

Governance and accountability in action: Creating a roadmap for all to follow

THE IMPORTANCE OF GOVERNANCE AND ACCOUNTABILITY IN RECONCILIATION EFFORTS

In the ongoing journey towards reconciliation at The University of Queensland (UQ), the principles of governance and accountability serve as guiding lights along pathways to meaningful change and lasting impact. Integral to finding these pathways, is the Reconciliation Action Plan (RAP) Working Group, a beacon of exemplary governance and accountability in action.

With a steadfast dedication to driving change, the RAP Working Group embodies the essence of responsible leadership and collective action. However, the significance lies not only in the commitment itself but also in the methodologies employed to enact meaningful transformation. It is in the meticulous navigation of governance structures and the unwavering adherence to principles of accountability that the true essence of reconciliation is realised.

ORIGINS AND OBJECTIVES

Established in 2017 by the Office of the Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Indigenous Engagement) under the oversight of the UQ RAP Oversight Committee, the RAP Working Group at UQ emerged with a clear mission; to guide the development, implementation, and monitoring of the university's Stretch RAP. As a testament to UQ's commitment to reconciliation, this plan aims to promote respect, equality, and opportunities for Indigenous Australians within the university community and beyond.

The journey of the RAP Working Group embodies a consultative process characterised by extensive discussions and negotiations among a diverse group of stakeholders.

As Co-Chair of the RAP Working Group Oversight Committee and UQ Professor of Indigenous Education, Professor Tracey Bunda highlighted, "There's an opportunity in the consultation to be innovative, to be creative, and when you do have consultation, then everybody has a sense of ownership."

Creating this sense of ownership and ability to be innovative empowers RAP Working Group members to better recognise the complexity of the issues addressed within the RAP and enables the group to translate its objectives into tangible outcomes, making reconciliation a lived reality for the entire university.

Central to the group's approach is creating a shared safe space where Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples from across the university can come together to foster dialogue, better understand each other, and create ways for people to build their own bridges.

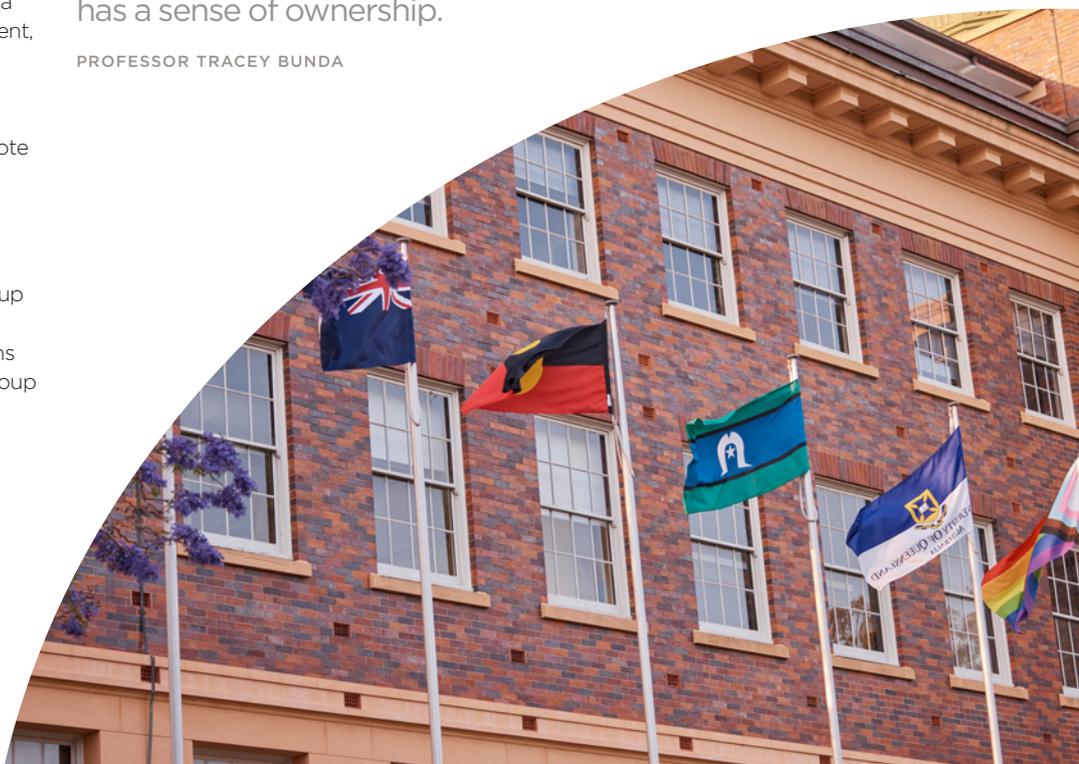
This collaborative environment relies on trust and the willingness of members to embrace different perspectives, recognising that diversity is key to meaningful progress.

RAP Working Group Member and Director of Global and Institutional Philanthropy for UQ Advancement and Community Engagement, Tara Turner emphasised the importance of aligning actions with the priorities and goals of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. Tara highlighted the collective responsibility of the RAP Working Group and broader UQ community to identify impactful ways of advancing reconciliation.

Ms Turner said, "The working group sets up the map, based on what the university is trying to achieve, and based on what is most meaningful for Aboriginal and Torres Strait peoples. It is our responsibility as members of the UQ community to find out and identify how we can have the most impact in accordance with those outlined priorities and goals."

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PROFESSOR TRACEY BUNDA



Professor Bunda also makes clear that reconciliation efforts should not be confined to a specific division but should permeate all aspects of university operations. This inclusive approach ensures that reconciliation becomes a shared responsibility and commitment across the institution.

However, Professor Bunda points out that achieving harmony between diverse perspectives while maintaining momentum in reconciliation action presents a significant challenge for the RAP Oversight Committee and Working Group. Professor Bunda acknowledges the need for sustained effort and that implanting reconciliation efforts deeply across the university takes time.

“When you are talking about key ideas that really need to be embedded, really need to be a part of the sinew DNA of the university, it is going to take a long time to be able to achieve it and some of them will never be completed because they’re constantly being renewed, and rightly so,” Professor Bunda said.

RAP Working Group Member and Director of UQ Research Ethics and Integrity, Dr. Marc Kamke echoes this sentiment, emphasising the importance of setting achievable goals while maintaining ambition. Dr. Kamke notes that sustainable change often unfolds incrementally, requiring patience and strategic prioritisation.

In essence, the origins and objectives of the RAP Working Group at UQ reflect a commitment to inclusive governance, accountability, and sustainable progress in advancing reconciliation. Despite the challenges inherent in this journey, members of the group remain steadfast in their dedication to fostering a more equitable and respectful university community.

GOVERNANCE FRAMEWORK AND ACCOUNTABILITY MECHANISMS

Governance and accountability are foundational pillars in shaping the roadmap for reconciliation within UQ. The RAP Working Group operates within a robust governance framework, ensuring transparency, inclusivity, and adherence to established processes. This framework is essential for guiding the development, implementation, and monitoring of the university’s RAP document, emphasising the importance of diverse perspectives and collaborative decision-making.

From a governance perspective, the RAP Working Group serves as a catalyst for action, creating a map and guidelines to navigate the journey towards reconciliation. Tara Turner emphasised that diversity is key in governance, ensuring that Indigenous-led perspectives are central to the process. The Working Group brings together Indigenous and non-Indigenous voices to identify meaningful actions and pathways for progress.

Accountability mechanisms play a crucial role in ensuring that reconciliation efforts translate into tangible outcomes. The RAP Working Group regularly reports back on its progress towards meeting the goals outlined in the RAP. These progress reports provide transparency and accountability to university leadership and stakeholders, fostering trust and engagement.

Performance metrics are established to measure the effectiveness of reconciliation initiatives and track progress over time. These metrics align with the objectives outlined in the RAP, providing a clear framework for evaluating success and identifying areas for improvement.

Stakeholder engagement is a cornerstone of the accountability process, ensuring that Indigenous voices are heard and valued. The RAP Working Group actively solicits feedback from Indigenous stakeholders, including staff, students, and community members, to inform decision-making and ensure alignment with community priorities.

External review mechanisms further enhance accountability by providing independent assessment and recommendations for improvement. Periodic external reviews assess the Working Group’s performance and adherence to governance principles, helping to strengthen accountability and effectiveness.

In summary, the governance framework and accountability mechanisms established by the RAP Working Group serve as essential tools for advancing reconciliation. By prioritising transparency, inclusivity, and stakeholder engagement, the RAP Working Group ensures that reconciliation efforts are grounded in shared values and meaningful action. Through ongoing evaluation and collaboration, the RAP Working Group continues to make significant strides towards building a more inclusive and respectful university community.

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PROFESSOR TRACEY BUNDA

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PROFESSOR NICK SHAW

KEY ACHIEVEMENTS

The RAP Working Group has made significant strides in advancing reconciliation through its commitment to tangible actions and meaningful outcomes. These achievements reflect the group's dedication to promoting Indigenous engagement, cultural respect, and educational opportunities within the university community.

Foundational to the RAP Working Group's success is primarily the development of a comprehensive RAP that is easily accessible and digested across the broader community. This plan outlines actionable steps to address key priorities and goals. By providing a clear framework for action, the RAP guides the implementation of initiatives aimed at fostering positive change.

One of the notable achievements of the RAP Working Group is the implementation of various initiatives to support Indigenous students and communities. These initiatives include the establishment of Indigenous scholarships, cultural awareness training for staff and students, and partnerships with Indigenous communities. These efforts demonstrate the group's commitment to creating a supportive and inclusive environment for Indigenous peoples at UQ.

Furthermore, the RAP Working Group has played a crucial role in increasing the representation of Indigenous voices in decision-making processes and university governance structures. By ensuring that Indigenous perspectives are heard and valued, the group has helped to amplify Indigenous voices within the university community.

One of the most significant impacts of the RAP Working Group's efforts has been the improvement of educational outcomes for Indigenous students. Through targeted support programs and initiatives, such as mentoring programs and academic support services, the group has helped to address barriers to success and promote academic achievement among Indigenous students.

Professor Bunda emphasised the importance of the consultative process in exposing gaps and identifying areas for improvement. By engaging in meaningful dialogue with Indigenous stakeholders and community members, the RAP Working Group has been able to identify key challenges and develop strategies to address them effectively.

The key achievements of the RAP Working Group underscore its commitment to advancing reconciliation, and promoting positive change within the university community. Through the development and implementation of the RAP, the group has made considerable progress in promoting Indigenous engagement, cultural respect, and educational opportunities at UQ. Moving forward, continued collaboration and dedication will be essential to building on these achievements and fostering a more inclusive and equitable university environment.

SUSTAINING PROGRESS THROUGH CONTINUED GOVERNANCE AND ACCOUNTABILITY

The RAP Working Group at UQ has demonstrated an unwavering commitment to advancing reconciliation through its governance structures and accountability mechanisms. By embracing principles of inclusivity, transparency, and collaboration, the group has achieved significant milestones in promoting Indigenous engagement, respect, and equality within the university community.

The consultative process adopted by the RAP Working Group has been instrumental in fostering innovation and creativity, allowing all stakeholders to have a sense of ownership over the reconciliation efforts. This approach has enabled the group to conceptualise and implement innovative strategies that build upon previous successes and address emerging challenges as a collective. Tara Turner explained that developing a successful RAP relies on individuals bringing their unique experiences together to create a collective roadmap toward reconciliation.

"Regardless of where you're from, and who you are, we each have unique and individual experiences, and yet, we're all connected," Ms Turner said.

Moreover, the recognition and support of non-Indigenous leadership within the university have created a safe space for Indigenous voices to be heard and valued. This acknowledgment of Indigenous perspectives is crucial for sustaining progress and fostering a culture of respect and inclusivity.

As we look toward the future, it is imperative that we continue to not only work collaboratively but also remain accountable for our actions. Recognising the reality of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander experiences and acknowledging their contributions to society are essential steps in the journey towards reconciliation. As Professor Nick Shaw pointed out, cultivating cultural humility, and embracing our commonalities are necessary for achieving equity and fostering a sense of interconnectedness among all members of the community.

He said, "We are a heterogenous society, we can't afford to ignore portions of it just because it's convenient or fits with the picture of our inner selves."

In conclusion, the RAP Working Group's efforts exemplify the transformative power of governance and accountability in advancing reconciliation. By remaining committed to our shared goals and values, we can create a more inclusive and equitable society for current and future generations.