

Division:	Fellowship Engagement	Ref. No.	POL-3026
Department:	Fellowship Services		
Title:	Welcome to Country and Acknowledgement of Country at College Meetings and Events in Australia		

1. PURPOSE AND SCOPE

This policy outlines the protocols for recognising the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people as the Traditional Owners of the land at official College meetings and events in Australia. The College recognises that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have strong and enduring cultural connections to the land and that showing appropriate respect is an important part of reconciliation.

2. KEYWORDS

Welcome, Acknowledgement, Country, Ceremony, Aboriginal, Torres Strait Islander, Elders, Land Councils.

3. BODY OF POLICY

3.1. Definitions

3.1.1. Welcome to Country

A "Welcome to Country" is a formal ceremony performed by Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander people to welcome visitors to their traditional land. It can only be performed by a Traditional Custodian from that particular "Country" where the event is being held. This is usually a recognised Elder or person from that land.

It can take many forms, depending on the particular culture of the traditional owners, and may include singing, dancing, smoking ceremonies or a speech in traditional language and/or English.

3.1.2. Acknowledgement of Country

An Acknowledgement of Country is a statement of recognition of the Traditional Owners of the land on which the event is being held and a demonstration of respect for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural protocols.

It can be performed by an Aboriginal, Torres Strait Islander or non-Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander person who is not a Traditional Custodian of the land on which the event is being held.

The appropriate statement is:

I would like to acknowledge the Traditional Owners of the land on which we are meeting, the [insert appropriate group] people, and pay my respects to Elders past and present.

3.2. Sensitivity around Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Cultural Protocols

3.2.1. If Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are involved in an event or meeting it is important that the nature of the event and the expected proceedings are discussed with the representatives prior to the event taking place.

3.3. Welcome to Country

3.3.1. The Welcome to Country should be the first item on the order of proceedings for an event.

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3.3.2. At official events it is customary for a speaker directly following an Elder performing a Welcome to Country to make a brief Acknowledgement of Country. This demonstrates respect for the Elder and is acceptable practice.

College events where it would be desirable for a Welcome to Country to be performed by an Aboriginal Elder from the local community include:

- a. RACS Annual Scientific Congress, when held in Australia
- b. RACS Regional Annual Scientific Meetings
- c. Special College events where there are invited members of the public and/or dignitaries
- d. Special College events as determined by staff managing events (e.g. Trauma Week)

3.3.3. A Welcome to Country usually attracts a fee.

3.3.4. When it is not possible to arrange a Welcome to Country at such events, an Acknowledgement of Country should occur.

3.4. Acknowledgement of Country

3.4.1. An Acknowledgement is a respectful public acknowledgment of the Traditional Custodians of the land. It is important that the appropriate custodians are acknowledged depending on the location of the event. Care must be taken to identify the appropriate custodians for the particular location (Country).

It is appropriate for the host of the meeting or event to make the Acknowledgement unless a person has been specifically asked to perform this.

College events where an Acknowledgement of Country should be considered include:

- a. Council Meetings
- b. President's Christmas Drinks
- c. College wide staff meetings
- d. Any high level College Boards and Regional Committees (e.g. Governance and Advocacy Committee (GAG), Education Board, Professional Development and Standards Board)
- e. Foundation for Surgery events
- f. College Open Days
- g. At all professional development, training and skills courses run by the College
- h. Public launch of new initiatives
- i. Special events as determined by staff managing events

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3.5. Responsibilities

- 3.5.1. The responsibility for organising a Welcome to Country or Acknowledgement of Country rests with the Division, Regional Office, Secretariat or staff member organising the event.
- 3.5.2. The Manager, Fellowship Services will provide advice as requested.

4. ASSOCIATED DOCUMENTS

Welcome to Country and Acknowledgement of Country at College meetings and events held in Australia Procedure

Approver Professional Developments and Standards Board
Authoriser Council

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