



Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples Policy

Purpose

This policy details Victorian School of Commerce's (VSC) practices and frameworks which encourage and support the success and achievement of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students from their recruitment, admission, participation and retention in their higher education studies. The policy addresses national Indigenous education policy and guidelines including VSC's commitment to the support and development of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff in their advancement, contribution to teaching and learning, leadership and mentorship at VSC.

Scope

The policy applies to all staff and students and prospective students at VSC.

Definitions

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander - A person of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander descent who identifies as an Aboriginal person or Torres Strait Islander and is accepted as such by the community in which he or she lives (High Court of Australia, 1983).

Cultural Safety – an environment that is spiritually, socially and emotionally safe and inclusive of cultural and academic diversity.

Deficit thinking – A term encompassing various theories of conjecture that the lack of student educational achievement is due to the student's race, culture or socioeconomic status.

Indigenous education – education which creates equitable opportunities and outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students and which enhances the knowledge and understanding of Indigenous Australia throughout the wider community

Policy

VSC supports the equity and diversity of all its staff and students. VSC acknowledges that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples often face complex and unique challenges in their desire to participate in higher education and that it is critical to address these disadvantages.

Hence VSC supports the *Universities Australia Indigenous Strategy 2017-2020* initiatives that seeks to

- Increase the numbers of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people participating in higher education as students and as graduates.
- Improve the higher education environment for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students and provide the utmost support for them to achieve in their studies.
- Provide opportunities for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employees for development and capacity building.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander applicants will be supported at all stages of their recruitment and admission. This policy empowers Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander applicants seeking entry to VSC and ensures their success and completion in higher education is best supported through the following frameworks, including:



- Recruitment, Enrolment enquiries and pre-admission
- Course selection
- Student readiness
- Enrolment, entry and transition
- Progress, career planning and completion
- Case by case management strategies either as requested by the student or in response to data collected during progression and assessments

Student Support available

Student support is a vital function of teaching and learning and is available to all students at VSC throughout their learning experience. Support is built in from pre-admission, entry and all stages of their study (See *Admissions Policy* and the special consideration for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students).

From the enquiry, admission and enrolment stages through to the graduation ceremony, staff who have undertaken Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural awareness and sensitivity training will be allocated to providing support to applicants, students and graduands of an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander background. In addition to the usual support provided to all students, people of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander will be provided one on one assistance as required. It is the expectation of VSC that all staff undergo and complete Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural awareness and sensitivity training in accordance with the *Staff Professional Development and Scholarly Activity Plan* and the *Professional Development Policy*.

VSC will encourage and support the employment of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff who will lead and contribute to the educational curriculum and implementation of the learning experience. In addition, VSC will include Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander representation on decision-making bodies.

The support framework is linked to several policies of VSC as listed below. VSC will provide the opportunity to identify as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander at the time of enrolment. In particular Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students may identify themselves or be identified as requiring additional support. This can include the following services:

- English Language and academic assistance
- Learning Resources
- Information technology (IT)
- Student Consultation – mentoring, additional academic support
- Legal Services
- Emergency and health services
- Counselling, mental health and support services

Progression in Studies

VSC is committed to support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students in their higher education achievement. All Academic staff will be provided with training and support in understanding, recognising and valuing, Indigenous history, language, culture and knowledge and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural safety so as to create an enabling environment for



learning and teaching, including development of curricula, resources and assessments for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students.

VSC Academic staff will refer to the resources below in the Related Documents and Legislation that provide information and guidance on how to best support and facilitate the learning of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students. These documents will be made readily available for staff to access in the online library portal.

Participation and Progress of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students will be monitored (See *Academic Progression and At-Risk Policy* and See *Academic Progression and At-Risk Procedure*), where mechanisms and strategies for providing early intervention are noted, enabling these students to keep up and continue their study and overcome their difficulties.

LTC will note in any reports of progression and completion if any disadvantaged group features more in attrition, and pay particular attention to the progression of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students. They will work with Academic staff to see if any further support can be developed to enable Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students to confidently complete their studies. LTC will send these reports to AB at least twice a year.

Cultural Safety

VSC is committed to developing and fostering an environment of cultural safety for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students and staff by ensuring:

- That all support given to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students is done sensitively as well as confidentiality is maintained and respected
- That all appropriately trained staff are available to support the students
- Where appropriate, the students will be referred to support organisations which are culturally relevant and cognizant of students' needs
- The courses that are designed will incorporate appropriate terminology and content that promotes cultural safety and is inclusive of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples
- Staff training in cultural awareness and sensitivity is mandated across all staff
- Using a case-by-case strategy to manage absenteeism for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students which is a result of cultural or family commitments of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples
- Cultural awareness practices in the classroom
- Enabling academic staff to be aware of any 'deficit thinking' in relations to minority groups
- Produce graduates who demonstrate cultural capability and achieve the graduate attributes
- Support students' career choices and employment opportunities internal and external to their communities.

Monitoring and Review

VSC will monitor and review the progression and participation of all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students. The findings will be presented to the Academic Board and examined to see what improvements may need to be made to admission policies and the learning and teaching support provided to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students.



Related policy instruments

Academic Progression and At-Risk Policy

Academic Progression and At-Risk Procedure

Admissions Policy

Bullying, Discrimination and Harassment Prevention Policy

Code of Conduct

Course Creation & Development Policy

Course Creation & Development Procedure

Course Review & Quality Assurance Policy

Course Review & Quality Assurance Procedure

Enrolment Policy

Equity and Diversity Policy

Marketing and Student Recruitment Policy

Privacy Policy

Recruitment and Selection Policy and Procedure

Student Orientation Policy

Student Orientation Procedure

Student Wellbeing and Support Policy

Student Wellbeing and Support Procedure

Teaching and Learning Policy

Related documents and legislation

Australian Government - *Indigenous Education (Targeted Assistance) Act 2000*

Higher education Standards Framework (Threshold Standards) 2021, Part A: Standard 1.1 (Admission) and 2.2 (Diversity and Equity)

Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency (TEQSA) Act 2011.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Higher Education Advisory Council (Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander HEAC) Recommendations.

Closing the Gap, Australian National Report on Schooling, Overcoming Indigenous Disadvantage

National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Strategy 2015, Australian Government, Dept of Education Skills and Employment

United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, 2008.

Anderson I. & Pechenkina E. (2011). *Background paper on Indigenous Australian Higher Education: Trends, Initiatives and Policy Implications*. Australian Government.

Dudgeon, P., Milroy, H. & Walker R. (2014). *Working Together: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Mental Health and Wellbeing Principles and Practice*. Australian Government. Canberra.

James, R. & Devlin, M. (2006) *Improving Indigenous Outcomes and enhancing Indigenous culture and knowledge in Australian Higher Education*. Canberra, ACT: DEST.



Taylor, E., Lalovic, A & Thompson, S. (2019) Beyond enrolments: a systematic review exploring the factors affecting the retention of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health students in tertiary education system. In *International Journal for Equity and Health*, 18: 136.

Williams, R. (2008). Cultural Safety: what does it mean for our work practice? *Australian and New Zealand Journal of Public Health.*, 23(2):213-214.

Universities Australia Indigenous Strategy 2017-2020 <https://www.universitiesaustralia.edu.au/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/Indigenous-Strategy-v16-1.pdf>

Welcome to Country: <https://www.reconciliation.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2017/11/Welcome-to-and-Acknowledgement-of-Country.pdf>



Administration

Revision History

Version	Approval date	Approval body	Review date
0.1	12/05/2020	Board of Directors	
0.2	09/06/2020	Board of Directors	
0.3	21/07/2020	Board of Directors	
1.0	18/06/2021	Board of Directors	30/06/2022