

Guidelines for Welcome to Country and Acknowledgement of Country



Welcome to Country and Acknowledgement of Country are protocols used in Australia at the opening of meetings, launches, special events and official functions. The practice shows respect for the traditional custodians of the region or area.

1. The University of Canberra's Reconciliation Action Plan 2013-2017 identifies opportunities to advance reconciliation as part of the University's core teaching and research activities through meaningful relationships with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and communities that is founded on respect for their cultures, knowledge and beliefs. The University also recognises that the Reconciliation Action Plan is a strategy that is owned by everyone in the University.
2. The University of Canberra acknowledges the Ngunnawal peoples as the traditional custodians of the land upon which the University's main campus sits and believes that it is important that staff and students recognise the importance of observing and recognising the Ngunnawal peoples as the traditional custodians of this land at events being held at the University.
3. By observing these protocols staff and students demonstrate respect for the Ngunnawal peoples and their continuing connection to the land and their culture, as well as recognising other Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples at the University, both students and staff.

Purpose

4. This document provides information on the appropriate ways to recognise and acknowledge Ngunnawal peoples in a consistent and meaningful way in all university business and events. There are various ways to recognise Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, in particular the Ngunnawal peoples:
 - a. Welcome to Country
 - b. Acknowledgement of Country
 - c. Smoking Ceremonies

Welcome to Country

5. A Welcome to Country is an official welcome by a senior Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander custodian or elder to their lands and is a way that the University can show respect for the Ngunnawal peoples. This may be done through speech, song, dance or ceremony.
6. Despite the absence of fences or visible borders, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander groups had clear boundaries separating their Country from that of other groups. Crossing into another group's Country required a request for permission to enter—like gaining a visa—and when that permission was granted the hosting group would welcome the visitors, offering them safe passage.

7. A Welcome to Country should be performed at all major University events where there is a significant public presence or where dignitaries are present. Examples of when a Welcome to Country is observed include:
 - opening of new buildings;
 - opening of significant events such as the launch of the University of Canberra – Collaborative Indigenous Research Initiative;
 - graduation ceremonies; and
 - high profile public lectures.
8. A Welcome to Country is always given by a Ngunnawal Elder who is recognised as such by the local community as a traditional custodian of the Ngunnawal land.

Arranging a Welcome to Country

9. The University of Canberra recognises the important role of the United Ngunnawal Elders Council (UNEC) and is committed to an ongoing relationship with the Council through their representation on the University's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Advisory Group.
10. Information about engaging Ngunnawal Elders can be found on the ACT Government website:
http://www.communityservices.act.gov.au/atsia/welcome_to_country/how_to_organise_a_welcome_to_country

Payment of fees

11. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander knowledge is complex, specialised and owned by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. Elders who give a Welcome to Country should be compensated for their expertise and time.

Acknowledgement of Country

12. An 'Acknowledgement of Country' is a demonstration of respect and appreciation of the Ngunnawal peoples' protocols and traditions by the University of Canberra. It can be performed by any person and is a respectful acknowledgement of the Ngunnawal peoples as the traditional custodians of the land on which the main campus of the University is situated. Unlike a Welcome to Country, it can be performed by a non-Indigenous person.
13. Events where it is appropriate for an Acknowledgement of Country to be given include:
 - significant meetings such as University Council, Academic Board, University Education Committee, University Research Committee, Faculty Boards and Senior Management Group;
 - at the commencement of the first lecture of any given teaching period;
 - significant orientation events;
 - graduation ceremonies;
 - significant student events; and
 - any meetings within the University at the discretion of the meeting convener.
14. Acknowledgement of Country would normally be captured in the minutes of such meetings.

Examples of Acknowledgement of Country

- a. *I would like to acknowledge the Ngunnawal people who are the traditional custodians of this land on which we are meeting and pay respect to the Elders of the Ngunnawal Nation both past and present. I extend this respect to all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in attendance today.*
- b. *Before we begin the proceedings, I would like to acknowledge and pay respect to the traditional owners of the land on which we meet – the Ngunnawal Peoples. It is upon their ancestral lands that the University of Canberra is built.*

As we share our own knowledge, teaching, learning, and research practices within this University may we also pay respect to the knowledge and traditions of the Ngunnawal peoples.

- c. *The University of Canberra is situated over a number of different locations however I would like to acknowledge the Ngunnawal peoples as the traditional custodians of the land on which the main campus is situated. I would also like to pay my respect to the Ngunnawal elders of that land both past and present and to their continuing relation to their ancestral lands. I would also like to acknowledge the [insert name of local Aboriginal people] on whose land that we are meeting today and pay my respect to their Elders both past and present.*

Smoking ceremonies

Smoking ceremonies have traditionally been used to cleanse a space. Within the university environment they should only be performed by a person who has been granted the authority to do so by the Ngunnawal peoples. It is advised that the most appropriate group to grant permission for someone to perform this ceremony is the United Ngunnawal Elders Council (UNEC).

The Ngunnawal Centre

16. The Ngunnawal Centre is available to provide advice and assistance at all times. However, in the interests of developing relationships with the local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community and establishing connections with UNEC, staff are encouraged to liaise directly with UNEC when organising a Ngunnawal Elder to perform a Welcome to Country or participate in a University occasion.