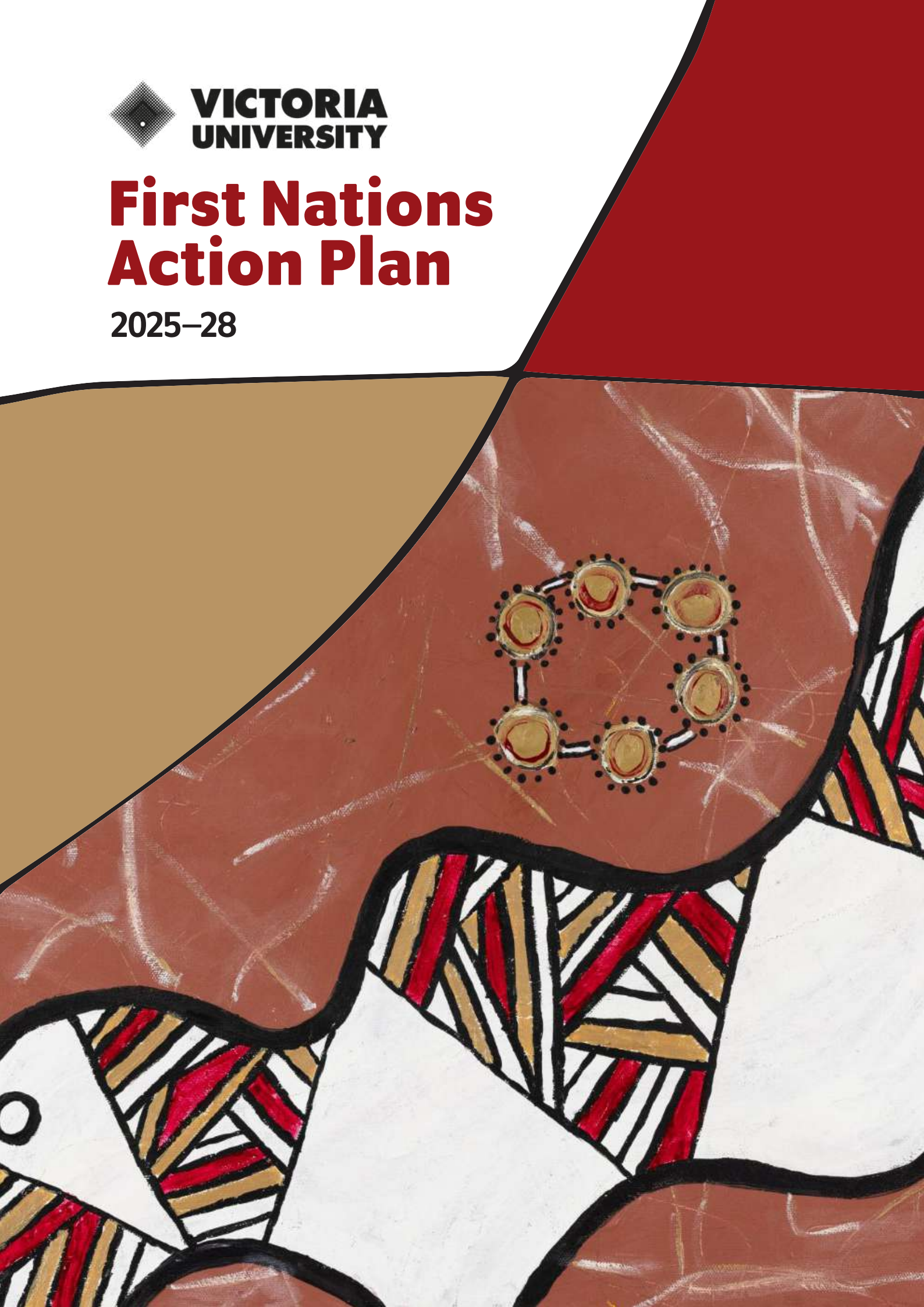


**VICTORIA
UNIVERSITY**

First Nations Action Plan

2025–28



Acknowledgement

Victoria University (VU) recognises that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples are the oldest living peoples on Earth and the first inhabitants of this place now called Australia. For 65,000 years this land has embodied hundreds of diverse nations with unique cultures, customs and languages.

Victoria University acknowledges that First Nations Ancestors, Elders and families are the Traditional Owners of the sacred grounds the University rests on; the Naarm campuses on the lands of the Kulin Nations, the Eora campus on the lands of the Eora Nations, and the Meanjin campus on the lands of the Yugara/YUgarapu land Turrbal Nations.

The University thanks the Traditional Owners of Naarm, Eora and Meanjin for allowing us to be on these lands, near the waters and under the skies that belong to you. We acknowledge your sovereignty that has never been ceded. We respect that these places hold story of ceremony, innovation, industry, teaching and learning. We honour the Lore and Law of First Nations Peoples, the embodied responsibility of Protecting Country, and the obligation to uphold guardianship of traditional Knowledges.

Victoria University respectfully receives the gifts of traditional Knowledge and academic practices that Traditional Owners, Elders, Aboriginal staff and students bring to the University.

With gratitude we commit to Protecting Country for the benefit of all.



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Paola Balla's Moondani Balluk design shows the embodying relationship between the University and Moondani Balluk, and the meaning of 'embracing people' – being embraced by VU.

The overall design, colour and shape are evocative of the western metropolitan region landscape and waterways.

The shape of the main piece of the artwork has dual meanings.

The outside lines are the shapes of boomerangs which represent the return of knowledge or inquiry to the community from the University and from the community to the University.

The second meaning shows the shape of an eel, a rich and plentiful food source of the Woiwurrung (Wurundjeri) and Boonwurrung peoples – as seen by the eel traps and woven eel baskets used by the traditional owners of land along the Maribyrnong.

The line designs contained within the main piece represent Woiwurrung and Boonwurrung land, culture, law and connection as continual.

The 2 "bora ring" shapes (containing six circles) represent Indigenous knowledge and show the context of imaginative inquiry, excellence and equality, which are values of the University, and also show the vision of Moondani Balluk Indigenous Academic Unit of access, respect and justice and our relationship to land, culture, Elders and lore.

Paola Balla is a Wemba-Wemba and Guditjmarra woman who is an award-winning visual artist, highly commended curator and sought-after community cultural development practitioner, speaker, facilitator and writer.

Introduction

The Victoria University Strategic Plan 2022-28: Start well, finish brilliantly has Protecting Country as a strategic driver.

This commits the University to progress First Peoples recognition and justice. It provides guidance to the University from Ancestors through traditional owners, Elders and Knowledge Holders – on learning, teaching, research, and community. It embodies values and ethics, and promotes sovereignty. It advocates privileging First Nations cultural practices and Knowledges.

VU is on a path to decolonising our university. This will call on all of us to listen, open ourselves to better ways of doing things and to deeply respect one another.



Protecting Country is about people, place and planet.

It embraces the seasons, stories and creation spirits and connects First Nations Peoples to place.

Country is both a place of belonging and a way of believing, as well as contributing to conservation of critical environment and cultural assets. It is a community-driven movement towards long-term social, cultural, physical and economic prosperity and sustainability.

We honour that commitment.

Alongside the Victoria University (VU) Strategic Plan, the First Nations Action Plan aligns with the following documents and reforms:

- ◆ VU Anti-Racism Policy
- ◆ VU Commitment to Progressive Inclusivity Framework
- ◆ VU Research and Impact Plan 2023-28
- ◆ Victoria University Act 2010
- ◆ Uluru Statement from the Heart 2017
- ◆ The Australian Universities Accord
- ◆ Universities Australia Indigenous Strategy
- ◆ Closing the Gap priority reforms
- ◆ The United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP)
- ◆ Treaty Process with Aboriginal Victorians Act 2018 (Treaty Act)

Closing the Gap

First Nations Peoples in Victoria

65,646

First Nations Peoples living in Victoria in 2023

7,018

Live in Melbourne's West

Represents 0.8% of the total First Nations population in Australia

24

Median age

Compared to 38 for non Aboriginal Victorians

18%

Aged 15-24 years

Compared to 12% for non Aboriginal Victorians

Source: Australia Bureau of Statistics Census Data 2021

First Nations Peoples at Victoria University

351

First Nations students enrolled at VU in 2023

Representing 1.2% of the student population

189

students in Higher Education

Top 3 HE Courses

1. Bachelor of Education (P-12)
2. Bachelor of Early Childhood Teaching
3. Bachelor of Social Work

⇒ 87.1%

Success rate for VU's First Nations students

The highest nationally*

Source: InfoVU Data 2023

*Source: Equity Performance Data, Australian Government, Department of Education

162

students in TAFE

Top 3 TAFE Courses

1. Course in Policing Recruitment Pathway
2. Certificate IV in Cyber Security
3. Certificate III in Carpentry

⇒ 86.2%

Success rate for VU's First Nations students

25

First Nations colleagues at VU

Including one Executive Director in the Vice-Chancellor's Group

VU First Nations students and their achievements



Tahnee Towers
Bachelor of Biomedicine

Tahnee received the Moondani Balluk Aboriginal Student Award in recognition of her contribution to First Nations experiences at VU.

“I’ve entered university at a later stage in life. The Block Model gave me the flexibility I needed; it better accommodates family and work schedules.

I loved that the first year was primarily hands-on in the anatomy labs, it really ignited my interest and confirmed my course choice.

Moondani Balluk has been an amazing resource and culturally safe space. It’s a place where connection with other strong, deadly mob is possible. It’s a place where visionary leaders have shaped historic change. It’s incredibly inspiring to stand among these giants.

After graduating, I will complete my Honours and hope to work in the brain cancer research space for years to come.”



Stella Rose Lay
Bachelor of Science

Stella Rose Lay, a Gamberre (WA) woman, started science as a hobby, that grew into a passion for protecting the planet.

“When I became aware of climate change, I decided to make it my mission to contribute to helping Country; conserving the environment for future generations.

From my first year of uni, I’ve felt supported. The teachers from VU First Year College were so helpful; I still email them occasionally for advice. I also connected with Moondani Balluk for guidance, and through them I gained an Indigenous women’s scholarship.

I thrive on the hands-on lab work and the outdoor field research we’ve done and continue to do.

It’s so rewarding to know that we’re making a difference to the planet already. I can’t wait to see what the future holds.”



Gene Vocale
Master of Teaching (Secondary)

Gene followed his love of sport into a Bachelor of Physical Education and Sports Science and is now completing his Masters in Teaching.

“During my VU degree I gained placements in several schools, working with kids with many different backgrounds, ages and abilities. These experiences motivated me to pursue a teaching career.

My Aboriginal background is the Monaro tribe in Gippsland, Victoria from my father’s side. The passing of my father soon after I finished school was difficult for me; I became unmotivated. The financial strains at university were tough too – if it wasn’t for the help from VU I’m not sure if I could’ve achieved all I have.

I tell others if they want to be part of a university with a positive environment and culture and a focus on industry experience they should choose VU. Now I just can’t wait to start teaching full time!”



Skye Gooch
Diploma of Community Services

Skye’s passion for social justice and community inspired her to return to study for a career in community services.

“I’m a proud Aboriginal woman from the West. I was born and raised on Wurundjeri Woi Wurrung land.

What I enjoyed most about my time studying was definitely the teachers. Real life experience in the sector; so social workers were able to talk to us about what to expect and also share experiences of working with clients. I was really lucky, I was offered a job from my second placement and that’s what set me up in what I do now.

Working in the community service sector is amazing. Being able to utilise my knowledge and theories that I learned in TAFE in a real life setting and see real life changes within the people I work with is really rewarding.”

Read more here: <https://www.vu.edu.au/study-at-vu/information-for/aboriginal-torres-strait-islander-students>

VU's commitment in action



VU has a First Nations student success rate of 87.1% — the highest nationally out of any university*

This success is shaped by the VU Block Model® and Moondani Balluk. Success rates are also very high for our First Nations TAFE students at 86.2%.



The Moondani Balluk Centre

Completed in 2023, it is the cornerstone of connections between people and place, strengthening belonging for First Nations students and colleagues. It is also the purpose-built home for the Aboriginal History Archive.



VU proudly houses the Aboriginal History Archive

Collected by Professor Gary Foley and spanning a century of activism from the 1920s onwards. There are almost 500,000 items housed in the archive, one of the largest in the world – and it continues to grow.



Blak Women's Healing Research Project

The project looks to increase Aboriginal women's healing, connection to programs, practices for cultural strengthening and reclamation, and keep families together. It was originally funded through the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies and continued funding is through a Lord Mayor's Charitable Trust grant.



Paul Ramsay Foundation Funding Grant

An internship program that provides VU students first-hand experience working in the Aboriginal History Archive, immersed in a unique opportunity to hone a range of skills such as research, archiving and digital applications.



Metropolitan Partnerships Development Fund

Moondani Balluk was allocated funding through the Supporting and Advancing Aboriginal Communities Project, to advance Aboriginal community-led work, increasing access to services and enabling direct advocacy to government.

*Source: Equity Performance Data, Australian Government, Department of Education

Victoria University First Nations Action Plan

VU's First Nations Action Plan focuses on five areas—which span across the University—to drive positive and progressive change.

Everyone can contribute to Protecting Country. The results will be transformative if we approach the work with commitment, connection and courage.

Truth Telling

Deliver the truth of First Nations history, colonisation, dispossession, racism – and the ongoing impact – to all VU students and colleagues

Self Determining

Create spaces that privilege and give authority to Blak lives, Blak experiences and Blak participation

Growing

Create a culturally safe environment for First Nations People to connect, belong and thrive; and work to eliminate institutionalised racism

Partnering

Foster deep connections and relationships with First Nations partners, organisations and communities

Deep Listening

Generate research driven by Protecting Country, informed by Ancestral and contemporary Knowledges, and determined by First Nations communities and researchers

How we will measure our success:

- Grow student and staff numbers year-on-year
- Grow retention and success rates year-on-year
- Feedback from students, colleagues, partners and the community
- Strengthen our research performance

For more detail see page 23



Growing

Create a culturally safe environment for First Nations People to connect, belong and thrive; and work to eliminate institutionalised racism

Actions

Deliverables to 2028

Increase the participation and success of First Nations students and staff

- Design and deliver First Nations student and staff recruitment and outreach initiatives which are culturally strong and developed in collaboration with First Nations Peoples.
- Drive recruitment and success strategies through VU's distinct tertiary education offer (Moondani Balluk, the VU Block Model®, the First Year College® and VU TAFE).
- Grow scholarships and financial support to First Nations students across TAFE and HE to reduce barriers to participation and success.

Indigenise University spaces and places

- Design and deliver fit-for-purpose cultural training for both students and colleagues – and make it as engaging and accessible as possible for everyone to complete.
- Ensure First Nations culture, practices, history, language and art are embedded in and prominent throughout VU's physical and online environments – enacted through VU's Campus Master Plan, and Digital Master Plan.

Ensure students and colleagues are culturally safe

- Implement the VU Anti-Racism Policy with ongoing review and enhancement of practices.
- Extend the reach of Moondani Balluk programs from Footscray Park to support First Nations students and colleagues across all sites (including online).
- Ensure safe and supportive mechanisms are in place for students and colleagues to report and resolve incidents of racism and discrimination.



Make a difference in the West and beyond

Student LIFE

VICTORIA UNIVERSITY

Funded by your Student Services & Amenities Fee



Partnering

Foster deep connections and relationships with First Nations partners, organisations and communities

Actions

Deliverables to 2028

Align to strategic initiatives

- Establish and strengthen mutually beneficial partnerships with First Nations stakeholders and organisations, particularly in health, education and community services.
- Establish ‘flipped campus’ partnerships with First Nations-led organisations and/or ensure access to VU sites and resources for First Nations partners.
- Ensure there is First Nations integration into major strategic initiatives of the University, underpinned by strong industry partnerships and backed by investment.

Increase First Nations community and partnership engagement

- Establish and foster a network of First Nations alumni.
- Grow and maintain respectful and reciprocal connections with First Nations organisations and agencies.

First Nations partnerships driven by Protecting Country and ethically-aligned

- Establish and follow culturally strong protocols developed for University partnerships with First Nations communities.
- Generate and share knowledge with VU partners on Protecting Country.
- Develop and embed a First Nations procurement framework and improve processes.
- Position VU in a culturally safe, resilient network by partnering with purpose-driven organisations that uphold First Nations values, guided by VU’s Principles for Partnering Framework.



Deep Listening

Generate research driven by Protecting Country, informed by Ancestral and contemporary Knowledges, and determined by First Nations communities and researchers

Actions

Amplify VU's key thematic research area First Nations Knowledges

Respect First Nations cultural and intellectual property, data sovereignty, ethics and authority

Deliverables to 2028

- Increase First Nations student pathways to doctoral degrees and post-doctoral employment.
 - Maintain and grow research scholarship pathways to create a cohort of First Nations research excellence, capacity and leadership.
 - Grow First Nations-led and/or related research projects through external funding.
 - Create national and international research collaborations to extend impact.
 - Conduct in-depth research on the societal impact and transformative experience of the VU Block Model® with a First Nations focus – to extend its positive benefits to under-represented students worldwide.
 - Expand and upgrade the Aboriginal History Archive to enhance its global impact, influence and accessibility.
- Develop policies and procedures for the management of First Nations Indigenous Cultural and Intellectual Property, data sovereignty, ethics and authority in research work.



Self Determining

Create spaces that privilege and give authority to Blak lives, Blak experiences and Blak participation

Actions

Understand and uphold sovereignty and self-determination

Deliverables to 2028

- Invest in strong First Nations leadership, and ensure representation on relevant senior leadership and key decision-making groups.
- Provide opportunities for First Nations students and colleagues to connect with each other, share their experiences and celebrate their culture.
- Continue to engage and participate in First Nations-led community action that strengthen self-determination and epistemic justice.
- Establish mechanisms for First Nations Elders and representatives to lead and guide on matters of culture, sovereignty, cultural rights, strategy and community engagement.



Truth Telling

Deliver the truth of First Nations history, colonisation, dispossession, racism –and the ongoing impact –to all VU students and staff

Actions

Deliverables to 2028

Educate First Nations truth and justice through learning and teaching

- Embed First Nations Knowledges and perspectives in what we learn and teach – ensuring First Nations students can see themselves in the curriculum, and all students can learn and understand First Nations historical and contemporary issues.
- Design resources for understanding truth-telling, First Nations history and sovereignty.

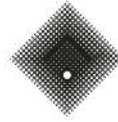
Advocate for and empower our First Nations communities

- Extend education and training opportunities in and beyond VU campuses across the West of Melbourne.
- Provide opportunities for all students and strengthen to participate in significant First Nations cultural events.
- Actively contribute to policy leadership around education and training, research and community engagement to grow First Nations success.



Measures of Success

Key Performance Indicators	Source
Achieve steady, incremental year-on-year growth of First Nations students and colleagues, in proportion to First Nations population in Victoria	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Number and percentage of First Nations students • Number and percentage of First Nations colleagues • Number of First Nations colleagues in leadership positions
Ensure that the retention and success rates of First Nations students match or surpass those of non-First Nations students	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Success rates • Retention rates • Completion rates
Feedback from students, colleagues, partners, and the community on how VU is honouring its commitment to Protecting Country	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • QILT Student Experience Survey • VU Staff Engagement Survey • Partnership and community surveys • TAFE Learner Questionnaire
Achieve steady, incremental year-on-year growth in research performance.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Number of First Nations Higher Degree by Research enrolments and completions • Number of grants supporting research led by or done in partnership with First Nations Peoples • Number of First Nations-led research publications and outputs



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