

## **Discussion Paper Only:**

### **Commitment to Australian Indigenous Employment, University of Melbourne, 2018**

The University of Melbourne seems committed to increasing Indigenous employment within the University. On further examination of the statistical data on Indigenous employment (matters) 2010-2018, there are some major discrepancies that need to be raised. These are important matters for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people seeking career paths within the academy as matters of equity and parity. Opportunities for employment in the teaching of what is considered to be the oldest living surviving culture in the world as an inherent right, is of fundamental importance to this commitment.

In the pursuit of greater equality and parity for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people within the academy, there are a number of Victorian Universities that have had their establishment Acts amended by the Victorian Parliament, to include formal obligations towards Indigenous Education. The 2009 University of Melbourne Act (Section 6. f) formalises that the University must; “use its 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 (i) realising Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander aspirations; and (ii) the safeguarding of the ancient and rich Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural heritage”.

Further weight for the realisation of these important statutory requirements within the academy is supported by the Provost and former Dean of the Faculty of Arts Professor Mark Considine who says: “Across the university, all disciplines are committed to increasing Indigenous employment”.

### **Reconciliation Action Plan, 2018**

This year the University of Melbourne has plans to commence its third Reconciliation Action Plan (RAP), projected for implementation between 2018 and 2022.

A key priority of this RAP is Melbourne University's commitment to addressing 'Indigenous Australian disadvantage through the provision of employment opportunities'.

This commitment is in response to government statistics from the Department of Education and Training. The 2012 Final Review Report revealed Indigenous staffing across Australian universities was low, with 0.8 per cent of full time academic staff being Indigenous.

#### **Progress of Employment Matters, 2010-2018**

As one of several key supporting initiatives of its Reconciliation Action Plans, the University of Melbourne introduced its Indigenous Employment Framework (IEF). Created in 2010, Melbourne University is currently conducting its third IEF (2016-2018). The mutual goal between the two initiatives is to increase the number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff to levels in line with the total population of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples – 2.6 per cent – by the year 2020.

As of 2015, Indigenous people were still largely underrepresented, forming 0.9 per cent of Melbourne University's total number of staff. To reach its goal by 2020, Melbourne University would need to employ 100 Indigenous staff from 2015 to 2020, or 20 per year.

Early success in implementing the first IEF between 2010 and 2013 is evidenced by the growth of the University's Indigenous workforce during that period, with numbers increasing from 24 to 61. Progress however has declined during the 2013 - 2015 period: the University has barely increased its number of Indigenous employees by a total of 4. The decline of these employment outcomes is a contradiction of the statutory and formal obligations that the University is committed to achieving.

#### **Teaching of Indigenous Studies**

There are important issues that need to be dealt with in the employment of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in the teaching of Australian Indigenous Studies. The term Indigenous is being misconstrued to include people claiming Indigenous identity to gain positions in the teaching of Australian based Indigenous Studies. Australian Indigenous studies is the foundation of our history and identify as a people, embodied in a timeline of at least 60000 years prior occupation and sovereignty. A vibrant surviving and living culture with such a unique pedagogy and epistemology deserves nothing less

than to be accorded its due place front and centre of any academic institution in Australia without justification.

To highlight the need for a better approach to the employment and inclusion of Indigenous voices within the academy, the following extract is from a student who attended this year's Oncountry Learning: Indigenous Studies course.

*I have struggled with the notion of non-indigenous presence in Aboriginal affairs during my time studying at the university. I have been increasingly concerned at the way that Aboriginal affairs are discussed and the paternalism and tokenism that takes place, both in the workplace and the teaching of Indigenous studies in my three years of study at the University, the On Country Learning experience was the first subject where I was taught by an Indigenous teacher. There is heavy irony in white settlers teaching about 'decolonising discourses' and the notion of being an 'academic' and an 'expert' in a field that is not their lived experience. Many of my Indigenous friends find themselves literally being lectured to about their own history and culture by white settlers. It is this claim to knowledge that, to me, represents continuing colonial subjugation against Indigenous knowledge and culture. It is this belief and entitlement to speak by non-indigenous academics that must be questioned and critiqued, particularly within the University of Melbourne and its teaching of Indigenous studies (Oncountry Learning Reflections, 2018pp 6-17).*

Other Indigenous students have reflected upon their experiences of studying and working at the University of Melbourne in Murrup Barak and University of Melbourne Student Union's publication 'Under Bunjil Volume One' (2015), pp.6-17.

*Kyle Webb reflects upon how the University "sparkles in the glow of power and privilege", yet his experience of having to "prove" his Aboriginality to a panel of elite staff left him feeling between two cultural worlds; Whiteness and Indigeneity, pp. 6-7.*

*Maddee Clark reveals how the University acts under a "facade of elitism, prestige, tolerance and worldliness" and engages Indigenous students in a performative attempt to "demonstrate their capacity for reconciliation and parity" without effective support mechanisms in place for Indigenous students, pp.12-13*

*Todd Fernando, now a PhD student, tutor and lecturer at the University, reflects upon the difficulty that transitioning into university may represent for indigenous students. He notes that "for Aboriginal people entering into university, boarding schools or the workforce,*

*there is significant historical baggage and intergenerational trauma accompanying them” and this must be recognised and effectively supported by the university,pp.14-15.*

*Emily James notes that Indigenous studies is “dominated by settler academics” and comments “if the only voices in an Aboriginal Studies class are white ones, you need to rethink what you're teaching.” She poses the important question; “when did Indigenous students become outsiders in Indigenous studies?”pp.16-17.*

While the University of Melbourne has formal responsibilities and agreements to advancing Indigenous access and participation, Indigenous staff and students remain disproportionately underrepresented. Indigenous students feel like outsiders in studies of their own cultures and histories. Moving forward, The University must put Indigenous voices and knowledge’s at the forefront of Indigenous studies.

These are important matters that require further examination, discussion and action by all disciplines across the University and particularly the employment of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people as lecturers, tutors, researchers, and administrative staff in the Indigenous Studies program.

**Implementing the 2011–2013 Reconciliation Action Plan**

<https://engagement.unimelb.edu.au/reconciliation/action-plan/v1>

**Reconciliation Action Plan 2011 - 2013**

[https://engagement.unimelb.edu.au/\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0005/954725/RAP\\_Publication Re-print 2013.pdf](https://engagement.unimelb.edu.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0005/954725/RAP_Publication_Re-print_2013.pdf)

**Reconciliation Action Plan 2015–2017**

[https://engagement.unimelb.edu.au/\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0011/1379369/10983-MurrupBarak-RAP LAND-V4b-FINAL.pdf](https://engagement.unimelb.edu.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0011/1379369/10983-MurrupBarak-RAP LAND-V4b-FINAL.pdf)

**Indigenous Employment Framework - this link has the PDF to the IEF 2011-13 and IEF 2014-16**

<https://murrupbarak.unimelb.edu.au/employment/employment-resources>

**University of Melbourne Act 2009 No. 78 of 2009, Section 6. Part f.**

[http://www.legislation.vic.gov.au/domino/web\\_notes/ldms/pubstatbook.nsf/edfb620cf7503d1aca256da4001b08af/489fcd5278f3602ca25767f00102b11/\\$file/09-078a.pdf](http://www.legislation.vic.gov.au/domino/web_notes/ldms/pubstatbook.nsf/edfb620cf7503d1aca256da4001b08af/489fcd5278f3602ca25767f00102b11/$file/09-078a.pdf)

**Murrup Barak and University of Melbourne Student publication 'Under Bunjil Volume One' (2015) pp.6-17.**

[https://murrupbarak.unimelb.edu.au/\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0005/2116589/20161007-0002-col.pdf](https://murrupbarak.unimelb.edu.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0005/2116589/20161007-0002-col.pdf)

**Online link to Paper**

<https://waynera.files.wordpress.com/2018/05/commitment-to-indigenous-employment18.pdf>

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