

TRANSFORMING THE FUTURE

WHERE BOLD HOPES
CAN BE REALISED

A RED PAPER ON RMIT'S
STRATEGIC PLAN
2011-2015

TRANSFORMING THE FUTURE

Executive summary

This new Strategic Plan, *RMIT 2015: Transforming the Future* is the opportunity for RMIT to realise bold hopes. The opportunity rests on the stable foundation and identity forged over past decades. It lies in the possibilities of increasingly globalised tertiary education and research. *RMIT 2015: Transforming the Future* draws out and weaves the threads of identity and opportunity together to make RMIT a global university of technology and design.

This paper elaborates and interprets the themes of *RMIT 2015: Transforming the Future*.

In the next five years RMIT will face a world with:

- » an increasingly competitive market for students and for research funding;
- » increased government quality and accountability requirements;
- » major demands and opportunities from new technologies particularly in information and communications, as well as in becoming a sustainable environment for study and work;
- » a more globalised tertiary education milieu in which performance is evaluated against national and international rankings and benchmarks; and
- » opportunities for tertiary education that are not confined by the domestic situation from which the institution originates.

RMIT aspires to be a global university of technology and design. The threads of RMIT's identity as a university of technology and design lie in its **global attitude, action and presence**, its **urban orientation and creativity** and its **connections to professions, industries and organisations**. The opportunities to reshape and redirect RMIT build on these core aspects of its activities.

To be global in attitude, action and presence means:

- ✓ deciding on the cities in which we will concentrate our educational activities, industry engagement and research and our links with other universities across the globe;
- ✓ committing to a diverse RMIT student body with all three Colleges engaged in significant activity in Melbourne and beyond;
- ✓ extending our presence in campuses and educational partnerships outside the Asia-Pacific region;
- ✓ developing internationalised programs and qualifications recognised and accredited in many countries;
- ✓ building the global passport so that a higher proportion of students and early career academics and teachers have access to an international study, work or research experience;
- ✓ ensuring our research addresses global issues and solutions and knowledge networks extend across our campuses and across the globe;
- ✓ reconsidering and extending services in terms of global reach; and
- ✓ focusing on international measures of quality for education and research and measuring the global impact of our education and research.

To be urban in orientation and creativity means:

- ✓ concentrating RMIT's global and industry partnerships in a select number of cities across the globe;
- ✓ developing campuses as urban laboratories committed to exciting and sustainable design and experience for students and staff and reflecting the vibrancy of urban life;
- ✓ integrating campus services, including accommodation and recreation, with the cities in which they are located and managing and integrating RMIT's footprint with those cities;
- ✓ providing access to education for people drawn from the diverse city populations in which campuses are located and in particular supporting access by disadvantaged groups within those cities;
- ✓ planning for and contributing to urban sustainable futures across the built environment, health, business services and community;
- ✓ addressing issues of urbanisation by developing an understanding of urban sustainable practice through education and research; and
- ✓ measuring the extent and impact of RMIT's work on cities and urban futures.

To be connected through active partnerships with professions, industries and organisations means:

- ✓ expanding the international and multi-disciplinary project aspects of work integrated learning and integrating it with a stronger graduate outcomes focus through an enhanced careers service;
- ✓ refining the professional and vocational profile of the education programs offered by RMIT by focusing investment in seven high impact clusters of teaching and research activity;
- ✓ building on the professional and vocational aspects of the educational programs by developing a student cohort experience that gives students a sense of 'belonging' to that cohort;
- ✓ creating a new 'practitioner' stream for staff who bring industry experience to education and consultancy;
- ✓ taking the industry engagement with RMIT's five identified industry sectors to a new level by developing industry partnerships across education and research, both within Australia and beyond; and
- ✓ measuring our education and research by its impact on graduate outcomes and on the professions, industries and organisations with which that research is engaged and by increasing publication with our partners.

In this Strategic Plan RMIT can be clear about the focus of its education and research; the key fields in which it educates and undertakes research; the particular professions, industries and organisations with which it has partnerships and with whom it is engaged; and the cities in which it seeks to work and build deeper links with industry and community.

We can measure our progress against international standards of quality but also focus on impact, because a key measure of what we seek to do lies in the action and experience we forge in partnership with others.

2011 to 2015: RMIT's Strategic Plan explained

A Strategic Plan occupies the uneasy space between a vision for the future and its achievement. This Strategic Plan assays the ground between the outcomes of the previous Plan: *Designing the Future*, and the changes to the world since the last Plan was conceived. Most importantly, however, RMIT's Strategic Plan grows from the stories of the University it seeks to shape; it has been built in conversation with those who care about the University; and it has tested itself on the sceptical gaze of outsiders.

RMIT's new Strategic Plan *Transforming the Future* should speak to the hearts as well as the heads of those who make up this University, because the execution of this Plan relies on the passion, as well as the capabilities, of all of us.

In this Strategic Plan we ask people to be bold, to imagine the future unconstrained, before they work towards the possible. The achievement of RMIT's vision will lie in our actions, but will draw from our conversations, as we respond to its goals. RMIT's Strategic Plan for 2011-2015 is critical to the University's development not only for the next five years, but also over the next decade.

This Red Paper tries to capture the reasoning, research and opportunities that inform the goals of the Strategic Plan. It is an interpretive guide to our bold vision.

There are three elements that are the key to this Strategic Plan.

- » Building RMIT's future from its foundations. From its beginnings, this University has been willing to believe that bold hopes can be realised and that we can bring knowledge within reach; has been dedicated to useful knowledge that responds to industry and community; and has trusted that education and research, drawing on action and experience, gives people the meaning and ability to build futures we cannot now imagine.
- » Refining RMIT's distinctive strengths, so that it becomes a university of technology and design; global in its presence, reach and impact; tightly connected with and relevant to the professions and industries with which it is engaged; and creatively inspired by and contributing to the cities in which it finds its place.
- » And finally, combining these distinctive strengths to chart a successful course through a shifting but exciting tertiary education landscape.

RMIT's education and research are focused in technology and design because their approach lies in the conception, planning and systematic application of knowledge to transforming the future of people's lives and environments. The focus of these fields is on action and experience – on the journey from what might be possible to what can be done. This focus is not feasible without strong connection to and partnership with the professions and industries with which our students and staff will work. And this cannot work without drawing on a diverse population of staff and students and recognising the global nature of the challenges and opportunities we face. We cannot realise this global dimension for RMIT without reaching out beyond the place where we began. And the potential impact of reaching out to transform our futures is amplified in the possibilities and challenges provided by the cities in which we find our place.

The wide world

There have been many changes in the contexts in which RMIT works since the last Strategic Plan was conceived. Before embarking on an explanation of the aspirations and goals of this new Plan, *Transforming the Future*, we pause to consider how these changes affect the direction RMIT has plotted.

Tertiary education is rapidly globalising and transforming in many of its essential features as a result. The research environment is ever more global, not only through more effective international networks of researchers, but also through a focus on international benchmarks of performance. Education and research, previously dominated by national or regional policy and funding, is also increasingly influenced by international demand and opportunities.

The regulatory context is also changing. In Australia a stronger national tertiary education system is being constructed to replace the state-based system that operates at present. Trends that have been evident over the past five years are heightened. Access to domestic students will be largely through contested markets. Government interest has increased in measures of performance as a means to ensure accountability of institutions for government funding and to assure quality of education and research. The nature of regulation is changed. There is a shift in the focus of regulation from prescribing what should or might be done in universities, to what standards must be met and how outcomes are reported. And while Australia is further advanced than some other countries in this type of market design for tertiary education, the trends are evident in other countries.

Rather than tertiary education being largely government funded, the contribution of students through fees to their tertiary education is now increasingly the norm. Countries across the world have opened their borders to universities from other countries or private providers setting up to educate international and domestic students. The information and communications technology that powers our connections to students, researchers and partners is rapidly changing access to knowledge and the nature of interactions. Its future impacts are changing fast and are not predictable, but they require an ability to invest to meet student and researcher demand and to modify our ways of working to respond and take advantage of the opportunities provided.

The major features of the environment in which RMIT will operate during this Plan are:

- » an increasingly competitive market for students and for research funding;
- » increased government quality and accountability requirements;
- » the fluid and increasingly ubiquitous effect of information and communications technology on how we work;
- » a more globalised tertiary education milieu in which performance is evaluated against international rankings and benchmarks; and in which
- » opportunities for tertiary education and research are not confined by the domestic situation from which the institution originates.

The strategic choices before a university like RMIT are starker now, although in some cases not different in kind from those that it faced when the last Strategic Plan was developed. One difference is that all domestic markets for students in which RMIT will operate are now contested, as has been the case internationally. And international markets continue to become more competitive and open. Access to research funding is also more open to international competition and relies more on international measurement, increasing opportunities but also the requirement for high quality performance.

There is one other major change in the context in which RMIT gives effect to this Strategic Plan – and that is the change in internal capability. RMIT does not face the major challenges that threatened its ability to provide quality education and research at the start of this century. RMIT faces the future with the financial viability that provides capacity for investment in people and infrastructure. As with other universities, RMIT's capacity to invest in the quality of its education, research and services depends heavily on its ability to generate surpluses from fee revenues, services to government and industry, and philanthropy. This must be strengthened and secured to support improvements in quality of education and research.

The major challenge is the global nature of competition. If the overarching goal is international quality and impact of student educational outcomes, as well as the quality and impact of international research in chosen fields, then the University must be able to draw students nationally and internationally, to participate effectively in international research, and to invest in the University for the future.

Building on RMIT's foundations

The goals of the Strategic Plan build on the foundations of RMIT's strengths in education, research and services. From its founding brief of the 1880s to provide technological education, RMIT grew to take this education to students in the Asia-Pacific region, building an international presence from the 1950s. RMIT has continued to offer a distinctive range of qualifications focused on professional and vocational specialisations. Its research shared with its education, engagement with industry and community. RMIT drew from its location in the city in developing its services and its links with professions and industries.

The core of the Strategic Plan from 2005 to 2010: *Designing the Future* highlighted and refined RMIT's distinctive features, combined with strong goals to improve quality and sustainability in its education, research and services.

This new Strategic Plan builds on achievements to date and most importantly seizes the opportunities that RMIT's distinctive features and our environment present.

This new Strategic Plan describes a university focused on technology and design and the type of education and research that such a description implies. This university of technology and design has three broad goals where each represents an attitude and a set of actions to propel the activities of the university; to be global, urban and connected through partners to professions and industries.

Each of these goals can stand alone, but it is their combination that comprises RMIT's distinctive contribution. In the sections below, the hallmarks of a university of technology and design are outlined, and the key aims and features of each of the goals described. Finally, the paper describes the effect of such a university in terms of its student experience, learning and teaching, research and services and infrastructure.

A university of technology and design

A university of technology and design is focused in its education and research. And to be a university of technology and design is not only to lay claim to a focus and depth in education and research in those fields, but also to commit to a particular way of undertaking education and research.

To be a university of technology and design is to make connections with professions, industries and organisations in order to transform the future of people's lives and environments for their benefit. When Francis Ormond, the philanthropist who founded what is now RMIT, advocated a new educational institution it was not only to transform the futures of its potential students, but also to change the future of the colony and city in which it was to be built by broadening its intellectual base. All universities subscribe to this broad educational vision. In choosing to focus on technology and design, however, RMIT will build a type of education and research that is linked directly to a transformative mission which is concerned with action with and in the cities, the professions, and the industries with which it is engaged.

Technology encompasses engineering and the applied sciences, but more generally all fields that take scientific knowledge to practical application. Design covers a wide range of fields characterised by people engaged in conceiving and producing objects, buildings, systems and environments. The focus on technology and design is evident in the concentration of RMIT in those areas of education and research. Around one-third of the University's total students are in these areas, (double the Australian university average). And with the University's development and delivery of technology and design programs outside Australia this proportion will increase.

More importantly however, to be a university of technology and design is to embrace an approach to education and research that is focused on the application of knowledge and the development of plans to transform our world. This approach to education privileges the opportunity for students to create and learn through studios, projects and placements. The curriculum must engage with the issues and challenges posed in the professions, industries and areas into which we expect our students to go. Research must equally be focused on engagement with those issues and the challenges of the cities, professions and industries with which we are engaged. It must be directed through and with partners to solutions that meet these challenges. This is education and research that draws on action and experience. It is characterised by a more synthetic than analytic approach because it is directed to application and solutions.

In its fields of education and research, RMIT is already concentrated in technology and design. But to be a university of technology and design requires rigorous questions about the necessary scale and focus for the future. Each of RMIT's high impact areas shares an approach to education and research that is consistent with a focus on application and transformation, but ways to deepen these features of our education and research must be at the forefront of our future activity. RMIT should provide depth of expertise and high quality equipment and facilities by concentrating in these fields. This focus should enhance the impact of graduates and research produced, not only because of the approach to knowledge and education but also because of immersion in an environment in which the cross-cutting engagement of many people creates the ferment from which creative solutions emerge.

HIGH IMPACT AREAS

- » Technology
- » Design
- » Global Business
- » Communication
- » Global Communities
- » Health Solutions
- » Urban Sustainable Futures

By choosing to be a university of technology and design, RMIT takes some of the aspirations expressed at its foundation and expands them by self-consciously shaping its education and research to build global scale and expertise in technology and design; by stamping its educational experience and its research approach as synthetic, partnered, action and solution-directed; and by considering not only the quality but the impact of its education and research in transforming lives and environments.

Global in attitude, action and presence

RMIT aims to be a global university: genuinely global in education, research and service with campuses in Australia and beyond that are equivalent in quality of education, research and service. To do so means committing to global reach and being prepared to shape a university that considers the implications of a globalising world for its education and research programs, as well as the way it provides services to students, staff and with partners. This also means focusing on the global quality of education and research for the University – stretching aspirations and performance, and seeing ourselves as those beyond our national borders see us.

There are significant changes required to achieve this aim, but RMIT is fortunate that it has many decades of experience in international education and engagement. RMIT's international education is already large in scale and spread across the world.

RMIT has successfully offered international education since the Colombo Plan in the 1950s. In 2010 both onshore and offshore international students comprise over 39% of RMIT's total student population. In the higher education student population, international students comprise 51%, which is one of the highest proportions in Australia and indeed the world.

RMIT is ranked fourth in the 2008 QS World University Rankings for its proportion of international students. In 2010 RMIT achieved its target of total load for international students in both vocational and higher education, onshore and offshore with 40% of total RMIT load. It enrolled more than 12,700 international students onshore, and offshore it provided 64 programs to more than 11,500 students in association with 20 offshore partners. Included in RMIT's offshore provision are more than 20 major programs with four key partners in Singapore, Malaysia, Hong Kong and China. In addition, RMIT delivers 14 higher education programs to over 4,700 students at its Vietnam campuses.

In 2009 over 900 RMIT students from its campuses and its offshore educational partnerships travelled to other countries for work placements or for study as part of their educational programs. Some 17.4% of the completing undergraduate population was involved in overseas mobility programs, around double the Australian average.

RMIT's global educational presence has three aspects:

- » campuses, such as those in Vietnam, which provide RMIT's internationally accredited and recognised degrees and diplomas in English;
- » educational partnerships offshore where RMIT contributes to building an educational foundation based on its degrees and diplomas; and
- » relationships with individual universities or networks of universities across the world with which students and staff are engaged as part of their educational or research programs.

RMIT's Vietnam campuses in Ho Chi Minh City and Hanoi are a major strength because they establish RMIT's long-term presence in its region. RMIT will build the Vietnam campuses to offer a broader profile of qualifications by field of study. The Vietnam campuses will also provide a focus for research in RMIT's overall areas of specialisation that relate to the circumstances of Vietnam.

RMIT must extend a campus presence to other major cities across the globe. This requires careful planning, taking into account the particular needs and circumstances of each case. We must also attempt to build campuses that draw on our particular educational and research strengths and balance the demands across our three Colleges.

RMIT has been concentrating its offshore educational partnerships in Singapore, Hong Kong, Kuala Lumpur and Shanghai. There is room for new educational partnerships for the next five years in different cities, as well as developing plans for those where RMIT is already established. Again we must investigate and plan carefully, aim to build partnerships that draw on the capabilities in each of our Colleges, and provide quality education and educational pathways. Campuses and educational partnerships, existing and new, need to be planned in the context of the overall development of RMIT's degrees and diplomas. For example, educational partnerships may be developed where a global network of provision is a significant advantage to students, or where a small demand and presence in Melbourne is extended and complemented by stronger demand and presence in another country.

Internationalisation is a project that spans the University. Accordingly, RMIT is committed to diversifying its international student profile, ensuring that relatively similar proportions of international students study in each of the University's three Colleges. RMIT has been concerned to ensure that international students are drawn from a range of countries to ensure that all students benefit from global diversity in their student cohort. Offshore educational partnerships, as well as the profile of education at campuses such as Vietnam should be spread across the three Colleges and should build a diverse student body drawn from across the globe.

RMIT remains committed to the global passport, which offers students and staff educational and research opportunities engaged with universities and industry in our region and beyond. There are 182 universities and colleges which provide opportunities for student exchange, and many agreements with universities that also provide for opportunities for staff exchange for research. The network of industry partners across Europe, the UK and the USA which provide work placements and research projects for students is another significant part of the commitment to this global passport. Our aim is to increase the opportunities for student and staff engagement with university and industry partners across the globe; to deepen our involvement with our partner universities by building long-term, sustainable research relationships; and to increase the opportunity for cross-disciplinary projects and teams of students to engage with universities and industries beyond their national borders.

Table 1: RMIT International agreements (current as at December 2010)

International collaborations	
RMIT International Research Projects	13
RMIT Transnational education partners	16
RMIT Memoranda of Understanding	180
Total	209
Inbound exchange agreements	
RMIT Exchange agreements	182
RMIT Articulation agreements	117
Total	299
Outbound exchange agreements	
RMIT International Industry Experience and Research Program	132
RMIT Exchange agreements	182
Total	314

We will also attempt to systematically build these opportunities into student educational programs and early career academic research programs and to develop student and staff expectations of participating in such exchanges from the beginning of their study or employment.

It is important that the consolidation of global educational partnerships and reconsideration of global research links that has been underway over the last three years is now reshaped. RMIT's global presence must be identified with key cities with which we have educational partnerships and university links. These cities, across the globe, must be the RMIT global points of presence towards which staff and student activity is encouraged.

RMIT's global orientation also argues for the adoption of global measures of education and research activity and quality. The main international measure of research quality is citations per paper. RMIT needs to improve its research performance on this measure because it is critical to dissemination of knowledge, international reputation and staff attraction and retention. RMIT should also increase the international scope of its research by increasing the proportion of its papers co-authored with researchers overseas. Global indicators of educational quality are not yet well established, but RMIT will focus on the selectivity or acceptance rate of its student pool, global graduate employment outcomes and international accreditation and recognition of RMIT qualifications.

RMIT's services are part of this global orientation. Services can be distributed across the global network of campuses, and delivered in ways that offer efficiency and economies of scale as well as quality. This will require creative thinking and responsiveness to student and other client needs, as well as increasing the capability of our staff to work beyond national borders.

Urban in orientation, creativity and inspiration

RMIT is clearly physically 'in' the city, but to achieve its vision for education and research, it has a broader mission to be 'of' the city and 'through' the city. The University aims to be an urban university where the design, creativity and engagement with the cities in which it is located are central to its identity and a wellspring of opportunity.

RMIT will endeavour to draw into its programs students from cities within which its campuses are located, paying attention to providing access for those from disadvantaged groups in those cities. RMIT's student and staff populations will reflect and support the diversity of the cities with which we are engaged.

RMIT will contribute to understanding the challenges and opportunities of urbanisation through its education and research. Its education programs and research can contribute to understanding the 'urban age' and the different ways this is experienced in cities in Australia, Europe, Asia and the Americas. Most importantly we can create partnerships with cities in which we are located so that our education and research can contribute to shaping the urban environment, creating new knowledge and practice for our cities, and delivering an urban sustainable future.

At an organisational level, RMIT affirms its commitment to excellence and innovation in design sustainability for its built environment and to reducing its operational footprint in terms of energy and water use and greenhouse gas emissions. Beyond this, each RMIT campus will become an 'urban laboratory' where new types of design and experience are tested. This will contribute to the student and staff experience by developing campuses that are microcosms of urban life, grappling with the challenges of the densification and sustainability agendas confronted in cities across the world.

This means commitments from the University to integrate its footprint with the cities in which it is located, ranging from the permeability of its campuses to ensuring that they enliven the precincts they occupy by activating the streetscape and contributing to recreational space. We must work with these cities to create urban sustainable practice across the built environment, health, business services and community.

RMIT should also support the student experience and educational opportunity by building networks of services jointly with the cities in which it is engaged, integrating accommodation, recreational and cultural spaces and activities. In the city, RMIT will then be socially engaged with its community through its engagement in the agendas of the city. It will engage its students in projects and social entrepreneurial activities that benefit those cities.

And it will be necessary to consider not only the ways and means to innovate but also the ways to measure the impact of the changes made. It is important that we can identify through our Research Institutes their key contributions to urban sustainable futures; that the education we provide helps students to understand the implications of urbanising and globalising cities for the professions and vocations to which they aspire; and that the University can measure not only its research impact in this field, but its organisational impact on the cities in which it is located.

Connected through active partnerships with professions, industries and organisations

Here are RMIT's beginnings and the core of its educational offerings. RMIT successfully provides education relevant to work and closely engaged with professions and industries. RMIT's educational profile is composed of professional and vocational programs of study. Its degrees and diplomas offer specialised qualifications that are in all relevant cases recognised or accredited by professional and industry bodies. RMIT does not have a comprehensive educational profile and nor does it offer generalist programs of study, although students are able to work across disciplines in building their qualification.

The specialisation of RMIT's educational profile is reflected first in the seven high impact areas aligned with teaching and research excellence and industry engagement, which the University has identified for focus. These clusters are urban sustainable futures, design, global communities, communications, global business, technology and health solutions.

Second, RMIT programs involve work integrated learning, through placements and projects that rely on learning by doing. These work integrated learning modules are assessed and comprise a significant part of the overall program of study. In recent years these work integrated learning components of programs have involved international work placements, as well as multi-disciplinary, multi-program teams. The model for work integrated learning will be developed to incorporate strong international and multi-disciplinary team aspects.

Third, RMIT has built relationships with organisations in the industries with which it is most engaged. These relationships span involvement in education, training and research. In 2007 RMIT identified five industry sectors – aerospace and aviation, automotive, building and construction, health and community services and media and communications – as those on which it would concentrate to build strategic links and partnerships. These are global industries and to be successfully linked requires international as well as national engagement.

RMIT will move from being industry-engaged to industry-partnered with key organisational and sector partnerships in training, education and research in selected industries. RMIT has a distinct advantage in building industry partnerships by being able to offer programs across the Australian Qualifications Framework from certificates to PhDs. As a tertiary education institution with academic strengths aligned with areas of impact and relevance, its education and research can engage with the future needs of professions, industries and organisations.

The student experience at RMIT will draw on the professional and vocational profile to build a stronger sense of 'belonging'. The specialised nature of many of RMIT's programs means they have been characterised by a tight professional cohort experience with close links between the student cohort and staff and, through work integrated learning, with practitioners in the field.

To make the virtual and physical 'cohort' experience as central as work integrated learning is the key to strengthening RMIT's educational quality and distinctiveness. Students' project and studio work can be built within as well as across different levels of a program in projects of shared thematic focus and scope. RMIT can use this to build and reinforce students' experience and sense of belonging to their group and to RMIT.

The organisational support for work integrated learning will be more closely linked to the University's careers service, so that links to careers and employers are developed over the course of study. Higher service graduate employment support for each student should be the result. The aim will be for RMIT's graduate employment rate to be among the top in Australia.

There is also a need to recognise the industry expertise and engagement of 'practitioners' who currently contribute in a range of ways to a quality and work-relevant experience for students, who provide valued advice and consultancies to industry and who can be a crucial link in establishing research projects with industry. We will reconsider the policies that place them in a range of staff categories that do not recognise their contribution and expertise. The aim will be to create a 'practitioner' career stream for those who bring industry expertise, typically at present through adjunct or casual appointments. The practitioner stream would provide a clearer framework and reward structure for those staff who contribute to a richer industry experience for our students and lead to a broader engagement with industry in advice and consultancy.

RMIT's research should reflect its industry engagement by being relevant to the future challenges of its five key industries and by attracting high levels of industry support. RMIT will aim to be among the top Australian universities for research publications co-authored with industry and to develop research partnerships with industry around the world, particularly in cities which have RMIT campuses and major educational partnerships. RMIT will measure its research not only by conventional quality measures such as citations, but also by its impact on and for those whom it is designed to benefit.

Table 2: The number of programs across qualification types in 2010, 2011 and 2012 that include a Work Integrated Learning experience

	Total number of programs	Currently Implemented	Implementation in 2011	Implementation in 2012
Advanced diplomas	33	26	7	
Associate degrees	9	8	1	
Bachelor degrees	144	126	18	
Double degrees	27	22	5	
Graduate diplomas	74	45	12	16
Masters	95	68	19	13
Totals	382	295	62	26
Percent implemented		77%	93%	100%

Figure 1: Intersection of high impact areas, research concentration and industry focus

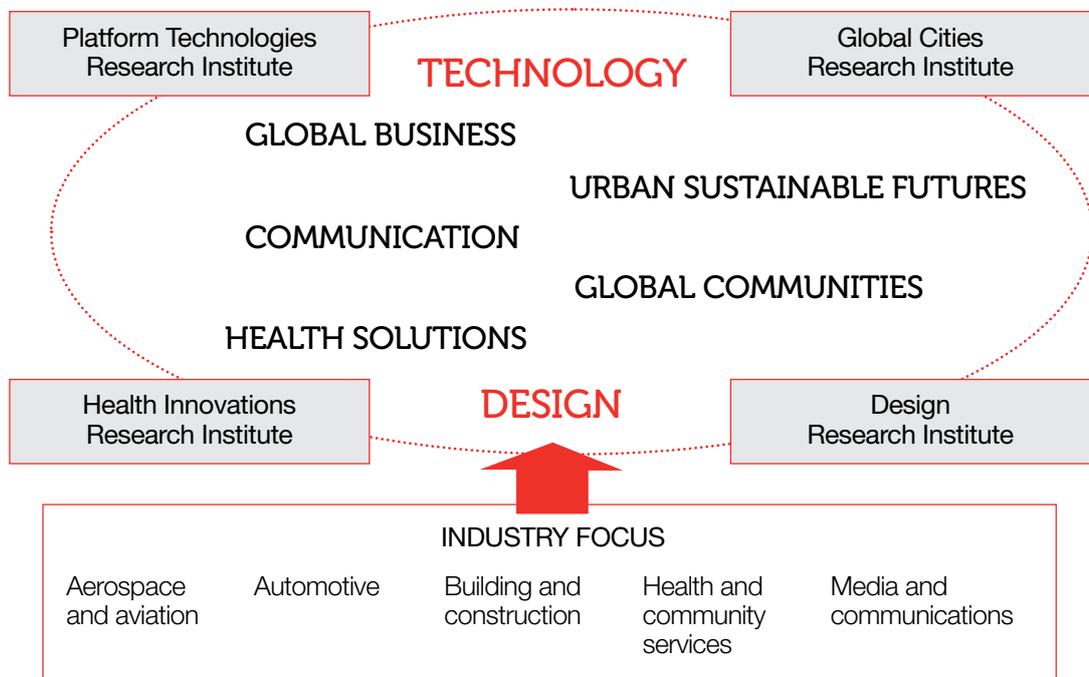
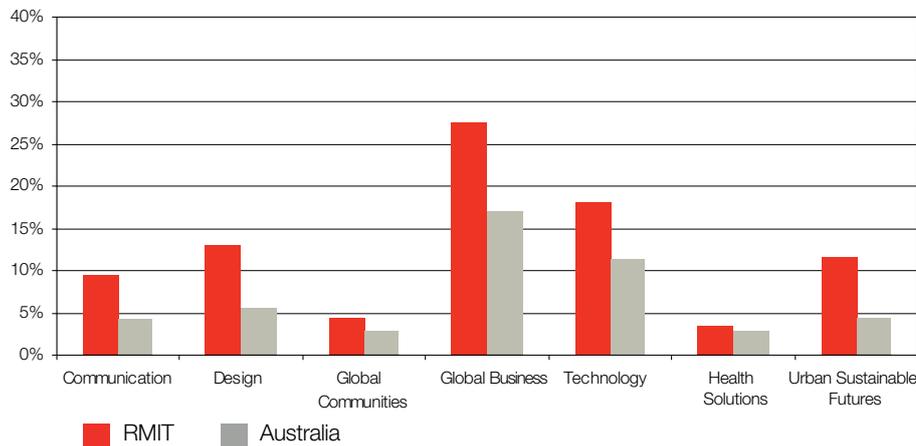


Figure 1 above indicates the way RMIT's industries of focus relate to the high impact areas of education and research contained in the oval and the overlapping agendas of the four Research Institutes with those fields.

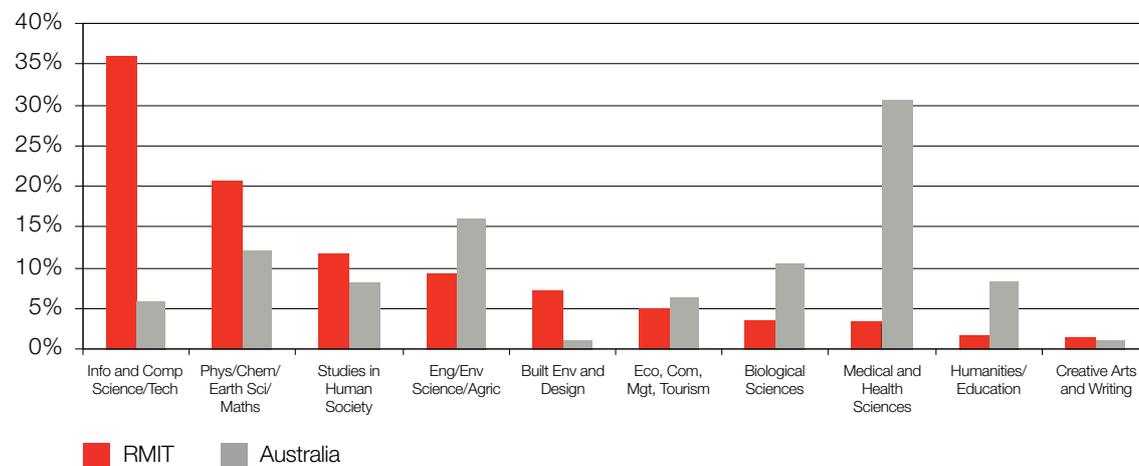
The focused range of educational fields in which the University operates, and the even more focused research fields, are a reflection of RMIT's distinctive mission. The graph below shows RMIT's relative concentration of teaching effort in its top fields of education relative to Australian universities more generally. The second figure shows RMIT's concentration by field of research.

Table 3: Student load distribution by high impact areas, RMIT and Australia total, 2004 – 2008



Source: DEEWR student load customised datafile 2008

Table 4: Concentration of R&D expenditure by field of research, RMIT and Australia, 2008



The threads of a global university of technology and design are woven into a tapestry through the major elements of the university experience. These are to be found in the student experience, in learning and teaching, in research and in the services and the environment in which they are provided.

Student experience

The student experience often appears elusive to student and staff member alike. One important feature of our ability to provide a distinctive, memorable and engaging student experience is to be able to draw on student ideas and feedback to help us understand what they are seeking and what they value in what is being provided. But a high quality student experience will not proceed only from more extensive focus groups or questionnaires; it must rely on opportunities for students to be part of academic governance from Academic Board and Council through to student consultative committees and student representation. In a university that values action and experience we must recognise that understanding the student experience is in large part about giving students the opportunity to contribute to the life of the University and to the shape of the education they receive.

We all aspire to provide the quality of education that will prepare a student to graduate with the capabilities to pursue their goals and to contribute effectively to the world in which they will find themselves. At RMIT this broad goal means ensuring that students have the depth of knowledge and skills required to operate effectively in their chosen profession or occupation. As many of these fields at RMIT are subject to professional accreditation or recognition processes we aim not only to meet these requirements but to engage in frequent dialogue with members of the relevant professions or industries in order to keep curriculum and pedagogy at the forefront of what will be needed for the future. It also means equipping students with the ability to demonstrate their knowledge and capabilities to prospective employers through the work they have undertaken while at RMIT.

It is most important, however, for the student experience to concentrate on those aspects that are critical to an RMIT education. This allows RMIT to signal to students those aspects that are key to its educational philosophy and to reinforce the capabilities that they provide for students in the future. There are three key features of an RMIT education that should permeate the student experience. They can be captured in three short phrases – ‘demonstrating achievement’; ‘fostering openness and excitement’; and ‘ensuring a sense of belonging’.

Integral to an RMIT education is learning through action and experience, whether that comes through assessed work placements, studios, projects or clinical practice. We aim to foster independence of thought and action, to encourage synthesis of knowledge to find solutions, and to provide the sense of achievement in completing a complex assignment for which the student has been responsible. The creation of authentic assessable experiences of this type whether individual or team-based, in a domestic or an overseas location, requires a level of investment and organisation above and beyond the standard classroom experience. It is this investment that we must make a focus for our student experience at RMIT.

True learning comes from remaining open to new perspectives and ideas. Creativity is built on this openness coupled with the courage to experiment. These attributes are encouraged in the work placements, studios, projects and practice that are core to the work integrated learning at RMIT. However they also draw on another important strand – the global passport that is embedded in the RMIT educational experience. To learn with and from people from many different backgrounds and cultures is to experience the excitement and challenge of seeing the world through different eyes; to spend part of your education immersed in a place that is not your home. The excitement of a student experience must be founded in part on confronting the unexpected. Our student experience must take students beyond the expected, foster openness to the new and the different, and encourage creative responses to those opportunities and challenges.

Finally the student experience must put the challenges of a global world, of unexpected ideas and perspectives, of different cultures, of trying to find your solution to a complex problem within an environment that supports willingness to take and meet a challenge. Each student at RMIT is part of a cohort studying in their particular field. In a large university, our students are in programs that are not always large. These programs have direct links to specific professions and sometimes to particular industries. The students share in the development of their knowledge, skills and capabilities in that context. It is our task at RMIT to make those connections to the relevant professions and industries not only in the way we develop our curriculum, but also in direct links for the students inside and outside the classroom. It is our task at RMIT to help students, from their first day with us, find a place and a set of connections with the students in their program. In some programs the ‘vertical’ studio brings different years in a program together through structured studio experience.

In others, our development of the 'vertical' campus will provide student portals, lounges and spaces within which each particular program or field of study finds its own place.

In these ways we will build in students a sense of belonging and commitment to the field they have chosen and to the students and staff with whom they have studied. From a sense of belonging comes the ability to take risks, to be creative, to be focused on achievement rather than worried about failure. It will lay the foundations for graduates' continuing association with the university, through professional development and engagement as alumni with teaching, research and industry partnerships.

RMIT's student experience must speak to the capabilities that we should expect of students who have learnt from action and experience, who are committed to the professions and fields in which they have chosen to study, and who are ready to transform the future.

Learning and teaching

Learning and teaching at RMIT must focus on our fields of specialisation. As a university of technology and design we do not aspire to engage with all the fields of study of a comprehensive university. And learning and teaching must build from the educational philosophy that emphasises learning through action and experience and curriculum that is engaged with professions and industries, understood in a global context. Our programs must meet the standards required for international accreditation and recognition. The focus must be as our original motto¹ implies that our graduates have the skills expected of those who will practise in their particular field or profession, but these must come with an understanding of their international context, and the challenges of our urbanising world.

Learning and teaching at RMIT continues this focus in curriculum and pedagogy wherever it occurs – whether on the original campus in Melbourne or in the newest campus in Hanoi. The fields of study on which we are concentrated are technology, design, global communities, health solutions, global business, communication and urban sustainable futures. These fields share a focus on knowledge applied to solutions to issues and problems. They involve single professions such as engineering, architecture, social work, journalism and accounting, as well as requiring and creating the teams that understand urban environments, communication systems, development issues and public health problems.

We cannot provide effective learning and teaching without full understanding of what internationalisation means to our curriculum and our pedagogy. We cannot lag behind the professions and fields with which we engage and into which our students will proceed; we must stay at the forefront of knowledge, technique and technology. Excellence in learning and teaching means commitment to regular renewal of curriculum; experimentation with new teaching techniques; and reshaping learning and teaching spaces to build new practice and new experience for our students and staff. RMIT has the advantage of combining the best of what we understand of skills development and work-based learning from vocational education, with the depth of critical analysis and research that characterises strong higher education courses.

RMIT has always invested heavily in the equipment to support its learning and teaching – it will continue this commitment. We will need to invest more heavily in the support of our staff to bring the latest in educational pedagogy to our students. We aspire to academic and teaching staff with a well-developed understanding of what is required for high quality learning and teaching. A large proportion of our academic staff will be able to bring the understanding that their research provides of new directions in knowledge and this is also critical to a high quality learning experience for students. However one of the major factors in RMIT's links to professions and industries is the ability to draw on the expertise of those currently engaged in these professions and industries.

Current experience and practice in a field is a vital component in scaffolding learning that draws on action and experience. Too much of this expertise comes through sessional or casual staff who have limited engagement with the University and the students. RMIT plans to introduce a new 'industry practitioner' stream to provide a clear and more permanent place for staff to contribute their current professional or industry expertise to learning and teaching. The medical professions have had such a concept through clinical appointments, and there are areas within RMIT that at present use a similar model. However it is time to make an explicit commitment to the enrichment of learning and teaching that such a new role would provide.

We will also need strong professional development for staff and support of student learning to provide an excellent education to a very diverse student body. Many of our students have English as their second or third language. We are committed to bringing students from disadvantaged backgrounds to RMIT. We have good retention rates and pathways and the possibility of new ones that provide the development of students to reach a successful conclusion to their studies.

Our learning and teaching requires sophistication, flexibility and experimentation in curriculum development and in pedagogy. This requires investment in staff, equipment and facilities but also capability and commitment in our staff and engagement with our partners. The best learning and teaching does not stay within the classroom walls or inside the campus. Our learning and teaching must stay true to our commitment to be global, urban and connected.

¹ The University's motto is 'perita manus, mens exulta' – broadly this translates as 'the skilled hand, the cultivated mind'.

Research

RMIT is a large university by international standards with over 70,000 students in 2010, of which over 50,000 are in higher education programs. Yet the scale of endeavour required for research of international excellence means that the concentration of learning and teaching must be accompanied by an even tighter focus in terms of research. RMIT currently has four Research Institutes; Design, Global Cities, Health Innovations and Platform Technologies. An increase in the scale and quality of research from these Institutes is a primary objective of this Strategic Plan. This requires investment in people, equipment and facilities across all our campuses.

The research that is supported in these Research Institutes and through associated Research Centres is cross-disciplinary, drawing researchers from across the University. The themes that currently capture this research are the future of cities; improving health and lifestyle; smart devices and technology solutions; designing the future; and sustainability and climate change.

Much of our research is applied and conducted in concert with industry and organisational partners. These themes are pursued in partnership with other researchers, universities, organisations and industries within and beyond Australia. Partnerships with international researchers and with industry are vital to building the quality and reach of our research and must be given priority in these next five years.

The conventional international measures of research, such as citations, and the ability to secure peer-reviewed grant income, are important to attest to the quality of our research. This is not only a measure of the quality of the researchers, but also of our ability to build and retain teams of researchers that nurture postgraduate students, postdoctoral researchers and early career academics. It is important that we focus on hiring high quality and high potential academic and research staff. We must build the scale of our postgraduate student cohort to increase the vibrancy and productivity of our research endeavour. As important, however, is building the culture and the teams to ensure a high quality research environment.

Beyond the quality of research for a university such as RMIT is its impact. To be concerned with the problems of an 'urban age' or a globalised economy or society, with creating better futures for health and work, to reduce our carbon footprint and energy use, our impact on the climate and environment, is to have research that makes an impact on these problems.

In order to ensure the impact of research on problems means that much of the research undertaken will be cross-disciplinary or trans-disciplinary in nature. While big issues can be understood through different disciplinary lenses, they encourage collaboration across disciplines in defining and responding to the questions raised.

Some of that impact also comes from being engaged with partners who are looking for solutions to put into effect. Engagement with partners is therefore a critical objective for our research. Being able to assess our research and its outcomes in terms of its impact on the problems and issues with which we are concerned is also a powerful lens through which to view research outcomes. It is this lens to which we will give equal weight, as to international quality, in focusing RMIT's research for the future.

As a university concerned in its research with the application of knowledge, then, international quality must be married with an equal commitment to considering the impact of the research conducted. To consider the impact of research means a clear commitment to ethical standards that involve the betterment of the world as a result of the application of that knowledge. It confirms a commitment to research that will enhance our lives and our world. It reminds us that research is an opportunity to act in the world and create a better future.

Services and infrastructure

It is important that we practise what we teach (and research). RMIT's campuses are located in large, vibrant urban centres. We also teach currently in Singapore, Hong Kong, Kuala Lumpur, Shanghai, and Brussels. By the end of this Strategic Plan, it is likely there will be more campuses and educational partnership locations.

With these characteristics we must meet the demands for services and infrastructure that draw on the opportunities and the challenges of being both global and urban. Our staff must be diverse and supported to deal with the diversity of the cultures and different ways of working that are evident when we embrace a global mission. To support our student diversity we must have the services and the facilities that are needed, including accommodation. This is a challenge for both staff and campus development in this Plan.

Everything that we do relies on a commitment by all our staff to excellent performance focused on our strategic goals, and this in turn relies on commitment by leadership to support, reward and recognise that performance.

We have the opportunity through partnership with the cities in which we are located to be an urban laboratory, in terms of the design of our campuses, the sustainability of our environment and operations, and in our integration with city life and landscape. We must meet the challenges of providing high quality services and infrastructure across our global footprint of campuses and partnerships.

As a university of technology and design we must model excellence in both areas. RMIT has been long committed to procurement of inspiring design for our campus built and landscape architecture. This commitment to excellence, as well as to encouraging new and innovative design has produced in Melbourne and in Ho Chi Minh City award-winning and exciting built environments. From the first building erected in 1887 to the most recent, there are examples of international quality design, speaking to the local context and in this century meeting high standards for sustainability. We will not resile from this commitment and will continue to set high standards as we further develop our campuses.

Another important recent part of our infrastructure is information technology, both the hardware and the systems to support the services, learning and teaching, and research of a university operating across locations and countries. This also needs to be excellent to ensure the quality of our work in technology and design, and to be so requires greater investment in this part of our infrastructure.

Finally, with many people and buildings our footprint in the landscape is significant and we must work to lighten its impact on limited resources and our environment. To this end we have commitments to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by 25% by 2020, and to reduce energy, water and paper consumption. In these last three years we have reduced our energy, water and paper use and our greenhouse gas emissions. To continue this trend will require not only the changes that the University can make to its fabric and operations but also behavioural change by each and every staff member and student. That behavioural change will be the sustainability challenge in this Plan.

Conclusion

RMIT's focus as a university of technology and design brings opportunities for cross-disciplinary activity, both within and across the fields they comprise. It means not just the fields of education and research with which we engage but the way we undertake that education and research. We must be focused on drawing the lessons from action and experience, pursuing solutions, concerned to transform the future.

The intersection of the three goals identified in this Plan, global, urban, and connected, also provides a layering that strengthens each separate goal. There is a need to support the professional, industry and organisational engagement of education and research. There is an opportunity to draw strength from the urban character of the University in building those city relationships, defining the student and staff experience and reinforcing the distinctiveness of the University's position.

To be global stretches all other goals; in scale, form and location. To draw strength from the global nature of the University requires focus on key cities, but with a global reach and also clarity about the nature of the education and research presence to be developed in each place and across the University as a whole.

A global network of locations and activity is best given effect by concentrating on key cities, thus combining a global reach with an urban orientation. The education and research partnerships and links with professions and industries provide a path into broader engagement in the cities in which we focus our efforts. Global industry partnership possibilities that intersect with these educational and research partnerships and links ensure that the global infuses the urban and partnership themes of our University.

The challenge is to provide a distinctive profile and position that is understood clearly by staff, students, industry and community and seeks to make a clear match between what is offered and expectations. This identity must be underpinned by refining the University's focus in education and research and by heightened investment and concentration in the key aspects of a university of technology and design.

This distinctiveness must also demonstrate quality and to do so the University must be able to find and define its place in the crowded national and international arenas in which it operates. For most well developed universities, and for RMIT with its global reach, the goal is international reputation. Reputation is founded on demonstrated quality of performance in education and research. But reputation is not important unless it is matched by demonstrated impact – that we are contributing to a transformation of the future.

There is a need to focus investment to achieve our goals, so that our research foci are strengthened, and our high impact educational program areas deliver the global passport, the work integrated learning, the student cohort experience and the graduate outcomes to which we aspire. This requires evidence-based priorities and the identification of areas from which resources will be diverted, as well as those to which resources will be directed.

Investment cannot come without a consequent demonstration of increased quality and significant impact in research and education. It also cannot come without those areas being able to contribute to further investment in our strengths or to experiment with new areas.

And finally we must use the way we measure our success to constrain our choices. Our measures of quality will be international measures for universities of technology and design. For example we will measure the demand of students for our programs, as well as using the national measures of teaching quality and satisfaction. We will focus on international measures of research excellence (noting these are now highly congruent with national measures). We will embrace measures of the sustainability of our services, recognising that we can aspire to significant achievements against international benchmarks on reducing our carbon footprint.

We will take the time to develop measures of impact, our impact in the cities in which we have located across the globe, our impact on the professional and industry partnerships in which we have invested, and our impact on the outcomes for our students.

By adding impact measures to those that attest to quality, we will ensure that we focus on our engagement with the world around us. We will be a university that achieves its goals in partnership with others, not just through our own capabilities and resources. To add impact measures is to recognise that our education and research is bred by and from action and experience, not contemplation and reflection. It relies on measures that are about acting in the world.

As a university our goal must be to transform the futures of our students, no matter the circumstances of their beginning. Our research must be to transform our knowledge of and ability to act in the world. Overall RMIT as a global university of technology and design must be committed to conceiving and planning new directions, applying its knowledge and working with and through others to transform the future.



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