

### 3rd UNESCO World Higher Education Conference – Knowledge Contribution

WHEC2022

Addressing Theme 3 - Inclusion in Higher Education

- 3.1. Leaving no one behind: enabling vulnerable groups to enter, transit and complete higher education.
- 3.2. Equity policies and equal distribution of opportunities; right to higher education.
- 3.3. Financial support to youth from low-income families (including scholarships).
- 3.7. Diminishing inequities, promoting diversity and maximising outcomes for all graduates.

#### RMIT University Indigenous Access Program

The Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology Act 2010 (RMIT Act 2010) legally endorses RMIT University's commitment to 'use our expertise and resources to involve Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people of Australia in its teaching, learning, research and advancement of knowledge activities and thereby contribute to:

- realising Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander aspirations
- safeguarding of the ancient and rich Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural heritage'

Much of the work to fulfil this commitment is undertaken by the University's Ngarara Willim Centre. 'Ngarara' means 'gathering' and 'Willim' means 'home' in the Boon Wurrung and Woi Wurrung languages. RMIT's main city campus is located primarily on the unceded lands of the Wurundjeri Woi Wurrung people. The Ngarara Willim Centre's main focus is to foster the aims of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students by supporting their education aspirations.

The Ngarara Willim Centre has crafted a unique, wholistic approach to student services, positioning the student at the centre of the approach. The intention is not only to enable more community members to begin (or continue) their education journey, but to make sure that they are equipped to excel in and complete their studies to the best of their ability, link them to support systems for early intervention where possible, and celebrate their successes throughout their time at RMIT and beyond. RMIT offers both vocational education and higher education programs, providing opportunities for different entry points as students transition through pathways.

University admissions through year 12 academic achievement ranking is a barrier for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, preventing their access to further education. The [Indigenous Access Program](#) is a priority access scheme which aims to support the increased participation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander applicants in RMIT vocational education and degree courses. The admissions scheme is designed to assess an applicant's capacity to study at tertiary level in their preferred area of study through a non-competitive selection process.

The [RMIT policies](#) that refer to Indigenous Admissions speaks to the rights of Indigenous people to self-determination and are aligned with the WHEC2022 theme 3.2. *Equity policies and equal distribution of opportunities; right to higher education*. The collaborative work by the Ngarara Willim Centre and discipline area staff to improve Indigenous access has led to changes in key policy statements:

## Admissions Policy

### Section 4 - Policy

#### *Principles*

(6) RMIT acknowledges the unique rights of Indigenous Australians to education under the RMIT Act 2010 and the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.

### Section 4 - Procedure

#### *Selection Process for Indigenous Australians*

(19) Applications from Indigenous Australians are overseen by the Ngarara Willim Centre. Applicants may be assessed through the Indigenous Access Program using a non-competitive and pathways focused approach.

Applicants to the **Indigenous Access Program** sit an informal interview with representation from both the Ngarara Willim Centre and the relevant discipline in order to gain entry into their chosen program. Applicants who meet the prerequisites and any program requirements can apply for entry through the Program. The collaborative approach taken to Indigenous student access embodies the WHEC 2022 theme for Inclusion in Higher Education through *3.1 Leaving no one behind: enabling vulnerable groups to enter, transit and complete higher education*.

Once an applicant is made an offer, students are transitioned from admissions to the student support team. Ngarara Willim support staff ensure the student receives information relevant to being a new student, including information about orientation for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, communication channels, the student support team, social media, cultural activities and how to reach out for assistance.

Further support offered to students includes free tutoring support, a range of scholarships available specifically for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students to offer financial support for the cost of studies and accommodation assistance for students from regional, remote or interstate locations. The Ngarara Willim Centre continues to aid students throughout the course of their studies through counselling, hardship assistance, community events, student lunches, employment and career advice, as well as support for graduate opportunities or entry into further study.

With support of RMIT University, the **Indigenous Access Program** aims to create an equitable and inclusive entry process for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander applicants, strengthen pathways for students who may not meet prerequisites, and builds in clear support structures that enable the student to meet their study and career aspirations.