

Building Regional Student Awareness, Aspiration and Engagement Using Digital Technologies

November 2016 to December 2017

Lara Rafferty

The project that resulted in the production of this report was funded under a National Priorities Pool (Higher Education Participation and Partnerships Program) grant from the Commonwealth. The recipient of the grant has granted the Commonwealth the right to sub-licence the material in this report. Copyright in the report remains with the original copyright owners.

Except where otherwise indicated, and save for any material protected by a trade mark, the Department of Education and Training, acting on behalf of the Commonwealth, has applied the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International Licence.



Modifications: Changed to meet WCAG 2.0 accessibility requirements.
Alternate text inserted for all images. Minor typographical errors corrected.

Higher Education Participation and Partnerships Programme (HEPPP)

2016 National Priorities Pool FINAL REPORT

Building Regional Student Awareness, Aspiration and Engagement Using Digital Technologies

November 2016 to December 2017

Name of university	Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology (RMIT)
Name of contact officer	Lara Rafferty
Position title	Manager, Equity and Diversity Unit
Email address	lara.rafferty@rmit.edu.au
Telephone number	(03) 9925 2006

In accordance with the Conditions of Grant, you must submit to the Department a Final Report (Clause 6.1 of Part A) and an Acquittal Report (clause 6.4 of Part A).

To meet this obligation, please submit:

- the completed **Final Report** template, in Word and PDF
- the completed and signed **Declaration** form, in PDF
- the completed **Acquittal Report** template, in Excel and PDF.

All documents must be submitted to equity@education.gov.au by **31 December 2017**. If you require additional guidance or clarification, please contact us at equity@education.gov.au.

Contents

List of Tables	3
1. PROJECT SUMMARY (Conditions of Grant, clause 2.2 of Part A)	4
Objectives	4
Project Activities, Milestones and Key Performance Indicators.....	4
Highlights and Issues	9
2. OTHER PROJECT MATERIAL (Conditions of Grant, clause 2.2 of Part A)	12
3. ACQUITTAL REPORT (Conditions of Grant, clause 6.4 (a)-(d), clause 6.5	
(a)-(b) of Part A)	13
Appendix i) – Evaluation Comments from Students and Teachers Involved	
in the Project.....	13
DECLARATION	15

List of Tables

Table 1: Project objectives	4
Table 2: Project activities, milestones and KPIs	5
Table 3: Additional materials produced over the course of the project	12

1. PROJECT SUMMARY (Conditions of Grant, clause 2.2 of Part A)

Objectives

Indicate the extent to which the Project Objectives specified in clause 3 of Part A of the Conditions of Grant were met. Where obligations established in the Conditions of Grant were not met, please identify these and provide an explanation of circumstances and consequences.

Table 1: Project objectives

IDENTIFIED OBJECTIVE	EXTENT TO WHICH THE OBJECTIVE WAS MET
Build regional secondary students' awareness, aspiration and preparedness for higher education through innovative digital methods of engagement	Various modes of delivery were offered to engage students with relevant content: videoconferences with schools both in and out of class time; creation of a website with videos, quizzes and teacher resources; and hosting of webchat for secondary students with current university students that explored both discipline-specific information and study and transition skills.
Improve access to undergraduate courses for regional students from low socio-economic status (SES) backgrounds by addressing the common barriers to tertiary education experienced by regional students	Commonly identified barriers to tertiary education participation were addressed such as awareness of the opportunities associated with higher education, academic achievement, and costs related to transport, relocation and housing. This was done through the use of personal experiences of current university students as well as other videos providing information (ie. how to apply for scholarships).

Project Activities, Milestones and Key Performance Indicators

Below, please specify whether:

- *all project Activities specified in Schedule 1 of the Conditions of Grant were completed*
- *all Project Milestones specified in Schedule 1 of the Conditions of Grant were completed*
- *all Key Performance Indicators specified in Schedule 1 of the Conditions of Grant were met.*

Where obligations established in the Conditions of Grant were not met, identify these and provide an explanation of circumstances and consequences.

Table 2: Project activities, milestones and KPIs

TIME FRAME	MILESTONES AND ACTIVITIES	KEY PERFORMANCE INDICATORS	OUTCOMES
Nov 2016	1.1 Project Manager.	1.1 A Project Manager with the knowledge, skills and experience to successfully deliver the Project is appointed.	The project was managed by RMIT staff from November to February 2017, when the Project manager was appointed through a competitive external recruitment process.
Nov 2016 – Feb 2017	2.1 Project timeline and logistics.	2.1 Project timeline and logistics are finalised.	Project plan was completed in Jan 2017 ready for commencement of Project Manager in Feb 2017
Nov 2016 – Mar 2017	3.1 Consultation to support development of an engagement program that increases regional participation in awareness and aspiration-building activities as well as increased participation across regional low SES schools in the RMIT partnership. Participants are: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • RMIT partner organisations; • target secondary schools; and • current RMIT students. 	3.1 Feedback from consultations delivers increased understanding of: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • challenges associated with digital delivery; • perceptions and expectations of tertiary study from prospective tertiary students; and • first-year experience of current tertiary students to support the development of engagement program content. 	Consultation started in Feb 2017 with key RMIT stakeholders, with secondary school visits completed in term 2 2017. Consultation with schools careers advisors and other staff affirmed the most common challenges faced by secondary students and informed the most relevant program content and delivery modes.
Jan 2017 – Apr 2017	4.1 Engagement program content development	4.1 Engagement program content suitable for delivery to students at target schools developed, including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • approximately 10 x interactive workshops (on three topics); • 4 x virtual RMIT campus tours • facility for live Q&A sessions with RMIT students; and • associated materials (including videos, booklets and guides). 	10 interactive workshops were delivered in term 3 2017 with 5 different schools on 5 different topics. 6 campus tour videos were produced by current university students. They addressed the common barriers listed in the project objectives. All associated materials such as quizzes, information sheets, teacher resources were included on the website.
Feb 2017 – Apr 2017	5.1 Recruitment of RMIT students	5.1 Approximately 20 students are recruited to assist with engagement program development and delivery.	21 students were recruited to produce the campus tour videos. 7 current students who work within the RMIT low SES equity outreach program / <i>Belong</i> were also involved in the project through content delivery.

TIME FRAME	MILESTONES AND ACTIVITIES	KEY PERFORMANCE INDICATORS	OUTCOMES
Feb 2017 – Jun 2017	6.1 Marketing and complementary project pieces including videos and digital publications.	6.1 Materials are ready for delivery and/or uploading to RMIT website.	Videos, worksheets, online quizzes were uploaded to the website over the course of the year with final content being added in December 2017.
Apr 2017 – May 2017	7.1 Evaluation framework	7.1 An evaluation framework that will allow a determination to be made of whether or not the engagement program has achieved its outcomes is devised, including surveys which target participants and key stakeholders	<p>Specialist advice from academic staff with expertise in equity program evaluation confirmed that a much longer project term would be needed to measure aspirational change in secondary students.</p> <p>The evaluation therefore focussed on the suitability of the delivered content and the best delivery method. It was also decided that an evaluation video would best highlight the various modes of delivery of the project content.</p> <p>The evaluation methodology for content suitability was in place prior to delivery of content to schools in term 2 2017.</p>
	8.1 Production of films and photographs for the engagement program.	<p>8.1 Engagement program content suitable for delivery to students at target schools developed, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • three films for inclusion in the interactive workshops; and • photographs for use in websites and other digital publications. 	<p>Suitable content was developed as a result of earlier consultation with schools.</p> <p>9 interactive videos were created for use in the website sites.rmit.edu.au/reachfurther/</p> <p>These were released to the website throughout the year and all 9 were published in the website by December 2017.</p> <p>Photographs were taken from video stills and used in the digital marketing campaign.</p>
Jun 2017 – Jul 2017	9.1 Engagement program content finalised.	9.1 Engagement program content is finalised and suitable for delivery to students at target schools.	<p>The engagement program was rolled out in instalments. The videoconferences took place in term 3 2017 (Aug/Sept/Oct).</p> <p>The website was completed in Nov 17. The final package of content was delivered via email campaign to 240 Low SES schools in Victoria.</p>
	10.1 Engagement program marketing.	<p>10.1.1 Engagement program marketed to 9 target schools in Gippsland and Shepparton.</p> <p>10.1.2 Twelve schools commit to the Engagement program pilot (this may include other regional schools</p>	<p>The program was marketed to 6 schools from the Gippsland region (Bairnsdale SC, Orbost HS, Swifts Creek P-12, Kurani P-12, Cann River P-12 and Lakes Entrance HS) and 4 schools from the Shepparton region (Mooroopna SC, McGuire SC, Shepparton HS and Wanganui Park SC). All schools participated in the project in some form either via video conferences, studio learning or use of content on website.</p>

TIME FRAME	MILESTONES AND ACTIVITIES	KEY PERFORMANCE INDICATORS	OUTCOMES
		from beyond these regions).	3 schools from the Mildura region also participated in videoconferences and studio learning (Swan Hill SC, Robinvale HS and Kerang Technical HS)
Jul 2017 – Oct 2017	11.1 Engagement program piloted. 11.1.2 At least 400 secondary school students participate in the Engagement program pilot.	11.1.1 Engagement program pilot takes place with the participating schools. 11.1.3 80 per cent of student participants complete evaluation surveys to assess change in their awareness and aspiration.	Across all forms of delivery 448 students have participated: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 117 students participated in videoconferences • 186 users created 1,791 page views of the website over 305 sessions • 20 students participated in studio learning
Jul 2017 – Nov 2017	12.1 Review and refinement of Engagement program.	12.1 Engagement program is reviewed and refined as required to improve content and usability.	The project was refined as it developed in conjunction with feedback from schools and secondary students as well as internal RMIT stakeholders.
Oct 2017 – Nov 2017	13.1 Analysis of engagement program pilot evaluation.	13.1.1 All evaluations collated. 13.1.2 Content of evaluations is analysed. 13.1.3 Analysis of evaluations completed by students and teachers demonstrates: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • increased awareness of and aspiration towards higher education among students who participated in the program pilot; and • digital delivery is an effective delivery mode for outreach activities targeting low SES students in regional areas. 	<p>Evaluation surveys were sent out to 14 targeted schools once the website was finalised. There was also the opportunity for any website viewer to provide feedback through the website.</p> <p>In early consultations and throughout the implementation of the project, schools demonstrated great interest in the opportunities made possible by the project's digital mode of delivery. Schools that cannot participate in on-campus visits indicated the need for content that will help secondary students understand and see themselves as part of a tertiary institution and that a tertiary qualification is achievable for them.</p> <p>Teachers were surveyed as to the effectiveness of the project resources in meeting their aims and they found that the website met their needs. One teacher stated that, 'Sustainability is a curriculum strand in Years 7 – 10 so this video fits in very well' and another that the 'resources that were offered were generally pitched at the right level'.</p> <p>The project was effective in increasing aspirations with one teacher reporting, 'For those students who have university aspirations I think this had a positive effect on them'. Overall the project</p>

TIME FRAME	MILESTONES AND ACTIVITIES	KEY PERFORMANCE INDICATORS	OUTCOMES
			<p>resources were seen as useful and digital delivery was an effective mode of outreach for regional students. One teacher stated that, 'We appreciate the support given by RMIT in helping regional and rural students understand university life and that anything is possible.'</p> <p>There was also great enthusiasm for this project from RMIT staff. For some areas it is part of their remit – to engage secondary students in university activities e.g. careers. For others it is out of interest and wanting involvement in engaging secondary students (their future cohorts).</p>
Nov 2017	14.1 Report on engagement program outcomes and recommendations.	<p>14.1.1 Report is completed.</p> <p>14.1.2 Report is circulated internally to facilitate planning for 2018 implementation of activities.</p>	<p>Evaluation surveys were sent out to 14 targeted schools once the website was finalised. There was also the opportunity for any website viewer to provide feedback through the website.</p> <p>In early consultations and throughout the implementation of the project, schools demonstrated great interest in the opportunities made possible by the project's digital mode of delivery. Schools that cannot participate in on-campus visits indicated the need for content that will help secondary students understand and see themselves as part of a tertiary institution and that a tertiary qualification is achievable for them.</p> <p>Teachers were surveyed as to the effectiveness of the project resources in meeting their aims and they found that the website met their needs. One teacher stated that, 'Sustainability is a curriculum strand in Years 7 – 10 so this video fits in very well' and another that the 'resources that were offered were generally pitched at the right level'.</p> <p>The project was effective in increasing aspirations with one teacher reporting, 'For those students who have university aspirations I think this had a positive effect on them'. Overall the project resources were seen as useful and digital delivery was an effective mode of outreach for regional students. One teacher stated that, 'We appreciate the support given by RMIT in helping regional</p>

TIME FRAME	MILESTONES AND ACTIVITIES	KEY PERFORMANCE INDICATORS	OUTCOMES
			<p>and rural students understand university life and that anything is possible.’</p> <p>There was also great enthusiasm for this project from RMIT staff. For some areas it is part of their remit – to engage secondary students in university activities e.g. careers. For others it is out of interest and wanting involvement in engaging secondary students (their future cohorts).</p> <p>All internal stakeholders received an update on the project. Internal report completed to aid in planning for 2018. Many schools are already planning how they can incorporate project resources into 2018 teaching with one school projecting use for 2018 as yr 10- 70 students, Yr 11 – 100 students and Yr 12 80 students (total of 250 students). The digital outreach project will also be incorporated in to <i>I Belong</i> delivery in 2018 as relevant.</p>
Nov 2017 – Dec 2017	15.1 Final Report and Acquittal Report.	15.1 Final Report and Acquittal Report submitted to the Department of Education and Training by 31 December	Extension provided by government due to extra time required for financial reporting; the final report will be submitted by 16 Feb 2018.

Highlights and Issues

Provide a summary of highlights and achievements arising from your project (maximum half page).

Highlights

The project has helped regional and rural students understand more about university life and realise anything is possible. The project was developed in conjunction with secondary schools through meetings and these face to face meetings helped to shape the content and ensure it was meeting the needs and challenges of the community.

One particular highlight is the ‘Studio Learning’ project that was trialled during the project. The Studio Learning model is designed to give students a typical university learning experience. This model has been developed by an RMIT lecturer in interactive gaming and animation who is studying for a PhD in ‘Online learning and community of practice’.

The project also generated a variety of well received digital artefacts that were delivered via a range of modes. A particular strength of the project was that RMIT students who were from similar backgrounds, or who understand the issues facing regional secondary students,

produced a high proportion of the digital assets ensuring the content was particularly relevant to the students

The support and enthusiasm for the project from staff at RMIT was fantastic. They were particularly enthusiastic about reaching out to regional students to help ease any reservations they might have about tertiary education and how to negotiate the pathways and issues involved.

See appendix i) for further comments from schools and students.

Challenges included secondary teachers finding time for this work within an already crowded curriculum. If academic and school projects such as this could be shared through education portals then their success would be greater.

Access to the internet is also different in different schools, which therefore creates inconsistency around the use of social media and YouTube in schools. Some schools embrace these channels and others ban them. For this reason this project did not utilise social media which could have been a useful tool to disseminate the project resources.

Did the project lead to implementable outcomes? What changes will result at your institution/nationally? How is research being translated into practice? Are there activities resulting from this project that will be continued?

The website is a lasting legacy of the project and will continue to be promoted to schools in regional Victoria, to other university colleagues, and to community organisations and networks. The project had a number of implementable outcomes including videoconferences, webchat, website, and studio learning.

This project has allowed us to address the inequity of access to higher education among regional communities, and highlighted the need to incorporate, wherever possible, the needs of those who live too far to travel to a metropolitan campus to ensure they have breadth of opportunities available to them.

Students and teachers were enthusiastically positive about the breadth of material provided through the project. The content really spoke to the need of the students and their communities and provided this information in an authentic voice. A teacher from Kerang Technical High School commented that 'our students certainly have, and will next year, benefit from the programs and resources provided.' A student from Kerang Technical High School commented that hearing the stories of other students made him feel 'a lot less nervous about going to university'.

Did you undertake an evaluation of your project?

Yes No

Please summarise the findings and attach the evaluation report.

Due to the short duration of this project the main focus of evaluation in the pilot year was assessing the usefulness of the content developed and the preferred modes of delivery among secondary school students/teachers.

A framework for future evaluation that will measure the impact of the project on the change in tertiary aspirations of students was developed in conjunction with the National Centre for Student Equity in Higher Education and an external consultant.

There is also the evaluation video that demonstrates the modes of delivery and summarises the pilot project with incorporated school/student feedback. The video sits on the homepage of the website <https://sites.rmit.edu.au/reachfurther/>

Where applicable, indicate number of the following resulting from this project:

Student contacts	448
Journal (or other publication) submissions	N/A
Conference Presentations	1
Websites developed	1 https://sites.rmit.edu.au/reachfurther/
Educational or marketing campaigns	1
Community organisations engaged	N/A
Schools engaged	14 schools targeted and website marketed to 240 schools via email campaign
Parental/family contacts	N/A

Describe any issues that occurred during the year and any mitigation strategies you implemented.

A major factor that has contributed to the success of the project has been secondary school's access to technology and their ability to use it. Having technological support in regional schools can be difficult – schools reported their difficulties in finding people with the relevant skills and retaining them in the roles. There are also restrictions on school student access to social media platforms, including ones that they are familiar with and have high use outside school, which restricts the type of technology that can be used to communicate with students successfully.

2. OTHER PROJECT MATERIAL (Conditions of Grant, clause 2.2 of Part A)

List the titles of any published reports, pamphlets or other documentation produced in the course of the Project and attach them to this Final Report.

Table 3: Additional materials produced over the course of the project

TYPE	AUTHOR	DATE OF PUBLICATION	PUBLICATION DETAILS
Conference presentation	Vicki Smith/Imelda Cooney	Nov 17	EPHEA conference
Transition video	RMIT Media students	Nov 17	Reach Further website https://sites.rmit.edu.au/reachfurther
Michael's journey from country to city video	RMIT Media students	Nov 17	Reach Further website https://sites.rmit.edu.au/reachfurther
Growth Mindset video	Xmachine Productions	Nov 17	Reach Further website https://sites.rmit.edu.au/reachfurther
Applying for Scholarships video	Xmachine productions	Nov 17	Reach Further website https://sites.rmit.edu.au/reachfurther
What if you don't get the ATAR you need? video	RMIT Media students	Nov 17	Reach Further website https://sites.rmit.edu.au/reachfurther
Finding connection and community video	Xmachine productions	Nov 17	Reach Further website https://sites.rmit.edu.au/reachfurther
The stresses when applying to uni video	RMIT Media students	Nov 17	Reach Further website https://sites.rmit.edu.au/reachfurther
Rushmore video	RMIT Media students	Nov 17	Reach Further website https://sites.rmit.edu.au/reachfurther
Indigenous support video	Xmachine	Nov 17	Reach Further website https://sites.rmit.edu.au/reachfurther
Connecting to country video	Xmachine productions	Nov 17	Reach Further website https://sites.rmit.edu.au/reachfurther
Moving from the country video	RMIT Media students	Nov 17	Reach Further website https://sites.rmit.edu.au/reachfurther
Colour and light video	Xmachine productions	Nov 17	Reach Further website https://sites.rmit.edu.au/reachfurther
Students Helping Students video	Xmachine	Nov 17	Reach Further website https://sites.rmit.edu.au/reachfurther
Creative thinking video	Xmachine productions	Nov 17	Reach Further website https://sites.rmit.edu.au/reachfurther
Sustainability video	RMIT Media students	Nov 17	Reach Further website https://sites.rmit.edu.au/reachfurther
Strategies to improve memory video	Xmachine productions	Nov 17	Reach Further website https://sites.rmit.edu.au/reachfurther
Problem Solving video	Xmachine productions	Nov 17	Reach Further website https://sites.rmit.edu.au/reachfurther

3. ACQUITTAL REPORT (Conditions of Grant, clause 6.4 (a)-(d), clause 6.5 (a)-(b) of Part A)

Have you fully expended the Grant Funds provided under the Conditions of Grant?

Yes No

If the answer is No, please specify:

- the amount of funds remaining: \$
- the reason for this underspend:

Ensure that the completed Acquittal Report template is signed by an appropriate university officer and attached to this Final Report.

**IMPORTANT NOTICE - Unspent 2016 National Priorities Pool Grant Funds*

- Grant recipients must fully expend these 2016 National Priorities Pool funds in the project period for which the grant is made and report on this expenditure to the Commonwealth, including the amount of any unspent funds.
- If a provider fails to spend the full amount granted it in respect of a year, the unspent funds may be recovered by the Commonwealth.

Appendix i) – Evaluation Comments from Students and Teachers Involved in the Project

‘Our students certainly have, and will next year, benefit from the programs and resources provided.’

Teacher – Kerang Technical High School

‘I watched a few of the videos and thought they were interesting. I will definitely watch them all next year when I am well into my VCE year. The website seems it will be quite relevant to my position.’

Student - Cann River P-12 College

‘We appreciate the support given by RMIT it helping regional and rural students understand and university life and that anything is possible.’

Teacher - Shepparton High School

‘There’s a need for the resources offered [in the website]’

Teacher – Kerang Technical High School

‘It made me feel more comfortable hearing someone else’s story and made me feel more confident about [the idea of] living by myself.’

Student – Kerang High School

‘In high school the learning will be very different from how you learn in university ... so being able to give an opportunity to regional students to experience that more open ... [style of] learning is really valuable and being able to do that

virtually is really important ...[and] hopefully going to inspire some students to consider this mode of learning and understand the difference between being in high school and being at university.'

Lecturer – RMIT

DECLARATION

I declare that:

- I am authorised by the university to sign this Declaration on its behalf, and to the best of my knowledge, the information that I have provided in the **Final Report** and **Acquittal Report** for the HEPPP 2016 National Priorities Pool project: *Building Regional Student Awareness, Aspiration and Engagement Using Digital Technologies* is true, correct and accurate in all particulars.

I understand that:

- The provision of false or misleading information or the making of false or misleading statements to the Commonwealth is a serious offence under the *Criminal Code Act 1995 (Cth)*.
- If any actual or potential conflict of interest arises, I must notify the Commonwealth immediately in writing of the facts giving rise to the actual or potential conflict of interest and to take such steps as the Commonwealth may require so as to resolve or otherwise deal with any conflict of interest that may arise.

I agree to publication of the Final Report on the Department of Education and Training website, once accepted by the department.

Title Mr
Name Martin Bean CBE
Position Vice-Chancellor and President
Signature