

# Guiding Principles for Welcome to and Acknowledgement of Country

## 1. Purpose

The University of Technology Sydney ('University') campuses are located on Aboriginal lands and it is important that staff and students understand the significance of observing protocols in recognising the Traditional Owners of the relevant Lands at University events and ceremonies.

Observing agreed cultural protocols demonstrates the respect that the University, its staff and students have for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

Regions and Aboriginal Country are not always clearly defined and acknowledging one people over another may unintentionally exclude some people. Therefore, the following is a guide if speakers wish to specifically acknowledge the people and land of particular Aboriginal communities on which the event is taking place:

- City campus, Broadway: Gadigal People of the Eora Nation<sup>1</sup>
- UTS Research Facility: Boorooberongal People of the Dharug Nation.<sup>2</sup>

## 2. Scope

Jumbunna Institute for Indigenous Education and Research is frequently consulted on the protocols how to engage the local Aboriginal community in university events. These Guidelines and Protocols will provide some instruction for Welcome to Country and Acknowledgement of People for staff and students and will establish a more consistent approach for engaging Aboriginal Elders, including Jumbunna's Elder in Residence in the events of the university.

These guiding principles:

- apply to all UTS campuses in Australia
- will help to eliminate ambiguity about what is appropriate and acceptable in recognising the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people
- provide guidance for arranging Aboriginal cultural ceremonies as part of university events
- outline the events suitable for Welcomes to and Acknowledgements of Country
- provide guidance for payment to guests officiating at ceremonies and events.

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<sup>1</sup> Map: Locations of Aboriginal groups in the Sydney area, based on a map by J Goodrum in Mulvaney, D J and White, Peter, 1987, *Australians to 1788*, Fairfax, Syme & Weldon, Sydney, p. 345., available at <http://www.sydneybarani.com.au/sites/aboriginal-people-and-place/>

<sup>2</sup> Map: Locations of Aboriginal groups in the Sydney area, based on a map by J Goodrum in Mulvaney, D J and White, Peter, 1987, *Australians to 1788*, Fairfax, Syme & Weldon, Sydney, p. 345., available at <http://www.sydneybarani.com.au/sites/aboriginal-people-and-place/>

### 3. What is a Welcome to or Acknowledgement of Country

An **Acknowledgement of People and Country** is a statement of recognition of the traditional owners of the land. An Acknowledgement of Country can be given by any person – Indigenous or non-Indigenous.<sup>3</sup>

A **Welcome to Country** is a formal welcome onto Aboriginal Land given by an Elder or person of that land. The Welcome to Country should be the first item on the order of proceedings for the event and may comprise a single speech given by an Elder with or without an accompanying performance, such as playing of the didgeridoo.<sup>4</sup>

#### 3.1 Importance of observing Welcome to and Acknowledgement of Country

##### Acknowledgement of Country

This importance of acknowledging country is a cultural protocol that demonstrates respect for Aboriginal protocols and may be performed by anyone who is not a traditional custodian on which the event is being held. It is a respectful public acknowledgment of the traditional custodians of the land.

- Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people can perform an Acknowledgement of Country on its own, in response to a Welcome, or to a preceding Acknowledgement.
- It is appropriate for the host of the ceremony to make the acknowledgement unless a person has been specifically asked to perform this.
- If you are officiating at a ceremony or event, it is respectful to ask the Elder how he/she would prefer to be addressed. Do not assume that “Uncle” or “Aunty” is his or her preferred title.

Events where an Acknowledgement of Country should be considered include:

- all graduation ceremonies
- significant public lectures
- official openings of careers fairs/nights
- large student events
- staff and student orientation
- student focused events
- student prize nights
- whole of staff significant events
- launch of new initiatives
- the first meeting of the year for high-level official university committees such as Council, Academic Board, EED Committee and similar events
- special events as determined by staff managing events.

Key points to remember when doing an Acknowledgment:

- Clan Group/Nation listed above
- acknowledging the local Aboriginal people.

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<sup>3</sup> NSW Aboriginal Education Consultative Group ‘Guidelines and Protocols for NSW Public Schools and TAFE NSW Institutes’, available at <https://www.det.nsw.edu.au/media/downloads/dethome/yr2005/welcomecountry.pdf>

<sup>4</sup> NSW Aboriginal Education Consultative Group ‘Guidelines and Protocols for NSW Public Schools and TAFE NSW Institutes’, available at <https://www.det.nsw.edu.au/media/downloads/dethome/yr2005/welcomecountry.pdf>

## **Welcome to Country**

A Welcome to Country can be only performed by a traditional custodian from that particular Country where the event is being held. This is a recognised Elder from the local community who is able to welcome people to their land. A Welcome to Country usually consists of a speech and may also include traditional language, singing, dancing or didgeridoo playing.

In general, University events where there are invited members of the public and/or dignitaries may include a Welcome to Country.

Events where it would be desirable for a Welcome to Country to be performed by an Aboriginal Elder from the local community include:

- opening of new buildings
- University awards nights
- community/public engagement events.

When it is not possible to arrange a Welcome to Country at such events, an Acknowledgement of Country is the minimum requirement.

### **Examples for an official UTS event, meeting or occasion**

#### ***UTS City campus***

*I would like to acknowledge the Gadigal People of the Eora Nation upon whose ancestral lands our City campus now stands. We would also like to pay respect to the Elders both past and present, acknowledging them as the traditional custodians of knowledge for this land.*

#### ***UTS Western Sydney Research Facility***

*I would like to acknowledge the Boorooberongal People of the Dharug Nation upon whose ancestral lands our Research Facility now stands. We would also like to pay respect to the Elders both past and present, acknowledging them as the traditional custodians of knowledge for this land.*

#### ***Example for an official UTS publication***

*UTS acknowledges the Gadigal People of the Eora Nation and the Boorooberongal People of the Dharug Nation upon whose ancestral lands our campuses now stands. We would also like to pay respect to the Elders both past and present, acknowledging them as the traditional custodians of knowledge for these lands.*

## **4. Other cultural practices to consider**

The observation of cultural protocols play a significant role in Aboriginal life, and it is important to be mindful these cultural practices can differ from community to community, and may be different for men and women.<sup>5</sup> An example is the nature of sorry business.

When organising an event, it is useful to contact Jumbunna Institute for Indigenous Education and Research to clarify any issues relating to cultural practice.

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<sup>5</sup> The Law Society of New South Wales 'Protocol for Welcome to and Acknowledgement of Country' available at <https://www.lawsociety.com.au/cs/groups/public/documents/internetcontent/680910.pdf>

## **5. Arranging a Welcome or Acknowledgement to Country**

Jumbunna's Elder in Residence is able to perform an Acknowledgment of Country on behalf of UTS. The role can also provide guidance with engaging an appropriate local Aboriginal Elder to deliver a Welcome to Country.

## **6. Intellectual property and fees for service**

In providing cultural services such as Welcome to Country, artistic performances and ceremonies, Aboriginal people are using their intellectual property. Appropriate remuneration should be discussed and arranged prior to the event.

## **7. Roles & responsibilities**

The University acknowledges this is a shared responsibility of all staff and students. Jumbunna Institute for Indigenous Education and Research is available to assist with cultural guidance and protocol. Jumbunna IHL will establish and maintain a register of expressions of interest from local Elders and cultural groups who wish to be connected with the University for the purposes of conducting a Welcome to Country. The register will also serve as a record of who has been engaged in various events throughout each year.

## **8. Contacts**

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