RMIT Regional and Remote (RR) Student Action Plan

(2024 Update)

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Executive Summary

Strategic context

RMIT's regional and remote (RR) student cohorts are a small group of capable students (around 1000 new students per year), with potential for growth.

Regional students are an area of priority and attention to meet both Federal Government and local equity and diversity targets. Analysis of RMIT data suggests particular attention on improved access and employability where we lag in the sector. Improvements over the next 3 years should improve federal funding outcomes.

RMIT RR students

RMIT RR students often stand apart from their regional peers as wanting something different to teaching, nursing or trades careers which still dominate regional post-schooling aspirations. They are often academically strong and confident and may not be first in family to attend university. They are prepared to move to the city to enrol in specific courses, and many commute from large centres such as Geelong, Ballarat and Bendigo.

Planning and consultation

The RR Student Action Plan was approved by the ASPECS committee in September 2022. It was developed through cross-campus consultation and reviewing student performance data. (see RR Squad Meeting 1 PPT), RR student personas and ideas for improvement (see RR Squad Meeting 2 PPT).

Funding sources are BAU, IRLSAF/HEPPP, philanthropic and specialist government grants.

Plan for 2023-2025

Through natural growth of our Bendigo Flight School campus and an expansion of online/blended offerings there should be a natural growth of RR students. Additional opportunities for uplift to growth and success have been identified. Short term strategies amplify existing good practice using existing projects and teams such as the Careers team, Work Integrated Learning (WIL) and Outreach.

Longer term strategies bring an RR lens and add value to the staff capability and lifelong learning actions of the NEXT Strategy. This includes micro-credentials and online diplomas relevant to RR students and communities, as shorter targeted skills programs are particularly needed and appreciated.

Background to the plan

2019 - 2021: The Federal Government's National Regional, Rural and Remote Tertiary Education Strategy combined with new funding arrangements require Higher Education Institutions to focus on students:

• From regional and remote Australia (RR)

• Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander

• From low SES backgrounds (LSES)

In 2024 the Higher Education Accord proposed additional measures to improve regional education including needs-based funding, expansion of Regional Study Hubs, the potential creation of a National Regional University and faster ways to gain skills such as funded micro-credentials. A National Skills passport has also been proposed for better transferring between VE and HE.
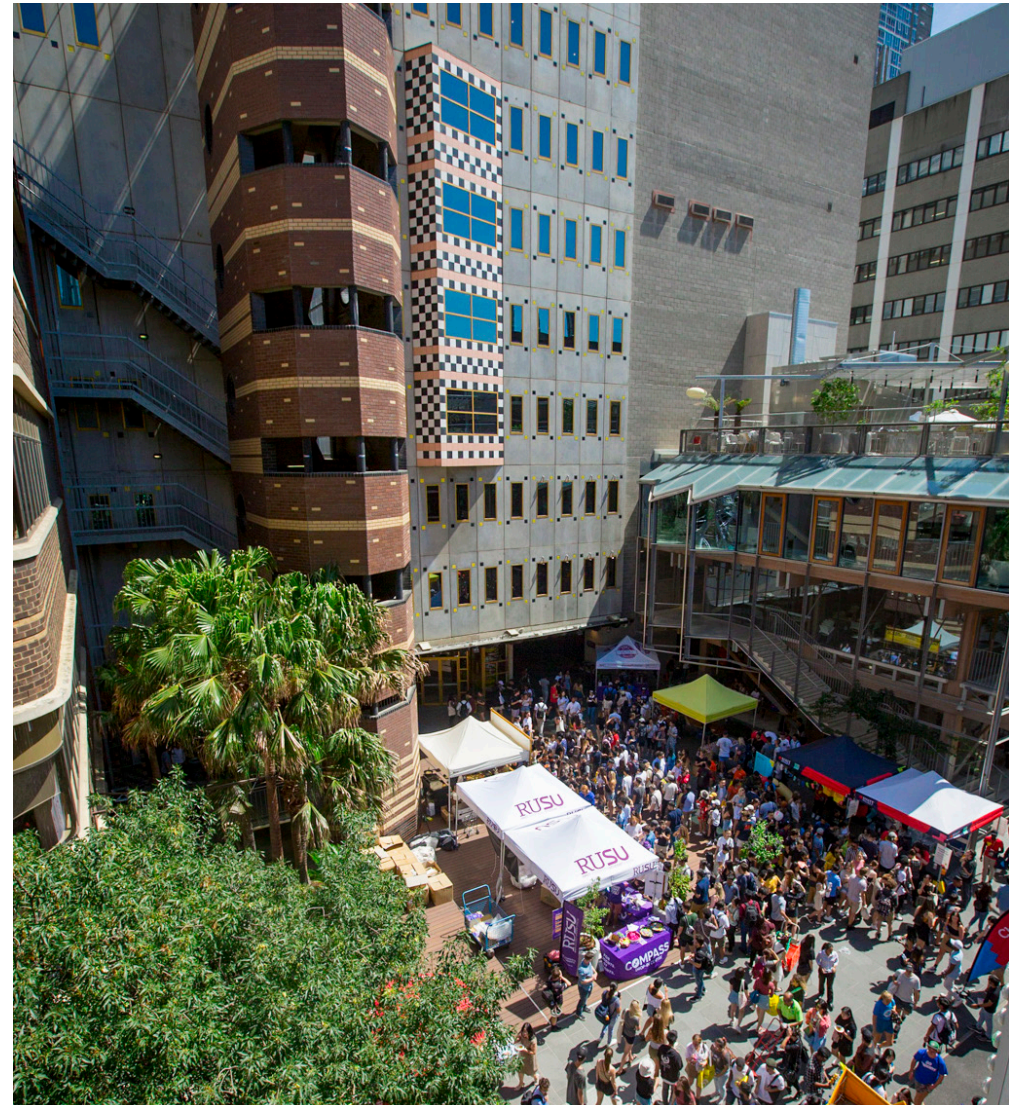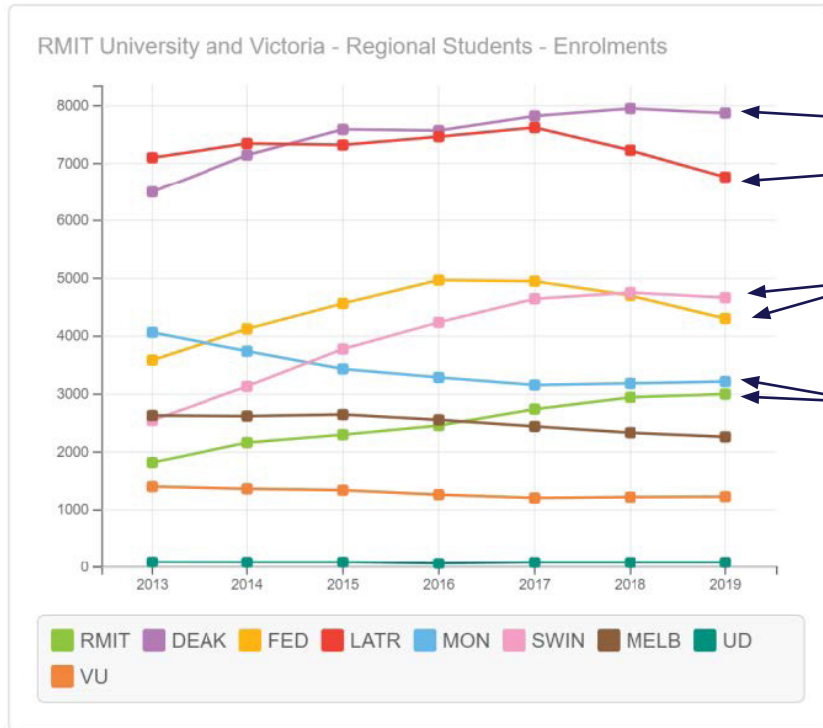
Regional and Remote students at RMIT

Small numbers of confident, capable, motivated and often high achieving students

RR Enrolments overview

RMIT University and Victoria - Regional Students - Enrolments

Unis with major regional campuses:

Deakin, La Trobe, FedU

Swinburne has substantial online undergrad course catalogue

Monash and RMIT here - approximately 3,000 students

University	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019
RMIT University (RMIT)	1,807	2,153	2,288	2,446	2,730	2,934	2,989
Deakin University (DEAK)	6,486	7,135	7,579	7,559	7,811	7,941	7,861
Federation University Australia (FED)	3,575	4,115	4,553	4,958	4,938	4,693	4,293
La Trobe University (LATR)	7,089	7,336	7,310	7,454	7,612	7,219	6,751
Monash University (MON)	4,056	3,729	3,423	3,276	3,146	3,174	3,206
Swinburne University of Technology (SWIN)	2,535	3,123	3,768	4,227	4,634	4,742	4,653
The University of Melbourne (MELB)	2,620	2,609	2,635	2,544	2,430	2,323	2,250
University of Divinity (UD)	81	77	79	56	74	73	75
Victoria University (VU)	1,393	1,354	1,331	1,253	1,195	1,209	1,218
Victoria	29,643	31,631	32,966	33,773	34,570	34,309	33,296
National	140,510	145,018	149,001	150,441	153,800	151,636	150,100

NB: this was 2022 data, available at time of plan approval. 2024 data is very similar, with a dip across the sector in 2020 (COVID) and rising up towards 2019 levels in 2021.

RMIT regional students look beyond common regional careers

- Nationally regional and remote students are more likely to be older, female and studying online but at RMIT regional and remote students are more likely to be male, 20-25 and studying on campus.

- RMIT regional and remote students often stand apart from their peers as wanting something different to teaching, nursing or trades careers which still dominate regional post-schooling aspirations:

  - They are often academically strong and confident, middle socioeconomic status, and may not be first in family to attend university.

  - They are prepared to move to the city, and others commute from large centres such as Geelong, Ballarat, Bendigo or study with us online.

On the following pages, personas of regional and remote students have been developed in conversation with RMIT regional and remote students. The purpose of the personas is to demonstrate the kinds of experiences and needs our regional and remote students often have.
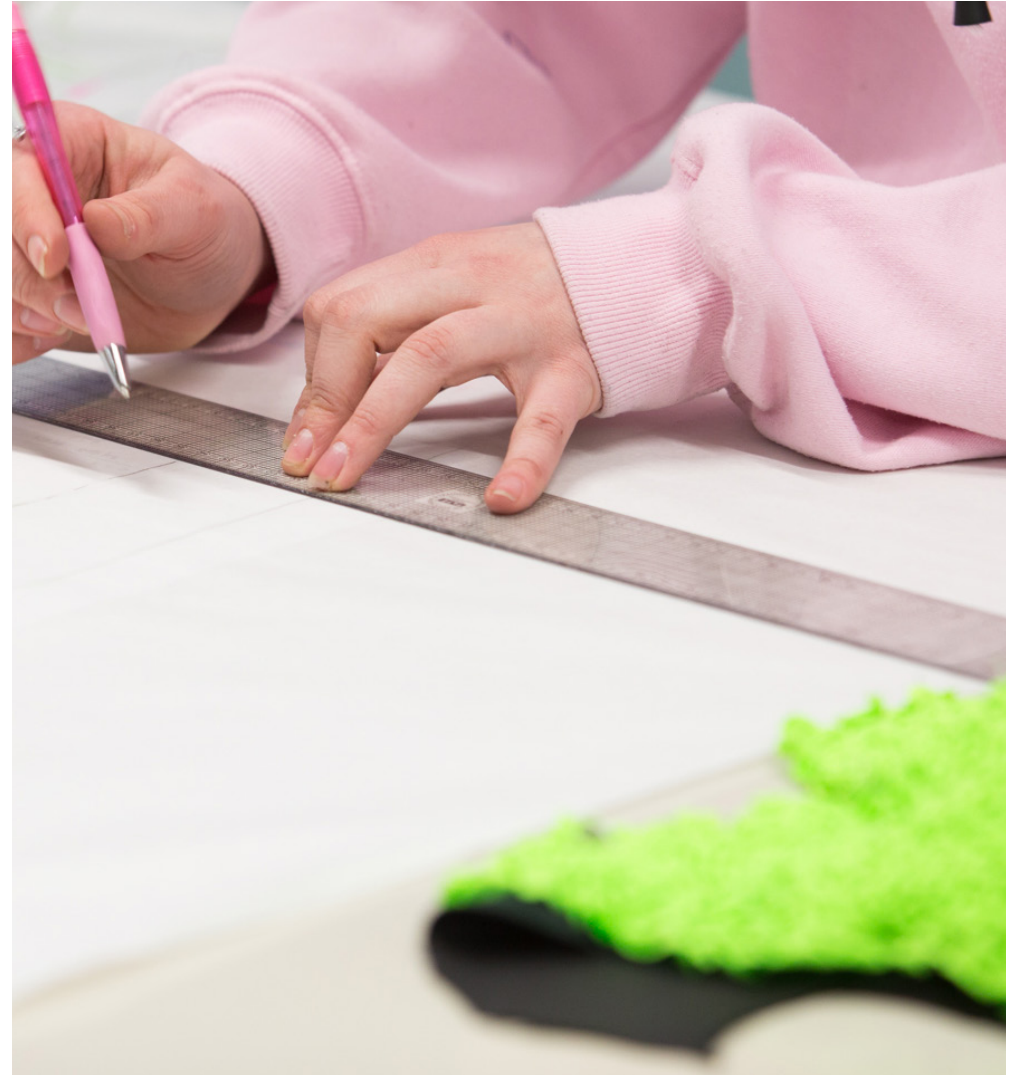
Regional and remote student persona 1

Danny the future FIFO engineer

- Danny lives with his family 15 minutes out from a major regional centre. His property backs the bush, he and his family are keen on-road and off-road motorbike riders. He commutes to RMIT via train and sometimes stays with extended family in Melbourne if he has a long day at uni.

- Danny was not sure about tertiary education but a Year 9 Careers Fair turned this around and grabbed his attention. He decided on studying Engineering and quickly applied more energy at school, doing well at maths and physics.

- Danny chose engineering at RMIT as it was a globally recognised course. He thinks he will do lucrative FIFO work interstate in the mining industry, and maybe even go overseas before settling back home. He prefers living and working in regional areas and looks forward to regional FIFO experiences- this career suits him perfectly.

Elise the future civil Engineer*

- Elise is a final year Chemical Engineering and Pharmaceutical Sciences student who relocated to Melbourne to study. However, has since moved back to her hometown after COVID provided her with study flexibility. She was the only kid at her school to relocate to Melbourne for uni as most went to uni in Bendigo or Geelong.

- Elise is one of the few students in her classes who did not come from a Melbourne private school. She is focused on her study and the good friends made living on campus and in the RMIT netball club prior to COVID. Elise is proud about being from the country.

- Elise is powering through her internship project and has a graduate job lined up in Melbourne. She thinks she might eventually move back to the country.

*Elise is a real student who has given permission to be named.

Regional and remote student persona 3

Rupeet the IT introvert

- Rupeet is early in his IT course and lives with his family in a large country town. He studies mostly online and commutes by train when needed.

- He is proud of his regional family who run a successful small business but does not shout the name of his La Trobe Valley town from the rooftops as it has a bit of a 'dirty' reputation for being a coal town.

- Rupeet is an introvert, "a follower not a leader socially". Rupeet got picked up by a group of IT kids in the first class and is happy to hang with them.

- He thinks he might work in Melbourne after graduating but is not totally sure.

Amina the digital artist

- Amina is in her final year of a Fine Arts degree and enjoys coming to City campus to study from her home in Geelong. Her teachers know her commute is much longer than most and give her some flexibility which helps a lot.

- Deakin Uni is closer to Amina, but she really wanted to do RMIT's Arts degree. She ended up choosing RMIT for the course.

- She sometimes feels a bit sad to miss out on the campus sports and club activities, but just can not fit those into her schedule as she has work and study to balance. She is not too concerned about getting a job after graduation, digital skills seem to be in demand in her area.

- Amina feels at home at RMIT. However, she occasionally thinks it would be nice if some of the emails that get sent out about jobs and careers opportunities might mention the world beyond Melbourne! "Geelong, Ballarat and Bendigo are full of good employers you know!".
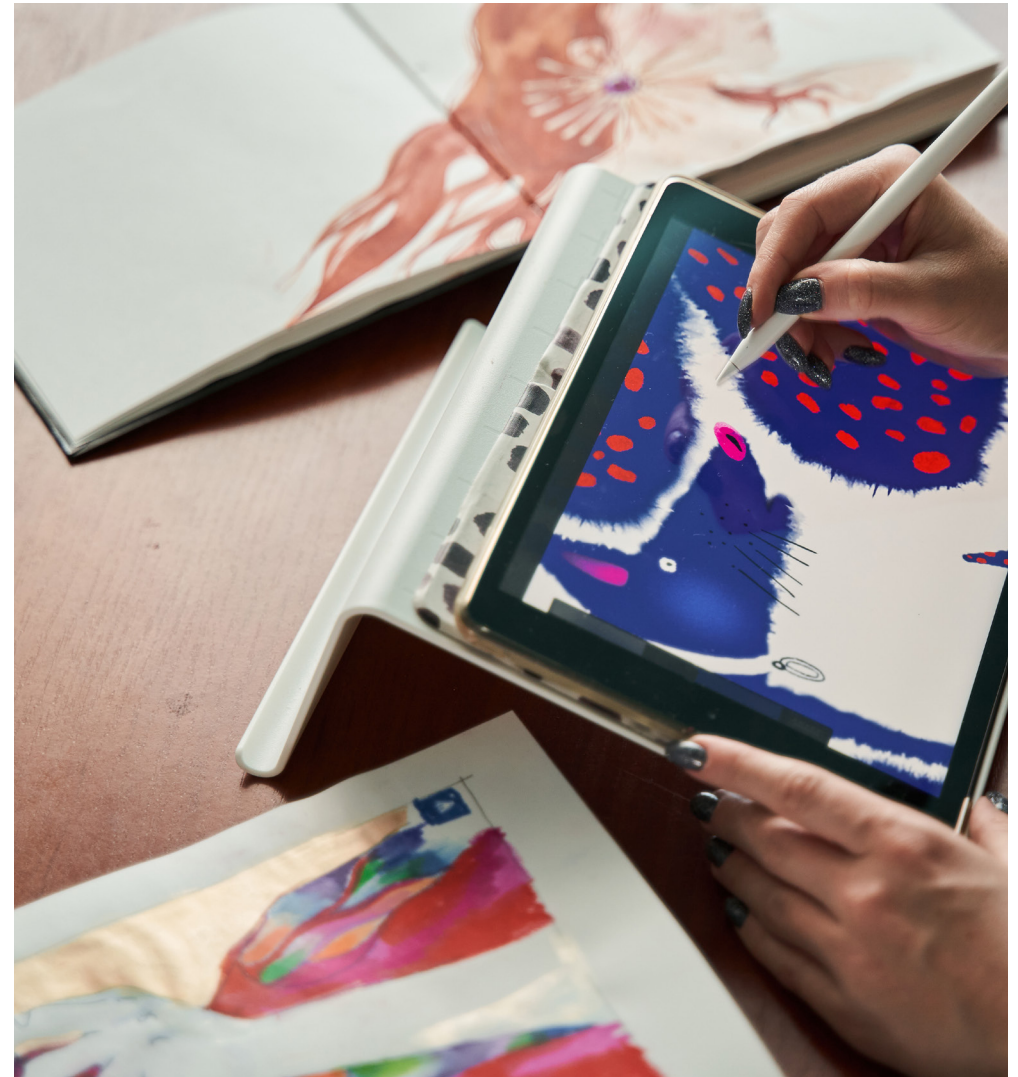
RMIT RR Action Plan 2022-25

Short and long-term investment opportunities to lift RR access and success

4 focus areas: access, success, employability and women

The committee approved these 4 objectives:

- **Objective 1 (RR access):** Attract more RR students through innovative outreach, communications and flexible/blended program offerings. Balance incentivising RR relocation with creating more options to stay, earn and learn in the regions. Shorter programs for lifelong learners.

- **Objective 2 (RR success):** Introduce individual 'Equitable Learning Plans' or stronger support to recognise longer commute times, have lectures online/recorded, avoid classes outside of 9am-5pm, assessment consideration for commutes; tweak mainstream services and opportunities for RR students and build educator capability.

- **Objective 3 (RR employability):** Improve employability with targeted programs for RR students. Improve opportunities for WIL and grad roles with regional employers.

- **Objective 4 (RR women):** Expand gender equity programs for RR women (VE and HE undergrad).

2023 RR plan: Amplify current practice

Access/Outreach:

- Bid for extra Commenwealth Supported Places for RR and equity students.

- Part time Advisor for the The National Priorities Pool Program (NPPP) Regional Outreach project.

- Explore "STEM on the fly" and other excursions to and from Bendigo Flight School.

- Part time Advisor for Mature age Outreach.

Success:

- Explore welcome/orientation events specific for RR students.

- Netball/Football club.

- Peer buddies.

- Networking opportunities.

Employability

- Extend CareerKit program for graduating year RR students, staff time plus $450 per student.

- Extend international mentoring service to RR students.

- Regional employers at Careers Fairs, pro-active support of regional WIL and jobs.

- Promote STEM cadetships to RR employers.

Women

- Outreach Collaboration: programs beyond hairdressing, nursing, teaching such as Women in STEM, the Arts and Business.

- Childcare options for campus orientation and careers events.

- More options to stay in the regions: internships, scholarships and grad jobs.

2023 - 2025 plan: RR relevant courses

More attractive and relevant courses for RR students and employers.

- **Curriculum flexibility:** New ways for RR students to tailor majors/electives/assignments/work integrated learning (WIL) to enhance relevance for RR grad roles and skills.

- **New curriculum architecture:** Explore degree apprenticeship (workplace learning) model.

- **Lifelong learning:** Partner with councils and employers in regional growth areas for microcredentials and tailored short courses.

  For example:

- Women in STEM internships, scholarships for workplace based creds/courses.

- Innovation/entrepreneurship programs in Food science, agribusiness and tourism.

- Leverage engineering course global brand: online diploma, certs for current employees needing to upskill.

RR relevant courses are a single strategy for improvements in access and enrolments, as well as success, gender parity and employability.

2022 - 2024 Achievements

RR Access (Pre-access)

- Co-designing sustainable Regional Outreach with Ovens-Murray Country University Centre (Wangaratta, Mansfield, Corryong), part of major Federally funded project with the East Coast uni consortia + Country University Centres.

- Signed MOU with Goldfields Local Learning and Employment Network (GLLEN) for joining their Passions and Pathways program, delivers tours and STEM workshops with Bendigo schools at Bendigo Flight School.

- I Belong and Ngarara Willim regional and Indigenous camps, Mythbusting Higher Education at Bendigo Open Day, Discipline-based Outreach with Bendigo Schools eg Year 11 students Digital arts collaboration displayed at Bendigo Digital Summit.

RR Access and Success, RR Gender Equity

- 80 women and gender diverse students enrolled in supported online version of Grant-funded Diploma of IT, outcome of consultation with the Bendigo business community. 40% of students from this program come from regional locations.

- Scholarships and relocation payments, for instance, Destination Australia funding for regional study and $45K for students studying Flight training at Bendigo.

- CareerKit: strong engagement and satisfaction from RR students. The $450 payment to student participants of the CareerKit program is helpful in providing practical support and a sense of belonging at RMIT.
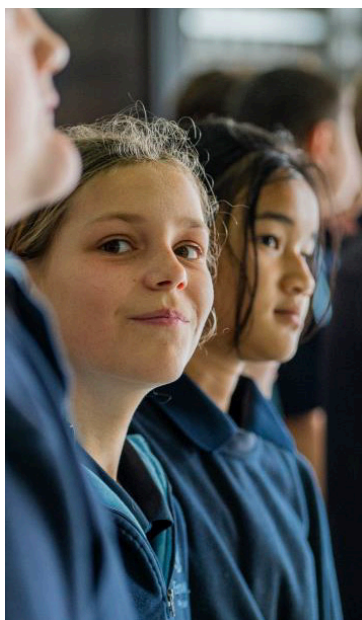
Recent achievement highlights: Bendigo Open Day 2022



*Photos from Bendigo Open Day 2022

*Photos from Bendigo Flight School Tour 2023

Recent achievements highlights: Free online Diploma of IT for women

Courses to address regional IT skills gaps were identified as a priority through grass-roots consultation with the Bendigo business community. When we offered a free, online part time Diploma of IT for women (places funded by a grant) the course proved very popular and 40% of the 80 places were taken up by regional women.

Additional flexible, online supports including E&I staff member and peer support network:
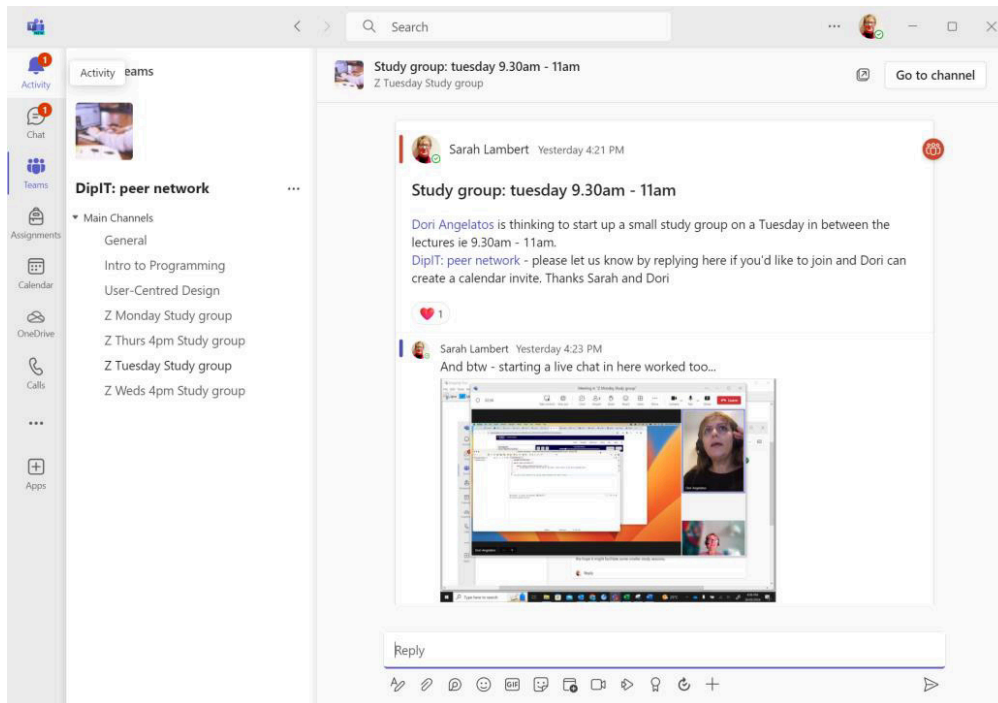
Part time study while working:

Study sequence over 2 years

Compulsory courses	Course Code	
User-Centred Design (AD)	ISYS3356	Semester 1: Feb – May 2024
Introduction to Programming	COSC2511	
Networking 1	COSC2385	Semester 2: July – Nov 2024
Cyber Security Foundations	INTE2643	
Foundations of Artificial Intelligence for STEM	COSC2960	Semester 1: Feb – May 2025
Programming 1	COSC2395	
Web Programming	COS2446	Semester 2: July – Nov 2025
Networking 2	COSC2384	

Equity and Inclusion, Students Group

We thank RMIT staff, students, and external organisations and contacts for their help in developing this resource.

For feedback or to get in touch, please email us at: inclusion@rmit.edu.au

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