

Cultural Narrative Framework



Norma McDonald
Land Rights Negotiation, 1997
Mixed media on paper
Purchased 1998



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Foreword

Acknowledgement of Country

Edith Cowan University proudly acknowledges the communities upon which its campuses are located; the Whadjuk, Wardandi and Mooro peoples of the southwest of Western Australia. It acknowledges that the work that is undertaken in our university campuses takes place on these sovereign nations and unceded lands throughout the state and on this continent colonially known as Australia.

Edith Cowan University acknowledges the Traditional Owners, Custodians and knowledge-holders of these unceded lands upon which students and staff live, learn and work, and pays its respects to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities' ancestors and Elders. Sovereignty was never ceded.

Warning

Members of Aboriginal communities are respectfully advised that several people mentioned in writing and depicted in photographs in this paper may have passed away. All such references and photographs have been included with permission by the appropriate authorities and community.

Note to the reader

The word Country is capitalised throughout this document. For Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, the notion of Country refers to custodianship, care and connection to specific locations. It also refers to vast tracts of land through which particular stories, songs and kinship lines connect communities. Country is perceived not just as a place but as a concept, which embodies families, language and culture.

Name, place and language spellings may differ depending on the speaker, writer or region. Edith Cowan University values information led by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and knowledge-sharing. Differences in name, place and language spellings may result from different languages and dialects in use, as indicated by the people of that area.

The terms Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and Indigenous are used interchangeably at various points in this strategy and framework.



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Introduction

Understanding Cultural Narratives

A cultural narrative is a thread of interconnected stories, values, histories, and practices that define and shape the identity, meaning, and shared experiences of a community. Such narratives reflect the ways in which individuals and groups make sense of their past, live in the present, and aspire toward a future, grounding these experiences in place, relationships, and cultural expression.

Within universities in Australia, dominant cultural narratives tend to foreground and prioritise Western knowledge systems, histories, and perspectives. Recognising this, at Edith Cowan University (ECU), the ambition of this strategic framework is to re-balance and centre Noongar culture, perspectives, and knowledges at the heart of its operations and identity. This acknowledges the significance of ECU's presence on Whadjuk, Wardandi, and Mooro lands, and honours the deep connection to Country and the principles of reciprocity, storytelling, and custodianship. While Noongar perspectives are intrinsic, ECU's cultural narrative expands beyond them, evolving into a multilayered local, regional, national, and global tapestry that reflects and celebrates all the communities that shape the University's vibrant community and purpose. This document connects the embedded Noongar cultural narrative to the broader cultural narrative of the University in a way that positions them equally and with a joined purpose.

Purpose and Intent

This document serves as a strategic framework centred on cultural narratives that helps shape and inspire ECU. It reflects the essence of place, storytelling, and connection embedded in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander knowledge systems, and aims to position these narratives not as isolated elements but as influential dynamisms that have the potential to positively impact all endeavours of the ECU community. It also positions cultural diversity as a strength, promoting the infusing of a wide array of knowledge systems into ECU's teaching, research, student experience, corporate activities, community and public engagement. Therefore, this strategy intends to infuse cultural narratives deeply into ECU's values, decisions, spaces, and policies, ensuring these narratives actively shape the student, staff and public experience. To understand how this can be achieved, it is important to understand the catalysts for this framework.

There are two foundational cultural narratives at the heart of this framework. One is 'Life Layers' the other is 'Birdiya Yok Bidi'. Understanding these narratives is crucial to understanding this framework.



ECU City Campus Life Layers: A narrative at the heart of the city and this strategy

The purpose, intent and energy supporting the development of this framework has come from the leadership and authority of Whadjuk Noongar elders in partnership with ECU working on this City Campus Project. It was from these relationships that the Life Layers narrative emerged.

This narrative, at the core of ECU's new city campus, is encapsulated by a system of five interconnected layers, developed by Dr Richard Walley in consultation with Whadjuk Noongar elders, to reflect the deep relationship between land, water, and culture. These life layers—Kardup (Earth/Subterranean), Kep (Water), Kaata (Hills), Moort (Community/Ecosystem), and Djinda (Stars/Constellations)—serve as both structural and symbolic elements guiding the campus's design and activation. Each layer speaks to an aspect of place, identity, and connection, representing the campus as a living, evolving space of learning, sharing, and cultural transmission.

The life layers are embedded into the architecture and identity of the city campus. Colours associated with each layer are integrated into the facade, while artworks, signage, and internal spaces align with the meanings behind each life layer. For example, Kep (Water) reflects the proximity to Derbarl Yerrigan (Swan River) and honours the ancient underground swamp systems that once sustained the Whadjuk people. This careful alignment ensures that everyone—students, staff, visitors, and the broader community—can engage with the story of place in ways that foster understanding and connection.

The natural, shared cultural and built environments and histories of the place upon which ECU's city campus, and its campuses at Joondalup and the Southwest stand are complex and nuanced. ECU has a proud history of fostering a deep connection with Country and culture across its campuses. Since 2014, the University has established several dedicated cultural reflection spaces at Joondalup,

Mount Lawley, and the South West Campus. These thoughtfully co-designed spaces invite the ECU community to engage with and reflect on shared histories, offering a unique environment for learning and contemplation.

For the city campus, close to the Derbarl Yerrigan – the Swan River – whose meandering, life-giving waterways are fundamental to the evolution of Boorloo (the name for the place upon which the city of Perth has been built), the location chosen for ECU's transformational new campus has always been a place of learning, sharing and inter-generational knowledge transmission. It is in this spirit we use the city campus as a driving force for accelerating this important work throughout all of ECU.

Birdiya Yok Bidi: The Yooreel and Edith Dirksey Cowan Narrative

The University itself is named after Edith Dirksey Cowan, a social worker and politician, who was born in 1861 on Yamatji Country near Geraldton, Western Australia. Her early family life made her singularly committed towards social reforms for women and the securing of proper care for children. Edith was one of the first women appointed to the Children's Court in 1915 and an early Justice of the Peace and she encouraged women to take up these leadership roles in Perth society, becoming herself the first female of the Australian Parliament. She used her term to promote women's and infants' health and rights, and migrant welfare.

During the development of Perth, Fanny Balbuk, often known as Yooreel, remained defiant to changes in the use of her land and Country, while sustaining important relationships with the new settlement and individuals during that time. Fanny Balbuk was born earlier than Edith Cowan, around 1840 on Matagarup (Heirisson Island), but they shared time until 1907, when Fanny Balbuk passed away. Contemporary documents refer to Fanny's family having significant claim to where Perth city centre is now located; her grandmother Moorgurungul's burial was in the grounds of Government House, her grandmother Yabben was buried further west along what is now St Georges Terrace, her great-great-grandfather was buried near Perth's oldest jail, and a great uncle where the Deanery now stands in Perth's main street. Her father Coondebung perished as a prisoner on Wadjemup/ Rottne Island.

Fanny's knowledge of Whadjuk country, recorded by self-taught anthropologist Daisy Bates in the early 1900s, informed the 2006 Noongar Native Title claim, where it was upheld that Native Title rights exist in the Perth metropolitan area. Her consistent and implacable determination to retain her right to walk the pathways – bidi – that her ancestors had walked for millennia through the burgeoning construction of the city of Perth continues to inspire Noongar and other First Nations communities throughout Australia.

Edith Cowan and Yooreel Fanny Balbuk moved across a shared universe in parallel. They both held space for women and took very seriously their role in creating and maintaining a sense of community, family, and the value of the matriarchy. Their tracks, both traceable, converge at different moments and contribute deeply to the fundamental understanding of what this place – Boorloo – has been, and what it can continue to be.

The interaction between these two women, along with the life layers embedded in place, illustrates how individuals and communities shape their surroundings and forge their identities. The cultural narratives of ECU's city campus, encapsulated within the buildings and in its broader external interactions, emphasises the foundational framework of First Peoples ways of learning and connecting to place. This foundational narrative is further extended and enriched by the diverse histories of all people—from the earliest non-Indigenous Australians to the migrant communities who have chosen Boorloo as their home.

Both Fanny Balbuk and Edith Cowan embodied forms of cultural and social leadership that defied the constraints of their time. Fanny Balbuk resisted the colonial reshaping of her Whadjuk Noongar land, walking traditional pathways (bidi) through the city as a symbol of defiance and cultural continuity, even as Perth developed around her. Edith Cowan, similarly, challenged societal norms by becoming Australia's first female parliamentarian, advocating for women's rights, children's welfare, and social reforms. Though their efforts emerged from different cultural contexts, both women demonstrated a commitment to community, justice, and connection to place, leaving lasting legacies that reflect resilience and advocacy. Their intertwined narratives inspire ECU's cultural framework, emphasising both Noongar knowledge systems and the historical contributions of pioneering women like Cowan.





Thinking about the city campus in a relational way

Indigenous relationality is about connection to people, place and experiences. It is an understanding of self that is multi-generational and inclusive. It is characterised by reciprocity, obligation, shared experiences and social memory. Generosity, empathy, care and collectivism underpin relationality for Indigenous communities. Importantly, relationality is also about accountability; every action has consequences that ripple through the network of relationships, whether it's with other people, the land, or other communities/organisations. This sense of relational accountability encourages a deep sense of responsibility and care for others and is one that guides the thinking of our approach to cultural narratives at ECU.

In this light, it is important to reflect that ECU's city campus, while being situated on an ancient site of learning, is in the here and now, at the nexus of the cultural organisations of Boorloo and the main commercial centre of the CBD. Therefore, the campus has a critical role to play in bringing these institutions together, to engage and promote the university and the city to potential students as well as local, national and international communities and external stakeholders. It is located along a line that links a series of cultural institutions across Boorloo, Perth. It will have a relationship with the Art Gallery of Western Australia and the Perth Institute of Contemporary Art, as well as with the Western Australian Museum Boola Bardip and the State Theatre Centre of WA. It naturally has an important relationship with the State Library of Western Australia, located in the cultural precinct also, and will develop a new relationship to the Aboriginal Cultural Centre, to be located at the Esplanade. The need for cultural tourism will be facilitated in part by the placemaking that will take place in the final stages of the ECU city campus development and will spread to and include all the campuses of the University - making each campus directly connected and alive.

Harnessing human creativity as the driving force for our future work in advancing cultural narratives, we are excited to transition from static representations to dynamic expression. By integrating cutting-edge digital and physical architecture, we aim to transform how universities share and engage with important stories, placing Indigenous perspectives at the core of our mission. This bold step forward will foster a truly inclusive and global approach, offering both the university and the broader community a deeper, more expansive understanding of how Indigenous knowledge and creativity can shape every aspect of our work and future.

Creativity first

The complexities of understanding place have historically often been translated by artists, who use their implicit courage, curiosity and deep understanding of self and others to communicate shared experiences in ways that can translate for all. It will be creativity that will be the spark for thinking about the ways cultural narratives will shape everything that we do.

With ECU City as our catalyst, new commissions of public art will enable a cohesive narrative throughout the ECU city campus, that will speak directly to a sense of place and to the life layers embedded within. These artworks create the possibility for teaching and learning to take place in wholly contextualised ways, and that offer a way for ECU's community of students to see themselves reflected in the very framework of the building. Larger than life digital media architecture will act as the mirror that narrates the direction, interests, concerns and legacies of the ECU, campuses – its histories, and its ambitions. The performing arts program, in connection with the West Australian Academy of Performing Arts (WAAPA), will support the ways in which ECU's cultural narrative can be engaged with by the public and our local community. Similarly, the Gallery with its exhibition program encompassing local, national and international artists practice will do the same.

It is anticipated that each and every student will be able to be oriented within an ECU Student Cultural Journey. This will support an understanding of Australian First Nations cultural frameworks and values, and it will take its lead from the embedding of the Birdiya Yok Bidi throughout not only the physical spaces of the city campus and the entirety of ECU's campuses, but also as a value proposition that forms each students' relationship with the University itself.

The idea of integrating a First Nations' perspective within each student's experience at ECU takes its cues from cross-cultural critical theory and is supported by a growing research base.

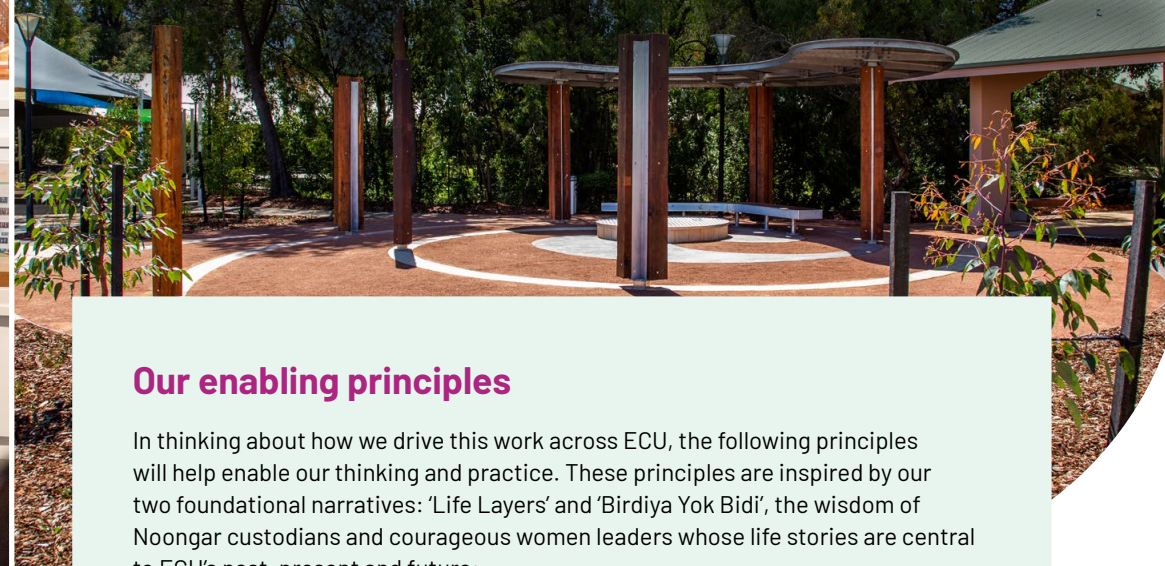
This framework is led by reciprocity and intergenerational transmission of learning, and a lens of holistic comprehension and functionable knowledge that seeks not to silo but to comprehensively embrace multiple aspects of whole-of-life education. A critical fundamental guiding principle to the Student Cultural Journey is an understanding of place, particularly where they are studying, living and working and where each campus is located, to develop a sense of their own and others positionality.

The cultural narrative for ECU is both a statement and an aspiration and observes that what we exemplify as our cultural narrative for ECU is also what we nourish and honour in ourselves.

A truly transformative shift will be expanding this thinking beyond the creative domain, integrating it into every aspect of our work. This strategy has a dual purpose: accelerating our current efforts while deeply respecting Noongar and Indigenous knowledges by embedding these ways of being and knowing at the core of our thinking and actions across all that we do, and connecting them to expanded systems of knowledge from other cultural groups at ECU.

To frame this work, five key principles will enable this work and guide all staff to consider how Indigenous knowledges and approaches to positively shape the student and staff experience, inform the way we teach, research, engage with industry and partner with community.





The Opportunity

Cultural narratives offer ECU a powerful opportunity to position its new city campus, and existing campuses, as dynamic hubs of learning, culture, and collaboration, integrating Noongar knowledge systems at their core while embracing global diversity. Through public art, placemaking, and cultural activations, the campuses will become spaces where stories, identities, and knowledges are experienced, fostering social cohesion, belonging, and dialogue among students, staff, partners, and the wider community.

The city campus's location at the heart of Perth's cultural precinct enables ECU to build meaningful partnerships locally, nationally, and internationally. The cultural narrative will drive educational innovation, enhance research development, and generate economic opportunities, connecting ECU's values with those of its collaborators and stakeholders.

By embedding this narrative into the architecture, programs, and interactions at the city campus and beyond, ECU will cultivate reciprocal relationships and sustainable practices. This framework ensures that ECU not only honours Country and place but also leads in the tertiary sector, setting a new standard for how universities engage with culture, knowledge, and community.

Our enabling principles

In thinking about how we drive this work across ECU, the following principles will help enable our thinking and practice. These principles are inspired by our two foundational narratives: 'Life Layers' and 'Birdiya Yok Bidi', the wisdom of Noongar custodians and courageous women leaders whose life stories are central to ECU's past, present and future:

- **Mutual Respect, Mutual Ownership:** Recognising the value of all perspectives and ensuring that partnerships, actions, and decisions are shared equitably, fostering collaborative ownership of outcomes across diverse communities.
- **Equity in Decision-Making:** Embedding fairness and inclusion in decision-making processes by giving voice to all stakeholders, particularly those from marginalised and underrepresented groups, ensuring all contributions are valued equally. This principle ensures there is enough time to make informed decisions and brings the values of informed consent and genuine, equitable collaboration into play.
- **Building and Sustaining Relationships:** Fostering reciprocal, meaningful, and long-term relationships based on trust, respect, and shared purpose, creating a framework for ongoing collaboration across the university and with external partners.
- **Authentic Participation and Involvement:** Encouraging genuine engagement where individuals and communities are not just consulted but actively involved in shaping decisions, programs, and initiatives, ensuring outcomes reflect collective input and ownership.
- **Resources that Empower and Enable:** Providing tools, knowledge, and support that uplift individuals and communities, ensuring they have the capacity to participate fully and thrive in ECU's environment, with resources allocated equitably to meet diverse needs.

Life Layers:

A framework for action

The Life Layers narrative, a gift from Whadjuk Noongar elders, provides the ECU community with a strategic framework that affords an alternative and/or additional way of achieving our strategic objectives as an academic community. Its applicability can be both narrow and shallow or broad and deep.

The Life Layers are explicated below with workable ways that ECU can leverage this ancient and new way of thinking to guide our work across everything we do. The opportunities outlined below are neither exhaustive or prescriptive, they are to serve as inspiration that enable autonomy and agency across the institution.



Ngarda – Subterranean: characterised by the embedding of fundamental principles and ways of working

Kardup, the subterranean layer, is the foundation of this framework, providing the stability, richness and strength necessary for meaningful growth. This layer is about respectfully following protocol, doing things appropriately from the outset. Deep, authentic conversations, relationships, and partnerships that already exist are acknowledged and amplified here, creating a solid platform upon which all future work is built and sustained.

1 Teaching and Learning

- Infuse Indigenous knowledge meaningfully into curriculum design by co-designing with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Elders, academics and communities from the outset.
- Evaluate existing and subsequently build upon reciprocal learning partnerships with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, organisations, businesses, leaders to co-design, co-teach, co-lead in the teaching and learning space. On Country learning also continues to be important as part of the cultural narrative framework.

2 Research and Development

- Co-design research with First Nations communities from the outset, engaging employed Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander researchers, project coordinators or community leads and ensuring that projects align with community interests and priorities.
- Adhere to ethical research frameworks, such as respecting Indigenous Cultural and Intellectual Property (ICIP), and commit to co-ownership of research outcomes.
- Establish long-term relationships with community partners through collaborative, two-way learning exchanges, rather than one-off projects.

3 Staff Development and Leadership

- Incorporate Dabakarn Kooliny (ECU's Indigenous-led staff development program) and reflective practices into professional development, focusing on relationality, reciprocity, and shared responsibility.
- Ensure all staff members understand the importance of relational engagement in their daily roles, especially in leadership positions where decisions impact diverse communities.



4 Community Engagement and Partnerships

- Build meaningful partnerships with local Indigenous organisations, ensuring ongoing dialogue and shared ownership of initiatives.
- Develop shared spaces for collaboration and reflection to encourage continuous relationship-building with external stakeholders (both physically and digitally). This includes the fundamental use of dual naming in shared spaces across campuses, where the English and Noongar names for frequently utilised rooms and locations are signposted.
- Host community-led events on campus, showcasing Indigenous art, culture, and knowledge to foster connection and dialogue between university members and external communities.

5 Governance, Policy, and Administration

- Involve Indigenous staff and community representatives in decision-making processes from the beginning, ensuring their voices shape policy frameworks and align this to the principles of self-determination within and external to ECU.
- Use consultative frameworks that prioritise respectful engagement, with built-in processes for feedback and continuous improvement.
- Develop policies and protocols that align with the principles of reciprocity and relationality, ensuring respectful use of cultural materials, names, and spaces.
- Development of protocols for the use of external imagery, information and representative information, including the ways in which cultural material is utilised, by whom and how.
- Development of protocols that reference and include Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander data sovereignty and governance.

6 Campus Design and Facilities

- Work with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander designers and community leaders to infuse cultural narratives into the architecture, signage, and use of public spaces.
- Establish culturally safe spaces for reflection, learning, and community gatherings, ensuring they remain accessible and well-maintained.
- Engage with local Elders to incorporate naming ceremonies and cultural symbols that reflect the history and significance of place and Country.



By embedding these practices into our work, ECU can nurture the deep, authentic relationships that align with Kardup, the subterranean layer. This foundation ensures that trust, reciprocity, and respect underpin all university activities, supporting meaningful and sustainable growth across teaching, research, governance, and community engagement.



Kep - Water: characterised by fluidity and agility

The Kep layer is one of responsiveness and dexterity – being alive to new opportunities, partnerships and collaborations, as well as new ways of thinking and doing. From an internal perspective this might involve instigating changes to established frameworks and protocols (combined with education pieces around these changes) and a responsive engagement to the sector and the place that every ECU campus is located in.

- It will necessarily involve the creation of new policies to direct and reflect change, in a wide variety of areas including procurement, legal and contracts, ECU Art Collection, Library archives and cultural material from across the university, and new modes and methodologies for research, including but not limited to the areas of art, humanities and culture. Existing policy alignments will be evaluated also.
- It will support the increased employment of First Nations staff, particularly in areas not related to First Nations business, and campus-wide opportunities for collaboration and mechanisms for coming together for First Nations existing staff members.
- It also encourages significant opportunities for students to create meaningful content in a variety of areas for the digital media architecture for ECU City and beyond, and to have input in the ways they wish to be represented in external engagement pieces.

- It will encourage new partnerships both locally, nationally and internationally, that will have ethical modes of engagement, and two-way benefit sharing for all parties.
- It will support cultural competency in a variety of forms taking place across each campus for all staff.

A critical component of this principle is the development and enrichment of curriculum related to Information Technology and Artificial Intelligence, in partnership with national and international collaborators, particularly in First Nations digital sovereignty, and new and evolving methodologies and technical expertise.



1 Policy, Governance and Administration

- Develop new frameworks for procurement and contracts that prioritise ethical engagement with Indigenous and local communities, ensuring two-way benefit sharing.
- Create policies for digital sovereignty that guide the use of Indigenous cultural material and protect Intellectual Property in partnership with First Nations communities. Regularly review and evaluate existing policies, ensuring they remain responsive to changing sector and community needs.

2 Research and Development

- Expand research collaborations into emerging fields such as Information Technology and Artificial Intelligence, with a focus on First Nations digital sovereignty and ethical data use.
- Develop new research methodologies in the arts, humanities, and culture, co-designed with communities, promoting innovative thinking and diverse ways of knowing.
- Engage in cross-disciplinary research partnerships that reflect ECU's agility and adaptability, ensuring responsiveness to both sector trends and community needs.

3 Staffing and Employment Initiatives

- Increase the employment of First Nations staff across diverse roles, not limited to Indigenous-specific portfolios, ensuring representation across all levels of the university.
- Build mechanisms for collaboration between First Nations and non-Indigenous staff, fostering inclusive teamwork and reciprocal learning.
- Implement flexible career pathways to support First Nations staff, with professional development opportunities across various departments.

4 Student Engagement and Digital Architecture

- Provide opportunities for students to create content for ECU's digital media architecture, giving them a voice in how they are represented within and beyond the university.
- Establish student-led collaborations on digital storytelling projects that reflect diverse identities and experiences, encouraging ownership and creativity.
- Create platforms for students to participate in external engagement initiatives, ensuring that their perspectives influence ECU's relationships with local, national, and international communities.

5 External Partnerships and Community Engagement

- Actively pursue local, national, and international partnerships, ensuring they align with ethical engagement principles and create mutual benefits for all stakeholders.
- Develop partnership models that allow for responsive collaboration, adapting to emerging opportunities while maintaining integrity and reciprocity.
- Strengthen connections with cultural institutions and the wider community, ensuring ECU's partnerships reflect its commitment to innovation and cultural inclusion.

6 Curriculum Development and Cultural Competency

- Design culturally responsive curricula that integrate First Nations perspectives and digital innovation, ensuring relevance across disciplines, especially in IT and AI.
- Implement cultural competency training for staff, tailored to the specific needs of each campus, to foster inclusive practices and cross-cultural understanding.
- Develop new teaching methodologies that embrace agility and co-creation with students and community partners, encouraging innovative and flexible approaches to learning.



By embracing Kep's principles of responsiveness and dexterity, ECU staff can remain adaptable to emerging trends, nurture collaborative relationships, and innovate across disciplines and operations. This ensures the university's capacity to respond effectively to sector needs, engage meaningfully with communities, and lead with flexibility and foresight across teaching, research, and public engagement.



Kaata - Hills: characterised by sustainability, and utilising existing resources

Kaata, the Hills layer, which focuses on sustainably directing resources and integrating the cultural narrative across the university's operations. This principle relates to the ways in which ECU can proactively direct its current and potential resources and operational plans to leverage not only the cultural narrative framework but its implementation more broadly. ECU currently manages and directs a range of resources appropriately and effectively to sustain the University, and this principle seeks to capitalise and potentially expand or refine these frameworks, programs and services viably and with a view to integrating across areas, divisions and faculties.

Some ways of thinking about the implementation of work within this layer may include:

1 Facilities Management and Campus Design

- Incorporate the cultural narrative into the naming of spaces, wayfinding, and architecture, ensuring these elements reflect Indigenous stories, values, and connection to place.
- Collaborate with First Nations communities to design culturally significant spaces that encourage learning, reflection, and inclusivity, such as yarning circles or gardens with native plants.

2 Collection Management and Digital Sovereignty

- Infuse cultural narratives within ECU's collection by curating art and cultural materials throughout all campuses to tell the story of place and identity.
- Implement policies around the digital representation and preservation of cultural material, respecting First Nations digital sovereignty and intellectual property.
- Facilitate two-way caretaking of collections by working with artists and communities to ensure accurate interpretation and respectful conservation practices.
- Use collection management tools to create educational templates and awareness programs, supporting staff and students in engaging with the cultural narrative meaningfully.

3 Gallery Management and Artistic Engagement

- Curate First Nations-led exhibitions and public art programs, offering students and alumni opportunities to display their work alongside national and international artists.
- Develop long-term partnerships with artists and cultural institutions to reflect the cultural narrative across gallery programming in Boorloo (Perth) and beyond.

4 Research Frameworks and Ethical Practices

- Align research frameworks with the cultural narrative, ensuring that projects involving Indigenous communities are conducted ethically and collaboratively.
- Develop reciprocal research practices, working with communities to co-design research outputs and share outcomes responsibly.

5 Social Media, Marketing, and External Engagement

- Create protocols for inclusive representation across all media, ensuring First Nations people, people with disabilities, and other underrepresented groups are accurately and respectfully portrayed.
- Establish clear guidelines for the production, accreditation, and remuneration of individuals involved in media projects, ensuring respectful use of their stories and images.

6 Events, Programming and Community Engagement

- Design cultural events and public programming—such as open days, exhibitions, and conferences—grounded in the cultural narrative, to attract diverse stakeholders.
- Facilitate student-led performances, exhibitions, and digital projects that align with ECU's identity and foster community engagement.

7 Professional Development Pathways

- Develop professional development pathways that reflect the cultural narrative, ensuring staff at all levels have access to training, mentorship, and career progression opportunities.
- Include staff learning opportunities as part of ongoing professional development, equipping staff with the knowledge to apply the cultural narrative in their roles.



By directing resources, policies, and programs through the lens of Kaata, ECU ensures that the cultural narrative becomes embedded across all aspects of university life. This approach promotes sustainability, ethical engagement, and collaboration, reinforcing ECU's commitment to cultural leadership and integration. Through this layer, the university nurtures an environment where art, learning, and community thrive together, shaping a vibrant, inclusive future.

Moort Boodja – Ecosystem: canopy, animals, trees: characterised by collaboration and relationships

The Moort layer focuses on building collaborative relationships across all areas of ECU and beyond, recognising that the success of the cultural narrative depends on breaking down silos and fostering cross-disciplinary partnerships.

Key to this approach is leveraging ECU's location within Perth's cultural precinct, establishing strong alliances with institutions like the Art Gallery of Western Australia, the Perth Institute of Contemporary Art, and the Aboriginal Cultural Centre. These partnerships create opportunities for student involvement, staff development, and collaborative programming.

Engagement with First Nations communities—locally, nationally, and internationally—is essential, with initiatives like residencies, scholarships, and research collaborations. Co-ownership of First Nations artworks and collections will further strengthen community connections and ECU's cultural programming, supported by philanthropy and external funding.

First Nations staff leadership in content development, programming, and management will be integral to embedding these practices, ensuring the cultural narrative is actively lived across the university. Through Moort, ECU creates a thriving ecosystem of relationships that fosters mutual benefit, visibility, and cultural leadership across all facets of university life.

1 Internal Collaboration & Strategic Planning

- Break down silos by fostering collaboration between disciplines and schools, using the cultural narrative as a shared guiding framework for strategic planning and implementation.
- Consider embedding the cultural narrative into internal policies, planning processes, and committees, ensuring that diverse areas of the university align with shared cultural goals.
- Encourage cross-disciplinary initiatives that bring together seemingly unrelated areas, such as the arts and technology, to create innovative programs and experiences.

2 Partnerships with Local Cultural Institutions

- Establish formal partnerships with key cultural institutions in Boorloo (Perth), including the Art Gallery of Western Australia, the Perth Institute of Contemporary Art, the State Library, and the State Theatre Centre of WA, to provide students with opportunities for internships, exhibitions, and collaborative projects.
- Develop joint programming with these institutions, allowing ECU to participate in public events, exhibitions, and performances that reflect the cultural narrative.

3 Engagement with First Nations Communities

- Build long-term, reciprocal relationships with First Nations communities, both locally and internationally, ensuring their involvement in co-designing programs, exhibitions, and initiatives.
- Support outreach programs that include residencies, scholarships, and collaborative research projects, providing mutual benefit to students, researchers, and community members.



4 Co-Ownership of Art and Cultural Collections

- Explore co-ownership opportunities for First Nations artworks and collections, fostering formal collaborations with artists and communities to guide exhibition curation and storytelling.
- Use philanthropy, grants, and external funding to support these initiatives, enhancing ECU's visibility and reputation within the arts and cultural sectors.

5 Student and Alumni Engagement

- Engage current students and alumni in exhibitions, performances, and creative projects that reflect their experiences and the cultural narrative, fostering a sense of belonging and community.
- Provide opportunities for students to participate in gallery programming, digital storytelling, and international collaborations, ensuring they are active contributors to ECU's cultural landscape.

6 Digital and Public Engagement Partnerships

- Collaborate with local, national, and international partners across public and digital spaces to extend the reach of ECU's cultural narrative through events, performances, and online platforms.
- Use CAPE (Creative Activation and Public Engagement) to facilitate partnerships that prioritise ethical collaboration and community involvement, ensuring public engagement aligns with ECU's values.

7 Employment and Content Development

- Increase the employment of First Nations staff in areas such as content development, programming, gallery management, and collection curation, to ensure their leadership and perspectives are embedded in key initiatives.
- Appoint dedicated staff roles, such as a collections database officer, to ensure the accurate management and respectful use of cultural materials.



By aligning with Moort, the Ecosystem layer, ECU staff can create deep, collaborative relationships across all aspects of university life. These relationships—whether internal, local, or international—are built on mutual respect, reciprocity, and shared goals, ensuring the cultural narrative flourishes through meaningful partnerships. This collaborative approach supports ECU in achieving global impact, while maintaining a strong connection to local communities and First Nations knowledge systems.



Djinda Worlal – Stars, constellations: characterised by aspiration

The fifth and final layer is where ECU can dream and build – and is not an end point or goal but part of a continuous improvement cycle. This principle encompasses what we achieved and triggers the evaluation component of this strategic framework. It qualitatively and quantitatively measures where we have been, how far we have come and what is still to come.

This principle speaks to and embodies ideas around sustainability. This will include employing sustainable digital and other technologies to support content within the ECU city campus and across all campuses. It will mean developing a framework that thinks about obsolescence of technology and mediums so that replacement is minimised. The cultural narrative will deeply inform the content and will describe the parameters around this content, both from a protocol but also a cohesion lens.

It will relate to sustainability in workforce strategy and development and will operate within a collegiate lattice of improvement pathways for all staff, at all levels, with regards

to career advancement, representation and leadership. As part of this, the strategy implicitly carries the aspiration of full cultural competency expectation across every facet of ECU life, that begins within the architectural spaces themselves. This may include Indigenous-specific anti-racism strategies, and immersion into Noongar language and cultural materials.

Importantly, Djinda will offer a structure that integrates various mechanisms to speak externally about ECU's achievements and leadership development in the sector – to take our wins to the world, so to speak, in a way that fits within the broader cultural narrative strategy. This is the part where evaluation and assessment of our achievements against the University's stated aims will occur.

The cultural narrative strategy has a structure that works like an upward spiral. The principle of Djinda pulls the spiral ever further upwards, after rigorous evaluation, review and implementation of new goals, with each strategy review reaching further than the previous.

In essence, this procedural framework of systematic university review and evaluation, and subsequent implementation of change based off the evaluation, will enable this strategic framework to be agile, consistently reaching towards the final principle of Djinda – the stars and sky – and to continuously bolden our aspirations. This criticality and identification of success will be key drivers to enable best practice for the university. This evaluation and review component of the strategy should be informed by how broadly and collaboratively the principles were participated in and engaged with by departments and schools, in keeping with the holistic cultural narrative.



Summary

The ambition of ECU's cultural narrative framework is to embed Noongar knowledge systems at the heart of the university, while fostering inclusive, interconnected narratives that reflect the diversity of local, national, and global communities. Through the guiding structure of The Life Layers and Birdiya Yok Bidi, this framework creates a foundation for collaborative relationships, responsive practices, and sustainable growth, ensuring that ECU's identity and impact are shaped by reciprocity, respect, and shared knowledge.

The intent is to integrate these narratives into all aspects of university life, from curriculum and research to campus design, governance, and partnerships. This work envisions ECU as a vibrant hub of cultural exchange, where meaningful conversations and partnerships foster innovation, belonging, and community impact. By embedding Indigenous perspectives and embracing diverse ways of knowing, ECU commits to leading with cultural integrity, breaking down silos, and creating transformative opportunities for students, staff, and external collaborators alike. The ultimate purpose is to ensure that place, identity, and relationships remain central to ECU's growth, enabling the university to thrive as a space of connection, inclusion, and learning for generations to come.


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