

## Welcome to Country and Acknowledgement of Country Policy

<b>Approving authority</b>	Deputy Vice Chancellor (Engagement)
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<b>Description</b>	This policy provides guidance concerning the use of a 'Welcome to Country' by traditional custodians and an 'Acknowledgement of Traditional Ownership' and when these are to be conducted at certain Griffith University events, ceremonies, meetings, and functions.

### Related documents

[Griffith University Statement on Reconciliation](#)

[\[Introduction\]](#) [\[Welcome to Country\]](#) [\[Response to Welcome to Country\]](#) [\[Acknowledgement of Country\]](#)

## 1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 Griffith University identifies Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people as Australia's First Peoples and Traditional Custodians of the land.
- 1.2 The University endeavours to be a place where Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and other Australians work together in positive partnership to develop a community that acknowledges the wisdom and cultural heritage of the descendants of the First Peoples of Australia. These values are outlined in the *Griffith University Reconciliation Action Plan*, which was introduced in 2012.
- 1.3 It is important that staff and students are aware of, recognise, and value the significance of Australia's First Peoples, their cultures, and their place in the learning and research activities of the University. In embracing the notion of reconciliation between Australia's First Peoples and other Australians, the University endorses the use of the Welcome to Country and Acknowledgement of Country at the University's events, ceremonies, meetings, and functions.
- 1.4 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander custodianship of country needs to be recognised where Griffith University events, ceremonies, meetings, and functions are held. Appropriate recognition of the traditional owners of country assists in developing strong partnerships between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and other Australian communities across the University's five campuses

## 2. WELCOME TO COUNTRY

- 2.1 A Welcome to Country is where the traditional Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander custodian or Elder welcomes people to their land. The Welcome to Country is a right of the local traditional owners and not a privilege.
- 2.2 A Welcome to Country always occurs at the opening of an event and is usually the first item on the program. The local Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander custodians or traditional owners conduct the ceremony and this may be done through a speech, song, ceremony, or a combination of these things.

- 2.3 Not all Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander people can perform a Welcome to Country, as it must be given by an appropriate person, such as a recognised Elder within the local community. The Griffith University Council of Elders should be consulted on this matter as part of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural protocols.
- 2.4 It is the responsibility of the person or unit organising the event to ensure, whenever possible, that the traditional owners are involved in the Welcome to Country. When organising a Welcome to Country, organisers are to provide the traditional owners with information on the theme and purpose of the event. Appropriate lead time should be given in organising a Welcome to Country with the Griffith University Council of Elders.
- 2.5 In general, a Welcome to Country will be performed where there are invited members of the public and/or dignitaries in attendance.
- 2.6 Examples of events where it would be desirable for a Welcome to Country to be performed by an Aboriginal Elder from the local community of the campus on which the event is taking place include:
- Official Welcome to Griffith;
  - Community engagement events involving visiting dignitaries;
  - University Awards Nights;
  - Opening of new buildings.
- 2.7 It may not always be possible to organise a Welcome to Country at such events and functions; in such situations, an Acknowledgement of Country is the minimum requirement.

### 3. RESPONSE TO WELCOME TO COUNTRY

- 3.1 It is the responsibility of the speaker who follows immediately after the Welcome to Country ceremony to provide an appropriate response. Part of the response should acknowledge the person who has delivered the Welcome to Country. The following text can be used in response to the traditional Welcome to Country.

*I would like to acknowledge the Traditional Custodians of the land on which we are meeting and pay my respect to the Elders, past and present, and extend that respect to all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.*

- 3.2 It is not necessary for every speaker at an event or gathering to provide a response or an acknowledgement of country.

### 4. ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF COUNTRY

- 4.1 The University has adopted the practice of acknowledging the traditional custodians of country at its events, ceremonies, meetings, and functions. It is the responsibility of the chair of the meeting or host or master of ceremonies of the event to ensure that the Acknowledgement of Country takes place in an appropriate manner. It is appropriate for the host of the ceremony to make the Acknowledgement, unless another person has been asked to perform this.
- 4.2 Acknowledgement of Country is a way that the University community can demonstrate respect for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander protocol and **can be performed by any individual**, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander or other Australians, participating in an occasion of any kind. The University takes the Acknowledgement of Country to be a demonstration of respect dedicated to the traditional custodians of the land or sea where the event or gathering is being conducted.

4.3 The Acknowledgement of Country comprises a short statement that is included in a Welcome to Country or at the beginning of the opening speech. It is to be included prior to other acknowledgements and formalities.

4.4 The following text can be used in Acknowledgement of Country:

*I would like to acknowledge the Traditional Custodians of the land on which we are meeting and pay my respect to the Elders, past and present, and extend that respect to all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.*

4.5 It is recommended that the following events should include an Acknowledgement of Country:

- Graduation Ceremonies;
- Student prize nights/events;
- Significant student events, for example Orientation-related functions hosted by the University;
- Significant public lectures; and
- Whole-of-staff significant events.