the majority of Themes will have secured horizons of less than 3 years, coupled with a pipeline of expected work, as is currently the case. This unsecured revenue brings with it an element of risk. The decision to open, retain, or close a Theme will become a risk-based decision process for the SMI Leadership Team.