

RMIT Diversity and Inclusion

# STUDENTS FROM LOW SOCIO-ECONOMIC BACKGROUNDS ACTION PLAN

# Introduction

## **RMIT's commitment to community inclusion dates back to 1887 with the establishment of the 'Working Men's College', promoting access to education, employment and the professions in Melbourne.**

More recently, the governing legislation, the RMIT Act of 2010, states that the objectives of the University include to provide education and research for the welfare of the community, and to 'provide programs and services in a way that reflects principles of equity and social justice'.

Consistent with a vision of the university as a public good that is central to the well-being of societies and their citizens, RMIT endorses these aspirations:

- those with the capacity and desire to attend university should be able to
- all staff and students should experience an inclusive and supportive environment
- the University should facilitate access to education and employment so that people of diverse circumstances and backgrounds can contribute to the intellectual, economic, social, cultural and civic life of their communities.

We also recognise that diversity enriches our campus communities. These principles are aligned with government objectives and programs. Responding to the Bradley Review of Higher Education, in 2009 the Australian Government set targets for participation in higher education, including for students from low socio-economic backgrounds.

The targets prompted a significant government funding allocation to improve access and equity for a range of student groups through the Higher Education Participation and Partnerships Programme. While government funds have supported a range of innovative and effective equity initiatives, reliance on these annual government grants without similar institutional commitments can constrain our capacity to implement long-term initiatives and to retain valuable staff, as they seek more permanent employment elsewhere.

### **Our commitments**

Considering this history and the future, after extensive consultation in 2015 RMIT launched its Strategic Plan, outlining its mission to '...create transformative experiences for students, getting them ready for life and work, and to help shape the world with research, innovation, teaching and engagement' (Ready for Life and Work: RMIT's Strategic Plan to 2020).

In this Strategic Plan, RMIT affirms its ongoing commitment to 'inclusion' as one of its key values:

*RMIT creates life-changing opportunities for all, welcomes students and staff from diverse backgrounds, honours the identity and knowledge of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander nations, and is an accessible and open institution dedicated to serving the needs of the whole community.*

In the RMIT Scorecard of key performance indicators for this Strategic Plan, RMIT commits to improving its enrolment of commencing domestic students from low SES backgrounds over the next five years. In this Scorecard, RMIT outlines its target for 2020 for low SES student access: to match the performance of leading Australian institutions, and to exceed the national average for higher education and the state average for vocational education access.

Recognising the wealth of good practice already in place at RMIT to improve access and to provide an equitable and inclusive experience and outcomes, this Action Plan describes the steps we will take over the next five years to meet these targets aligned with our values and aspirations.

## Summary

Action areas	Increase access, and build a more diverse student community		Provide an equitable and inclusive experience for all students	
Aims	Increase awareness of pathways, opportunities and associated careers	Provide opportunities for people to access and achieve at RMIT	Facilitate engagement and belonging, and the development of academic literacies and disciplinary competencies	Support completion and employability
Targets	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Secure funding and deliver the <i>I Belong</i> aspiration-building program to SNAP secondary school students.</li> <li>Complete independent evaluation of <i>I Belong</i> and implement any required improvements.</li> <li>Deliver other outreach programs to develop awareness and aspiration among low SES students.</li> <li>Develop and enhance partnerships with SNAP schools, tertiary education providers, industry and community organisations.</li> <li>Investigate gaps in relation to aspiration-building, entry schemes and pathways for non-school-leaver mature-age low SES students, to identify and implement initiatives.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Improve access pathways to the breadth of RMIT programs.</li> <li>Maintain pre-entry programs to facilitate admission, improve English, gain core knowledge in a new subject area or refresh skills:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Victorian Certificate of Education</li> <li>English language programs</li> <li>Tertiary preparation programs</li> </ul> </li> <li>Recruit additional schools to participate in the SNAP priority access scheme.</li> <li>Analyse effectiveness of the University's access schemes (SNAP, VTAC Special Entry Access Scheme, and direct entry) to identify and implement improvements.</li> <li>Obtain funding to increase number and value of equity scholarships providing financial and other assistance.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Provide targeted orientation and transition programs to build confidence, academic preparedness, and engagement.</li> <li>Provide professional development for teaching staff to enhance awareness and practice in relation to inclusive teaching and the first-year curriculum.</li> <li>Increase the number of low SES students participating in learning support programs.</li> <li>Increase low SES student utilisation of support services and advice addressing personal circumstances and needs.</li> <li>Improve systems and processes to monitor, analyse and report on equity programs and related student outcomes to identify performance and issues, and inform evidence-based interventions.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Support low SES students to build their employability and career awareness from day 1 to enable them to make informed career choices.</li> <li>Increase the number of low SES students accessing careers resources and participating in careers services.</li> <li>Provide tailored careers support to selected groups of low SES students using models based on analysis of data to develop employability and improve graduate employment outcomes.</li> <li>Improve access to Work Integrated Learning for low SES students.</li> <li>Provide support and develop resources for programs to embed Career Development Learning in the curriculum, prioritising programs with high equity group student participation.</li> </ul>

# Action Area 1: Student Access and Diversity

**RMIT University will increase awareness of pathways, opportunities and associated careers, and provide opportunities for people to access and achieve at RMIT.**

Action	Responsibility	Target	Timeline
1. Build awareness of and aspiration for tertiary education among SNAP and other low SES secondary school students	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>DVC Education<sup>1</sup></li> <li>Colleges</li> </ul>	Secure funding and deliver the <i>I Belong</i> aspiration-building program to students from selected SNAP secondary schools.	Dec 2017 (funding) and ongoing (delivery)
		Complete an independent evaluation of the effectiveness of the <i>I Belong</i> program in increasing aspiration and participation of students from equity groups, and identify and implement any improvements.	June 2017
		Deliver outreach programs to secondary school students to build awareness and aspiration among under-represented and low SES groups.	Dec 2016, ongoing
2. Enhance partnerships with SNAP schools, other tertiary education institutions, government and community organisations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>DVC Education</li> <li>Colleges</li> </ul>	Enhance existing partnerships with government and community organisations, identify and build new partnerships, and document shared aspirations and understandings.	Dec 2016, ongoing
		Explore additional collaborative partnerships with other tertiary education institutions and community organisations.	
3. Identify and implement additional initiatives to facilitate non-school-leaver mature-age low SES student entry	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>DVC Education</li> <li>Academic Registrar</li> <li>Manager, Student Recruitment</li> </ul>	Investigate gaps in relation to aspiration building, entry schemes and pathways for non-school-leaver mature-age low SES students, to identify and implement initiatives.	Dec 2018
4. Provide access pathways to the breadth of RMIT programs	DVC Education	Expand access pathways from vocational education to higher education, including through the Recognition of Prior Learning.	Dec 2018

<sup>1</sup> If position titles change, these responsibilities will be updated accordingly.

## **Action Area 1: Student Access and Diversity**

<b>Action</b>	<b>Responsibility</b>	<b>Target</b>	<b>Timeline</b>
5. Provide pre-entry programs to support successful transition	Head, School of Education	Maintain pre-entry programs to facilitate admission, improve English, gain core knowledge in a new subject area or refresh skills: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Victorian Certificate of Education</li> <li>• English language programs</li> <li>• Tertiary preparation programs.</li> </ul>	Nov 2016, ongoing
6. Ensure equitable consideration of student circumstances and backgrounds in selection and admissions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• DVC Education</li> <li>• Academic Registrar</li> </ul>	Recruit additional schools to participate in the SNAP priority access scheme, providing up to 20 bonus ATAR points and equivalent consideration for 'range of entry' criteria programs.	Dec 2016
		Develop a clear and differentiated access strategy for RMIT, including analysis of the University's access schemes (SNAP, VTAC Special Entry Access Scheme, and direct entry) to identify and implement improvements to increase low SES enrolments.	Dec 2017
7. Improve recruitment and retention through the provision of financial and other assistance	DVC Education	Obtain funding to increase number and value of equity scholarships providing financial and other assistance (such as laptops) at commencement and during studies.	Dec 2017

## Action Area 2: Student Experience and Outcomes

**RMIT University will facilitate engagement and belonging, and the development of academic literacies and disciplinary competencies, and will build employability and support transition to future careers.**

Action	Responsibility	Target	Timeline
1. Provide orientation and transition programs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>DVC Education</li> <li>Deputy PVC Teaching and Learning, Colleges</li> </ul>	Provide targeted orientation and transition programs, such as the welcome sessions for SNAP students and their parents, and the Study KnowHow orientation and transition workshops, to build confidence, academic preparedness, and connection.	April 2017, ongoing
2. Provide inclusive program structure, curriculum design and pedagogy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>DVC Education</li> <li>Executive Director, Vocational Education</li> </ul>	Provide professional development for teaching staff to enhance awareness and practice in relation to inclusive teaching and assessment and the first-year curriculum.	Dec 2016, ongoing
3. Enhance extra-curricular learning and support programs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>DVC Education</li> <li>Deputy PVC Teaching and Learning, Colleges</li> </ul>	Increase the number of low SES students participating in learning support programs such as: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Peer Assisted Study Sessions (PASS) and LEAD Academic Mentoring, providing academic support and mentoring by later-year peer students</li> <li>Early intervention services, providing individual contact and support to 'at-risk' students, SNAP students, and students with disabilities</li> <li>Drop-in learning centres.</li> </ul>	Dec 2016
4. Provide a range of student services and advice to support health, wellbeing, and participation in the University community	DVC Education	Increase low SES student utilisation of support services and advice addressing personal circumstances and needs (such as mental health, disability, housing, financial and legal issues, childcare responsibilities, religious belief and practice, and participation in University social, sporting, and cultural events and activities).	Dec 2017

<sup>1</sup> If position titles change, these responsibilities will be updated accordingly.

## Action Area 2: Student Experience and Outcomes

Action	Responsibility	Target	Timeline
5. Provide a range of targeted career development strategies and services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>DVC Education</li> <li>Deputy PVC Teaching and Learning, Colleges</li> </ul>	Support low SES students to build their employability and career awareness from day 1 to enable them to make informed career choices.	Dec 2016
		Increase the number of low SES students accessing careers resources and participating in careers services.	Dec 2016
		Provide tailored careers support to selected groups of low SES students using models based on analysis of data to develop employability and improve graduate employment outcomes.	June 2017
		Improve access to Work Integrated Learning for low SES students.	Nov 2017
		Provide support and develop resources for programs to embed Career Development Learning in the curriculum, prioritising programs with high equity group student participation.	Nov 2017
6. Maintain robust systems and processes to track performance, and identify issues and interventions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>DVC Education</li> <li>Director, Strategy and Analytics</li> </ul>	Improve systems and processes to monitor, analyse and report on: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>student access, participation, success, retention, completion, and graduate outcomes, and</li> <li>equity-related programs and interventions</li> </ul> to identify performance and issues, and inform evidence-based interventions.	Dec 2017