INDIGENOUS EMPLOYMENT AT THE UNIVERSITY OF MELBOURNE
A guide to Indigenous employment for recruiters and supervisors of Indigenous Australians
About the Artist:
Dixon Patten is a proud Yorta Yorta and Gunnai man who has family bloodlines from Dhudhuwa, Gunditjmara, Wiradjuri, Yuin, Wemba Wemba, Barapa Barapa and Monaro. He has worked with the University on its Cultural Awareness Training program and other projects.

‘The artwork represents the journey taken by the University of Melbourne, working with the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community, to develop [its Reconciliation Action Plan]. The pathway depicts life’s course and the waves represent the ripple effect that the RAP’s Signature Projects will have on students, staff and the broader Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and non-Indigenous communities. The circles in the middle are our community – the motivation for, and guiding influence on, [the] RAP.’

- Dixon Patten, artist and designer – Bayila Creative
INTRODUCTION

Purpose of Guide

This guide has been developed for the benefit of employees responsible for recruiting and supervising staff, with advice on attracting, recruiting and retaining Indigenous Australians. In addition to direct advice on recruitment strategies, and with the goal of assisting supervisors and recruiters to create a culturally safe workplace for Indigenous people, the guide includes an overview of Indigenous cultures and behaviours that may impact on the workplace environment.

The University of Melbourne is committed to contributing to closing the gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians and addressing Indigenous Australian disadvantage through the provision of employment opportunities. Our commitment to recruiting Indigenous people is also driven by the vision of becoming a leading employer of choice for Indigenous people and thus benefiting the University by enhancing the diversity of its workforce. This commitment is not based solely on addressing disadvantage experienced by the majority of Indigenous Australians, but rather on the basis that Indigenous employees will bring with them a wealth of experience, expertise, knowledge and skills that will inform, enrich and fundamentally improve the work that we do.

Indigenous Employment Framework 2018-2021

The University of Melbourne’s Indigenous Employment Framework (IEF) 2018–2021 is the third iteration of the Framework that builds on earlier recruitment successes by focusing on diversification strategies and the provision of career development opportunities.

The IEF states that the University will bring the number and dispersion of Indigenous Australian staff within the University to population parity by 2020 (commencing in 2010).

In 2018, in alignment with the Elevate Reconciliation Action Plan, University faculties and administrative divisions completed their Divisional Indigenous Development Plans. The plans responded to key action areas of the IEF which translated high level commitment and intent into Indigenous employment outcomes.

To meet our targets, the University’s approach is based around three themes:

Recruitment

• Supporting early career academic transition and pathways for Indigenous PhD students and post-doctoral fellows
• Recruitment of exceptional Indigenous researchers Australia-wide
• Maintaining our outstanding Indigenous professional staff recruitment strategies and initiatives
• Appointment of Indigenous staff to senior professional roles

Career Support

• Providing professional and leadership development for Indigenous academic careers
• Targeted development opportunities for Indigenous professional staff to support competitive application for senior professional roles
• Facilitating mentoring for Indigenous Staff

Employment Partnerships

• Establish and maintain partnerships to create opportunities for co-employment

1. Currently 3.3% of the Australian population identify as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander.
WHY DO WE NEED A SPECIFIC APPROACH TO RECRUIT INDIGENOUS PEOPLE?

Indigenous Australians face significant barriers when it comes to securing employment at the University of Melbourne. In all the major social indicators such as health, housing, education and employment, they are significantly worse off than most other Australians. This section of the guide will provide you with an overview of these disadvantages and highlight some of the reasons why targeted Divisional Indigenous Development Plans were developed.

Historical Factors

Historical factors, such as institutionally racist public policies, have devastated the lives of many Indigenous Australians. For example, in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries Aboriginal Protection Boards were created across the country. Rather than protecting Indigenous Australians the policies of the Boards caused dislocation from family, culture, education and economic participation for Indigenous Australians.

Protection Boards had wide ranging powers that gave them a high level of control over the lives of Indigenous people. This included allowing them to dictate where Indigenous people lived, curtail their freedom of movement and deny them control of their personal finances. Most damagingly, significant numbers of Indigenous children (especially light-skinned children) were removed from their homes and families and taken into care to be raised like ‘white children’, or transported to ‘homes’ to be trained as labour hands or domestic servants. Life for children living in these homes, for example, the Kinchela Boys Home and the Cootamundra Girls Home for Indigenous Children, was fraught with cruelty and abuse.

The Aboriginal Protection era commenced in the 1860s and operated in various forms for over 100 years. Progressively, due to the failure of protection policies and the inhumanity it entailed, the legislation establishing the Boards was repealed and they were abolished, with the NSW Aboriginal Welfare Board finally being abolished in 1969. Many Indigenous Australians are still dealing with the tragic trans-generational impact of these policies and practices. The Commonwealth Government’s Report: Overcoming Indigenous Disadvantage, Key Indicators 2016 provides data that demonstrates the extremely high level of disadvantage experienced by many Indigenous people and which accounts for ‘the gap’ between Indigenous people and non-Indigenous people.

This disadvantage is outlined below:

Entrenched high unemployment

The unemployment rate for Indigenous Australians is 20%, around three times the rate for non-Indigenous Australians. High generational unemployment levels in Indigenous communities create a snowball effect, until unemployment becomes the norm. This has further ramifications in terms of welfare dependency, which further exacerbates unemployment.

Inequality in economic development and participation

Due to high levels of unemployment and lack of opportunities, Indigenous Australians and communities have a lower income and have lower levels of economic development compared to the non-Indigenous community. This further impacts on employment opportunities as Indigenous Australians may not be part of the economic community in an equal capacity. In 2015 Indigenous households’ average gross weekly income was $542 in comparison to the non-Indigenous average of $852.
Lower education participation rates

The proportion of Indigenous 20-24-year olds who have completed year 12 or an equivalent is 61.5%, compared to 87.9% of their non-Indigenous counterparts.

Indigenous people are 13 times more likely to be imprisoned than non-Indigenous people. The imprisonment rate for Indigenous people has increased by 77% since 2000 - due to various factors that are historical and discriminatory.

Being incarcerated has negative effects in relation to family and community, and further inhibits employment opportunities. Most employers screen potential employees through a criminal record check and because of the high rate of incarceration for Indigenous Australians, this has a detrimental effect on their job prospects.

Higher rates of poor health

High levels of poor health exist within many Indigenous communities and have a detrimental effect on an individual’s capacity to participate in education and employment. The effect of Indigenous poor health is reflected in the estimated life expectancy at birth for Indigenous people, which, for men, is 67 years (12 years less than for non-Indigenous men), and for women, is 73 years (10 years less than for non-Indigenous women).

Note: Despite these barriers, progress is being made in addressing these challenges. This progress is supported by commitment from all levels of government and the private sector, and by Indigenous Australians driving change in their own communities. Individual Indigenous Australian’s experience of disadvantage will vary. Some Indigenous Australians have overcome entrenched disadvantage and are living fully engaged lives at a similar level of prosperity enjoyed by most Australians.

High rates of homelessness and overcrowding

Lack of stability with regard to housing has an effect on an individual’s general wellbeing, with direct impacts on opportunities for employment and education. Homeless people also suffer from high rates of incarceration, which creates further barriers to employment opportunities.
Supervisors have a critical role to play in ensuring the University delivers on its Indigenous recruitment targets. Without their support in identifying roles for Indigenous Australians, attracting Indigenous applicants and creating a work environment that enables Indigenous employees to develop and excel in their employment, the University will not achieve its Indigenous employment objectives or become an employer of choice for Indigenous Australians.

To assist you to attract and recruit Indigenous Australians consider:

- Advertising vacancies on Ourmob.com.au, in the Koori Mail and on the Indigenous Jobs Australia website
- Promoting vacancies through the University’s Indigenous Staff Network
- Using local, regional networks to promote vacancies
- Sending vacancies to Murrup Barak Institute to be promoted via Indigenous community mailing lists
- Providing information about the role and about the University in a format that is easily accessible
- Checking on the number of Indigenous applicants who have applied for a position on Page Up midway through the advertisement period. If the number of Indigenous applicants is low, contact the Indigenous Employment Project Officer who may be able to stimulate further interest
- Ensuring the job description and selection criteria do not inadvertently discriminate against Indigenous applicants, for example, by insisting on tertiary qualifications when direct experience or a combination of experience and a TAFE qualification or similar can provide the necessary skills.

**Print media**

The University has committed to a continual presence (a general promotion advertisement or composite advertisement with targeted vacancies) in the Koori Mail, a widely read newspaper within the Indigenous community. If you choose to identify or target a position for Indigenous Australians, you can advertise this position in the Koori Mail as part of the University’s regular advertisement. For more information contact local HR.

**Targeted Indigenous employment websites**

The Indigenous Jobs Australia website and ourmob.edu.au are culturally appropriate forums to post job vacancies targeting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander candidates. For more information contact local HR.

**Substantive equity**

Once an Indigenous Australian has been shortlisted for an interview, substantive equity should be taken into consideration regarding aspects of socioeconomic and educational disadvantage routinely experienced by Indigenous people. For example, if an Indigenous candidate is deemed appointable as well as a non-Indigenous candidate with more experience and a higher level of education, the recruitment panel should consider the following questions:

- Does the Indigenous candidate have the base skills and experience for the position?
- Does the candidate have the ability to rapidly acquire the additional skills or experience required to perform in the role at the expected level?
If the answer to these questions is yes, the Indigenous candidate should be considered for appointment over the non-Indigenous candidate who has most likely not experienced the high level of disadvantage outlined in the previous section.

**Indigenous Australian Employment Exemption Process**

The University has developed an Indigenous Australian Employment Exemption Process. The Process allows the University to legally ‘identify’ suitable positions as those that only Indigenous Australians may apply and compete for.

The Process is based on the Special Measure Provision (Section 12) of the Equal Opportunity Act 2010 (VIC). The provision covers casual, fixed-term and continuing positions across all classifications and work areas.

If you choose to identify a position and make it ‘exempt’ so that only Indigenous Australians may apply, the process is simple. You are required to fill in an HR72 Indigenous Australian Employment Exemption Questionnaire and send to HR Assist for processing.

To download the form, please refer to: staff.unimelb.edu.au/human-resources/forms-templates

**Pre-employment support**

Providing support to Indigenous Australians in writing a job application and preparing for an interview is a University-wide commitment. Indigenous Australians seeking support in applying for a position can contact the University through a single point (hr-careers@unimelb.edu.au). Their inquiry will be directed to a nominated contact in each respective department. Nominated officers will provide general information about the function of their department, review written applications and give advice about interview skills and techniques.

For any further information contact the University’s Indigenous Employment Project Officer around issues in relation to appointments or Indigenous recruitment and retention.
Once an Indigenous person is successful in gaining a position with the University, their workplace experiences will be critical in determining whether the University will achieve its retention commitments. Providing a positive work experience for the person will be observed and reflected upon throughout the Indigenous community. Such positive experiences can foster ongoing employment and encourage other Indigenous people to apply for positions.

It is important to note that there is no blanket approach to Indigenous employment and the best approach will depend on the individual and the position in which they are commencing. The recruiting staff member should provide the new Indigenous recruit with a designated ‘buddy’. Preferably, the buddy will be another Indigenous staff member, but if not, then a staff member that has undertaken cultural awareness training or has some experience working with Indigenous Australians. The role of the buddy is to support the new recruit in navigating a department’s processes and procedures and to answer any questions the new recruit may have but may not want to discuss with their supervisor.

For more information about how to best support new Indigenous staff, please contact indigenous-employment@unimelb.edu.au

Retaining Indigenous staff is a critical part of the IEF. The aim is to provide opportunities for Indigenous people to develop both broad-based and specialised skills so that they progress in their roles. Supervisors of Indigenous staff are encouraged to work with their new Indigenous recruits when developing their Performance Development Framework to ensure that successful career pathways and educational opportunities have been incorporated.

The University of Melbourne’s Indigenous Staff Support Network provides an environment where Indigenous staff can share their experiences of working in the University, provide support for other Indigenous staff, participate in professional development opportunities as they arise and contribute to the work of the University. Supervisors are encouraged to support the participation of Indigenous staff in this network.
INDIGENOUS CULTURES IN THE WORKPLACE

The purpose of this section is to provide practical information and advice about aspects of Indigenous culture to supervisors, recruiters and general staff when recruiting or working with an Indigenous person. However, it is important to reiterate that not all Indigenous Australians have had the same experiences or have the same cultural practices. Not all the content discussed in this section will be relevant to all Indigenous Australians.

Indigenous identity

There is great diversity among Indigenous communities and societies in Australia, each has its own unique mixture of cultures, customs and languages. Before the arrival of Europeans there were 600 different tribal groups across Australia living in defined territories.

Indigenous people often use different terms to refer to themselves depending on where they are from:

• Koori is used in south-eastern Australia
• Murri is often used in Queensland and far northern New South Wales
• Nunga is used in South and Western Australia.

In addition some Indigenous people refer to themselves by their traditional tribal groups, while others prefer the term Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander.

Note: The best way to find out an Indigenous colleague’s preferred way of identifying themselves, is to ask them. Indigenous people in your team may originally be from a different state or community than the one where they are currently living and working. Therefore, they will not always be able to provide you with advice on local Indigenous issues from the local community’s perspective.

Note: Indigenous people are not experts on all Indigenous issues across the country.

The Federal Government’s definition of an Indigenous Australian is a person who:

• is of Indigenous descent;
• identifies as Indigenous; and
• is accepted in the community in which he or she lives (or has lived) as being Indigenous.

As apparent from the above definition, being Indigenous has nothing to do with skin colour or physical features. Indigenous people come in all shades from dark to fair. Being Indigenous is about one’s community and upbringing, ancestral connection to land, spirituality and culture. Supervisors should note that some Indigenous people have not yet established strong ties with their community due to a range of factors, including childhood removal.

Another point to note is that it is offensive to refer to Indigenous people as full blood, half-caste, quarter-caste, native or part Indigenous. These terms were used to justify forcibly removing Indigenous children of lighter complexion from their families under assimilation policies. It was maintained that they could more easily reject their indigenous identity, assimilate and become ‘white’. These children became known as the Stolen Generations.
CULTURAL PROTOCOLS AND BEHAVIOURS THAT MAY AFFECT THE WORKPLACE

Described below are some Indigenous customs that may influence workplace behaviour, and possible responses a supervisor may use to deal with the behaviours in a culturally appropriate way. However, please remember there is as great a diversity in the experiences, perspectives, background and traditions of Indigenous staff as there are for all staff employed at the University.

**Eye contact**

In Indigenous communities, eye movement is very important when a younger person greets an elder. To show respect, they may have ‘eyes down’. If you witness this in your own dealings with an Indigenous staff member, it should be taken as a respectful gesture. It is also important to note that for many Indigenous Australians (particularly those in remote areas), avoidance of eye contact cuts across all interactions – not just those between younger people and elders.

Some Indigenous people feel no obligation to look at the person speaking to them. For some, it is culturally inappropriate to make eye contact when speaking, and it can be offensive to force an Indigenous person to look you directly in the eye.

**Response:** Don’t assume that lack of eye contact means inattention or that the person isn’t listening. It may take time for a new Indigenous employee to adapt to the level of eye contact required in a mainstream workplace. You and your team can assist by initially reducing your eye contact with the new employee until they become accustomed to the workplace requirements. Please remember that Indigenous people are diverse and will interact differently.

**Shame**

If an Indigenous person says he or she was ‘shamed’ it generally means embarrassed. An Indigenous recruit can often be quite shy and feel shamed if singled out or laughed at in front of work mates. Shame is generally about being put forward or being asked to step up and show yourself as more capable or competent than someone else with regard to a particular skill or knowledge. While this is rewarded in mainstream workplaces, this singling-out, even for positive reasons, might leave an Indigenous person feeling shamed because they do not wish to appear better than anyone else – particularly in relation to any other Indigenous person.

**Response:** Think carefully before giving feedback or addressing groups of staff. Help the new employee to see that the workplace does not operate in the same culture of shame, and that at work it is sometimes necessary to be upfront or forward to achieve outcomes. For example, individual team members may at times lead because of their additional experience or talent in a particular task or function.
Men and women’s business

Indigenous societies respect the roles of both men and women equally. At the same time, Indigenous culture may allocate quite separate roles in passing down knowledge, which are referred to as ‘men’s business’ or ‘women’s business’. This simply means that some knowledge is under the protection of men only or women only.

Response: Understand the restrictions this may create in working with communities or in tasking Indigenous employees to work in the Indigenous community. If you have a staff member attending an Indigenous meeting at the community level, you may need to first check whether a male or female staff member should attend.

Importance of the extended family/Elder system

Traditionally, Indigenous communities were quite small and so members have strong family networks and obligations. Indigenous Elders are very important in the community and command a lot of respect because of their wisdom and knowledge of culture. Younger Indigenous members are inclined to listen to their advice and follow instructions.

Response: Be sure to treat older Indigenous people in the workplace with respect (they may be Elders in their communities).

Engaging Elders policy

Elders from the Wurundjeri Nation are invited to the University regularly to perform a Welcome to Country. The Welcome is conducted by an Aboriginal member of the Wurundjeri nation and is performed to welcome people gathering on the land of the Wurundjeri people and to pay respects to each other while on these traditional lands.

The University of Melbourne will perform a Welcome to Country at all of its major events. Find out more about Welcome to Country https://murrupbarak.unimelb.edu.au/engage/cultural-awareness,-protocols-and-advice

Silence

Silence from an Indigenous person does not automatically mean he or she has nothing to say. Long periods of silence and thought characterise meetings with Indigenous people. Given time and trust, they will express their opinions. In some Indigenous cultures, value is based on brevity of reply rather than detailed elaboration so be prepared for very brief or yes/no responses.

Response: Some Indigenous employees may need coaxing via well-constructed open questions to provide you with the information that you require. Over time new Indigenous employees will pick up the workplace cultural requirement for faster responses and more detailed answers and explanations.
CULTURAL PROTOCOLS AND BEHAVIOURS THAT MAY AFFECT THE WORKPLACE

Languages

There are approximately 145 Indigenous languages spoken in Australia today, 110 of which are endangered. The most common language used is Indigenous English; the name given to the various types of English spoken by Indigenous people throughout Australia. Technically, the language varieties are dialects of English. They have much in common with other varieties of Australian English, but there are distinctive features of accent, grammar, words and meanings, as well as language use. In many subtle ways Indigenous English is a powerful vehicle for the expression of Indigenous identity and should not be dismissed as ‘bad English’. Examples of Indigenous English are:

- Brus/Bra: shortened version of brother
- deadly: excellent, very good, high standard
- gammon: pretend, not true, not of high quality, joking generally
- gubbah: is a term used by some Indigenous people to refer to white people. It is a shortening of the word government, since traditionally, Indigenous people’s contact with whites most often involved a government official.
- mob: unlike broader English, it does not usually mean an indiscriminate crowd, but a cohesive group
- growl: to be scolded or to scold.

Response: Be careful in using Indigenous English so that you don’t appear to be mocking the Indigenous person. It is best to avoid Indigenous English and use clear, precise, simple Australian English, clarifying anything not understood.

Family terms

Words referring to an Indigenous person’s relatives may be used in a different sense to non-Indigenous people, reflecting traditional kinship systems, for example:

- Aunty and Uncle are used as terms of address that express respect for older people, to whom the speaker may not in fact be related.
- Brother and Sister include close relatives of the same generation, not just siblings.
- Cousin includes any relative of one’s own generation.
- The combinations cousin-brother and cousin-sister are used to refer to biological cousins.
- Father and Mother include any relative of one’s parents’ generation, such as uncles, aunts, and in-laws.
- Grandfather and Grandmother can refer to anyone from one’s grandparents’ generation.
- Grandfather can also refer to any respected elderly man, to whom the speaker may not be related.
- Son or Daughter can refer to any male or female of the next generation, such as nephews and nieces.

Response: Ask the Indigenous staff member to clarify what they mean in using these terms and explain how it may differ in meaning to other workers in the mainstream workplace.

While we face many challenges in working towards our goal of increasing the Indigenous workforce, we are fully equipped and supported by the University to do this. We have high level support, but ultimately success will come by our individual efforts in our respective teams. On a final note, we should not only be driven in this work by our vision of becoming an employer of choice or addressing disadvantage, but also on the basis that Indigenous employees will bring with them a wealth of experience, expertise, knowledge and skills that will inform, enrich and fundamentally improve the work that we do.
SIGNIFICANT INDIGENOUS AUSTRALIAN DATES

Community dates
- Anniversary of National Apology – 13 February
- International Day for Elimination of Racial Discrimination – 21 March
- National Close the Gap Day – 24 March
- National Sorry Day – 26 May
- Anniversary of the 1967 Referendum – 27 May
- Reconciliation Week – 27 May– 03 June
- Mabo Day – 3 June
- Anniversary of Victorian Aboriginal Justice Agreement – 1 June
- NAIDOC Week – 3–10 July
- National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children’s Day – 04 August

University Dates
- Wominjeka – early in Term One
- Diversity Week – early August
- Dungala Kaiela Oration – mid-year (TBC), Shepparton
- Narrm Oration – November, date TBC
- Murrup Barak lunches – every Tuesday during semester

References
- www.reconciliation.org.au/
- generationone.org.au/
Contact Information

Indigenous Employment Project Officer
Murrup Barak Institute for Indigenous Development
Email: indigenous-employment@unimelb.edu.au
Web: murrupbarak.unimelb.edu.au