



The University of Melbourne

Reconciliation Action Plan

2011-2013



Foreword

I am delighted to introduce the University of Melbourne's first Reconciliation Action Plan.

The University's Reconciliation Action Plan (RAP) 2011–2013 was endorsed by Senior Executive in December 2010. The RAP commits the University to a big agenda. It is an opportunity to reflect on the University's contribution to Indigenous development in Australia, and to help address the disadvantages faced by Indigenous Australians in health, employment and education.

Research has shown education to be one of the most effective ways to break the cycle of disadvantage. We aim to use the expertise and resources of our teaching and learning, research and engagement activities to make a sustained contribution to lifting the health, education and living standards of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. We aim to develop knowledge and knowledge processes which support Indigenous development.

I commend the staff of the Murrup Barak Melbourne Institute for Indigenous Development, and the broader University community who worked together to develop our Action Plan and support its implementation. I especially acknowledge the contribution and support of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Elders, staff and students.

We look forward to achieving, in the coming years, the targets the University has set.

Glyn Davis
Vice-Chancellor
The University of Melbourne

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A big agenda

Nearly 40 years ago the Aboriginal poet Oodgeroo Noonuccal penned the iconic poem 'Song of Hope', ending with the verse:

To our fathers' fathers
The pain, the sorrow;
To our children's children
The glad tomorrow.

These words poignantly capture the grief and aspiration, the pain and hope felt by Indigenous people pursuing the development agenda to close the gaps between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and other Australians. The sentiments are often expressed as a desire for change – moving out of the town camp into the main street – or from a position of social inequality and marginalisation into one in which the dreams and capabilities of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders are fully realised. This transformation is complex and multi-faceted. If all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples are to realize their true and full potential as individuals and as the original custodians of this land, then change is required across Australian society and institutions, within Indigenous Australia, and in the relations between Indigenous and non-Indigenous society. It is, without doubt, a big agenda.

The University of Melbourne has a role to play in this big agenda, by producing the human capital and knowledge for this transformation. All our graduates, regardless of how directly they are involved with this agenda and regardless of their personal and cultural histories, can make a contribution to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander development through their leadership, service and productivity. To that end our graduates will need to have a respectful understanding of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures and histories. We will know that there is an impact from the knowledge we produce and the expertise we develop when the accountability of other institutions is strengthened, innovation and creativity is fostered, and the agenda for change developed. To achieve this, our research will focus on the issues of the big agenda and will be conducted in a way that leads to sustained benefit for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

As a university we also have an important contribution to make through the growth of a cadre of Indigenous Australian graduates. Indigenous and other graduates can contribute significantly to a transformed Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander future through their service and by pressing for Indigenous advancement and reform within their professions, through their leadership, and through their role in Indigenous economic and cultural development.

If we are to step up to the challenge of the big agenda we embrace, we need to build reciprocal relationships with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities that are grounded in respect. We should not expect to contribute to change and development in Indigenous Australia without recognising that we need to change and be transformed ourselves.

Our Reconciliation Action Plan is a modest but significant step for our University on a much longer journey towards realising the goals of this big agenda.



Our Vision

The University of Melbourne's vision for reconciliation is to use the expertise and resources of its teaching and learning, research and engagement activities to make a sustained contribution to lifting the health, education and living standards of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. We aim to develop knowledge and knowledge processes that support Indigenous development.

Our vision includes producing the highest quality outcomes in all aspects of our academic endeavour – from recruitment and retention of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students to building our cohort of Indigenous Australian academic and professional staff.

Our Business

The University of Melbourne is a public-spirited and internationally engaged institution. Our activities span research, learning and teaching, and engagement with community, business and government. Our business is to provide our students, staff and community with outstanding educational and research opportunities and outcomes.

In 2010 the University employed approximately 7100 staff and 24 of these were Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders, 13 employed in the professional staff area and 11 in the academic staff area. In addition, 11 casual staff positions were held by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people – five professional staff and six academic staff.

For the 2010 academic year the University enrolled 75 commencing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students – 31 into undergraduate courses and 44 into postgraduate programs. (Non-Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander commencing enrolments were 8398 undergraduate and 7012 postgraduate.) The total enrolment of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students in 2010, across all years of study, was 107 undergraduate and 88 postgraduate. (Total non-Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander enrolments for the same period were 28 420 undergraduate and 16 247 postgraduate, with international students comprising approximately 28 per cent of total enrolments.)





Our RAP

The development of the University of Melbourne Reconciliation Action Plan (RAP) is aligned to the method and framework developed by Reconciliation Australia. This framework groups activities and actions as:

- Strong and positive relationships.
- Respect for the special contribution of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.
- Working together to ensure all Australians have the same life opportunities.

The key principles that underpin the RAP are:

- The Reconciliation Action Plan represents a University-wide commitment. Accordingly, the responsibilities outlined in the plan should align with existing accountability structures.
- The activities in the Reconciliation Action Plan build and extend on core business activities.
- The implementation of the Reconciliation Action Plan will be, as much as possible, integrated into the University's planning cycle.
- A process will be established to refresh the Reconciliation Action Plan each year. This will include the production of an annual report and refreshed RAP.

As the first step in developing the RAP, in mid 2010, the Provost convened a meeting with a panel of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders and community leaders with whom the University has a long standing association to discuss the vision for the RAP. The key themes emerging from this discussion were then explored in meetings with staff and students and in an online consultation. All ideas were recorded and the RAP drafted to include all actions judged to be achievable in the short term. Big ideas, which require further scoping work, were noted and retained by Murrup Barak without deadlines and account abilities, and earmarked for future planning.

A RAP Implementation Working Group was formed in early 2011 to guide implementation and ensure effective communication on RAP issues. A committee was also established to support the implementation of the Indigenous Employment Framework 2010–2013. These two groups meet regularly throughout the year.

The devolution of responsibility for RAP targets and outcomes to faculties and administrative divisions is a critical feature of the RAP implementation. The University business planning process has been amended so that each faculty and division is responsible for developing and implementing a localised Indigenous Employment Plan. Faculties are also responsible for developing faculty-specific Indigenous Student Recruitment Plans. These plans aim to drive continuous growth in the population of Indigenous staff and students at the University and to bring the number of Indigenous staff at the University to population parity by 2020.



Our Actions

Within the three planks of the reconciliation framework identified by Reconciliation Australia – Respect, Relationships and Opportunities – the University identified six focus areas for action. Since January 2011, the faculties and administrative divisions that make up the University have worked together to achieve outright, or to build on our capacity to achieve, the 27 individual actions that were included in the 2011–2013 RAP objectives. The action areas are described below:

Relationships

Action Area 1: *Partnerships with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Communities*

The development of genuine and effective partnerships between the University and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities underpins this RAP. Genuinely reciprocal and sustained partnerships require respect (Action Area 2) and a commitment to inclusion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people across all facets of University life. It is important to build a collaborative, culturally safe and welcoming environment for all students and staff.

Respect

Action Area 2: *Cultural Recognition*

The RAP will build understanding and respect between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians and promote Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures across all University campuses. Our aim is to create opportunities for staff and students to gain an understanding of the contemporary, historical and traditional cultures, values and knowledge of Indigenous Australians and the diversity of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. This will provide students with a well-rounded education that will help them meet their career aspirations and life goals. It will also help provide Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff with a culturally safe and welcoming working environment.

Opportunities

Action Area 3: *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Student Recruitment and Retention*

A range of strategies is required to strengthen the recruitment and retention of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, and to build, extend and sustain current efforts. To achieve this goal, the University will foster innovation, build an evidence-based approach, and implement a framework that will embed responsibilities for delivery across University programs. We will also provide appropriate support and development opportunities for all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, and work to grow and develop the University's Indigenous community and community spirit.

Action Area 4: *Teaching and Learning Strategies*

The University has already agreed to a number of attributes for graduates including being attuned to cultural diversity and having respect for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander knowledge, cultures and values. We will work to build on this agreement and outline the steps and processes to realise this ambition.

Action Area 5: *Research*

University of Melbourne research has the potential to produce knowledge and innovation needed to close the gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous life opportunities. Current efforts will be reviewed and extended, and the number of students and graduates undertaking research training in Indigenous Studies increased.

Action Area 6: *Indigenous Staff Employment*

In 2010 the University agreed to the Indigenous Employment Framework 2010–2013 (IEF). The IEF headline targets are aligned with the National Indigenous Higher Education Workforce Strategy and the University of Melbourne Collective Agreement 2010.



Tracking and Reporting on the University of Melbourne RAP

Tracking and reporting on progress forms an integral part of Reconciliation Australia's RAP process. The University's current RAP was developed in 2010 to cover the three-year period from 2011–2013. Each year, for the life of the RAP, Senior Executive will review the performance of the RAP and prepare a report for presentation to Reconciliation Australia. This report describes the achievements of the preceding year and sets new and refreshed objectives for the following year. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Elders and community leaders, together with the University's Indigenous staff and students, play a critical role in this review process.

From mid 2013, a University-wide consultation process will review and renew the RAP in order to set objectives for the three-year period 2014–2016.

Further information about the University of Melbourne Reconciliation Action Plan, including copies of the full 2011–2013 RAP and the 2011 *Report* is available on the University's web page at: <http://www.murruvbarak.unimelb.edu.au/>

Information about **Reconciliation Australia** and the Reconciliation Action Plan process can be found at: <http://www.reconciliation.org.au/home/reconciliation-action-plans>





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