

Indigenous Student Success Program

2023 Performance Report

Organisation	VICTORIA UNIVERSITY		
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1. Declaration

In providing this Performance Report, it is acknowledged that it is an offence under the *Criminal Code Act 1995* to provide false or misleading information.

2. Enrolments (Access)

Victoria University committed to various activities to improve access to the university. The main objective of this work was to share information on supports and pathways for prospective Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander students, their families and relevant stakeholders, programs and organisations. The below activities are featured in our Moondani Balluk Action Plan and absorbed into various Moondani Balluk staff workloads. Unless specified these activities are ISSP funded. This included, but was not limited to the following:

- Providing accurate advice to future Aboriginal students on study options and personalised support throughout initial application and enrolment process. Assisting potential students with course applications and pre course information and materials, course inquiries, preparation, navigation of university tools and system etc.
- Engaging with local secondary schools, to enable Moondani Balluk to directly provide senior high school students information on supports and pathways. Examples included engagement with schools such as Kurunjang SC, Footscray High School, Sunshine College, Grange P-12, Bacchus Marsh College, Wyndham Central and Taylors Lakes Secondary College.
- Moondani Balluk also worked within various Aboriginal community spaces to engage with people who may be interested in VU/Moondani Balluk programs. This includes Western Bulldogs Nallei Jerring Indigenous Youth Leadership Program, the Wunggurrwil Dhurrung Centre in Wyndham Vale and at the Local Aboriginal Education Consultative Groups Koorie Education Roundtable and Koorie Career Network meetings. VU also hosted a Deadly Tech Day hosted at the Wyndham Tech School at our Werribee campus, with 20 local Aboriginal students attending.
- Continued delivery of the VU First Nations Fund, funded through external philanthropic support, which supports high school students financially through small grants whilst also promoting tertiary education. The program has deepened connections with a range of schools and programs in the west of Melbourne. 53 students across 8 local high schools accessed the First Nations Fund in 2023, totaling \$13,250.
- Collaborating with the VU Future Students team to pro-actively engage with Aboriginal Year 12 students within our VU Guaranteed program. 10 eligible students accepted a course offer at VU in 2023 via this program.

3. Progression (outcomes)

Our Moondani Balluk student grants provide flexible financial assistance to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students studying at VU. These grants are fully managed by Moondani Balluk. Grants are provided on a case by-case basis throughout the year and a student can receive multiple grants in one year if necessary. These grants assist students with general living costs, to pay for rent, accommodation and for transport. Occasionally Moondani Balluk will sponsor students to cover Student Service Amenities Fees and/or one-off subject costs to assist with progression.

Another layer of financial support provided to students were digital gift cards to use for groceries and fuel to further reduce, remove financial barriers. Moondani Balluk also provided rewards and gifts to students, as a recognition of hard work, encouragement and celebrating their achievement/s. These rewards and gifts were mostly purchased from local Aboriginal businesses and given to students at graduation ceremonies or on campus.

The Aboriginal Student Employment and Alumni Officer promoted internal and external employment opportunities to relevant cohorts of students with the aim of assisting students to access student friendly employment, to aid with course progression and living costs. Students are supported to apply for VU student as staff positions; internships, cadetships, graduate positions, and other roles which provide industry experience, employment, or continue to postgraduate study. The above programs and activities are supported by ISSP funding. Examples of employment included St Vincent's Hospital Melbourne and *CareerTrackers* Indigenous Internship Program.

The university's Aboriginal Student Mentoring program was a collaboration between the VU Learning Hub and Moondani Balluk. This targeted program enabled drop-in sessions for Aboriginal students facilitated by an Aboriginal Student Mentor, who was a high achieving Masters student. The Mentor provided one to one, student led study support to Aboriginal students including academic writing, referencing and access to study resources. These drop-in sessions were delivered in our new offices on campus in 2023. The Aboriginal Peer Career Advisor (PCA) employed by the VU Employ, facilitated drop-in sessions within Moondani Balluk for Aboriginal students who needed assistance with resume writing, job applications and interview preparation, plus access to careers resources.

Under Protecting Country and a Thriving Place to Study and Work our milestones were to *continue Protecting Country seminars and information sharing practices* and to *educate and inform staff about Aboriginal culture*. In 2023, Moondani Balluk developed and delivered several [Extra Transcript](#) Protecting Country sessions for students. In these sessions students were engaged in on campus activities that introduced Aboriginal landscape and ceremony, research and reflective writing, discussion on Country, Traditional Owners, and the diversity of Aboriginal people in Victoria. Our VU Yulendj Wurrung online cultural awareness training was mandatory for all staff to complete.

4. Completions (outcomes)

The student support delivered by Moondani Balluk plays a significant role in supporting students to complete their courses whilst enriching their overall student experience. Our financial supports are flexible and broad to cover various incidentals, plus our tutorial support provides both individual tutoring and mentoring services to allow students to receive study support and advice that is best tailored to them. There is a dedicated student support team designed to service our students wants and needs where suitable.

The VU First Nations Fund provided additional financial support to assist undergraduate and postgraduate with unique costs related to studies, to aid with completing their courses and upskilling. This included:

- Temporary accommodation to allow students to commit to placement that is not local
- Start up costs to assist with accommodation for students moving from regional, remote and rural areas to allow them to live on campus at the UniLodge
- Attendance at international and overseas conferences, including study tours that allowed students to complete a VU subject whilst overseas

For VU Guaranteed students who accepted a course offer via the program, an additional scholarship upon enrolment to help with various course costs.

The VU Block Model was implemented by the First Year College (FYC) in 2018 and extended the block mode of teaching across all undergraduate and postgraduate courses. The model is intended to ensure a sense of belonging, learner sophistication and the other known predictors of learning gain. It means that students will be able to focus on a single subject, rather than juggling multiple units with competing demands and deadlines; to immerse themselves in each unit, learning through discussion and group interaction; to form strong peer connections; to get to know and be known by their educators; to receive timely and targeted support; and, crucially, to achieve success early to build confidence and motivation.

Since Block Model delivery has been introduced it has cut the fail rate of first year students by around 40%, with improvements being higher for students from non-English speaking and low SES backgrounds, with fail grades reducing by 45.6% and 46.4% respectively. The unit failure rate among all students declined by 9.2 percentage points between the most recent pre-Block (2017) and post-Block (2019) cohorts, with the equity students' fail rate declining by 9.8 percentage points over this time.

5. Regional and remote students

Moondani Balluk's delivery of supports and services to enrolled students are also delivered to students from regional, rural and remote locations. In 2023 we had 32 students from these locations.

We work to ensure all students are aware of relevant local Aboriginal and mainstream services and organisations that may help to give students a sense of belonging, connection and to provide additional layers of support if necessary. The Aboriginal Student Support Coordinator's role in Moondani Balluk is dedicated to implement supports to all our students that cover financial, academic, and pastoral care. These supports are essential to enable enrolled students to commit to and achieve within their studies.

6. Eligibility criteria

6.1. Indigenous Education Strategy

In 2023 the University continued work in implementing its Bathelmun Yalingwa Enterprise Plan 2022 – 2025 and associated high-level objectives and emerging priorities. This work was framed in context of the VU Strategic Plan 2022 – 2028 six pillars of Doing Dual Differently, Partnering with Principle, Maximising Research with Impact, Protecting Country, and a Thriving Place to Study and Work. The 2023 emerging priorities contained in this Plan were specific to each of the pillars and mostly specific to the work of Moondani Balluk.

Under a Thriving Place to Study and Work our objective was to *create student and staff employment for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples*. Our milestone was to *increase the number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander colleagues in our workforce and provide career development*. Whilst this is not specific on student enrolment the university did employ several Aboriginal students in the VU Students as Staff program. This enabled Aboriginal students to progress through their studies as it alleviated the necessity for casual external work that required a change in available hours each four weeks as the Block timetable changed. We did not have a target for increasing Aboriginal student enrolment but did begin design a Moondani Balluk recruitment plan for inclusion into 2024 and beyond activities.

Under Doing Dual Differently our objective was to *develop an Aboriginal competency by ensuring that all students will encounter and engage with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural content as integral parts of their study*. Our milestone was to *create a team approach in the design and delivery of actions in College Plans for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander teaching and learning*. The team approach in creating relationships and understanding course content was continued in 2023 with psychology academics though it was difficult to maintain regular contact given the teaching load of all colleagues involved. Excellent relationships were maintained with our College of Health academic staff and particular case studies were designed and included into courses on Aboriginal content. College Plans were not finalised in 2023 because of the amount of structural change that occurred in 2023 through the merging of five Colleges into two and resultant staff change. Utilising student feedback, Moondani Balluk design an audit tool in 2023 that will be used as a starting point for any academic colleagues who wish to include Aboriginal content in their units or courses in 2024.

Under Protecting Country and a Thriving Place to Study and Work our milestones were to *continue Protecting Country seminars and information sharing practices* and to *educate and inform staff about Aboriginal culture*. In 2023, Moondani Balluk developed and delivered several [Extra Transcript](#) Protecting Country sessions for students. In these sessions students were engaged in on campus activities that introduced Aboriginal landscape and ceremony, research and reflective writing, discussion on Country, Traditional Owners, and the diversity of Aboriginal people in Victoria. Our VU Yulendj Wurrung online cultural awareness training was mandatory for all staff to complete.

6.2. Indigenous Workforce Strategy

Please refer to the attached VU ISSP Workforce Action Plan.

6.3. Indigenous Governance Mechanism

The Leadership Team within Moondani Balluk meets monthly and consists of the Executive Director, Director of Teaching and Learning, the Associate Director Teaching and Learning and the Director of Research. Three of the four team members are Aboriginal. The Leadership Team do not have a charter but are aware of their roles and responsibilities within the VU enterprise and governance structures, and Finance budget requirements of all grants received in Moondani Balluk, including the ISSP. They work alongside the Aboriginal Student Support Coordinator and the professional staff Aboriginal support team to advise, recommend, and monitor the use of ISSP funding. The Executive Director has authority and responsibility within the university financial delegations for ISSP funds.

Regarding other activities involving Aboriginal people in the decisions of the university the following applies:

- The Executive Director of Moondani Balluk reports directly to the Vice Chancellor and is a part of the VC Group.
- Academic Board has the Director of Teaching and learning.
- Learning Teaching and Quality Committee has the Director of Teaching and Learning as a member.
- Research and Research Training Committee has the Director of Research as a member.

6.3.1. Statement by the Indigenous Governance Mechanism

Moondani Balluk is more than our Indigenous academic unit - they are the experts and authority in growing, sharing, and connecting Aboriginal perspectives and standpoints at VU. Moondani Balluk delivers Aboriginal units and courses, including Aboriginal politics, traditions and policy, and health and education – using de-colonial approaches to learning and teaching. They also conduct research and provide support to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students. In 2022, the first phase of the Moondani Balluk Centre refurbishment was completed. The Centre will be the cornerstone of connections between people and place, strengthening belonging for Aboriginal staff and students.

With reference to the authority and expertise of Moondani Balluk, the Executive Director notes the content of this performance report while also involved in working with Aboriginal staff to finalise it and works closely with our Finance Department to finalise the financial acquittal. The university is committed to progressing the work of Moondani Balluk through its Strategic Plan and through the Moondani Balluk Plan in collaboration and good relations of Aboriginal staff.