

Clearing the Way: Deakin University and the Alfred Deakin legacy – a Tanderrum

Deakin University was named in recognition of Alfred Deakin, Australia's second Prime Minister and one of the key architects of Federation. Alfred Deakin was a complex individual who brings with him an equally complex legacy. This legacy has resulted in questions for us as a University, including from Alfred Deakin's own family members.

Deakin University has from its inception been committed to delivering an outstanding education and, in doing so, provide access to those individuals and communities who had been less well served in the past. For three-and-a-half decades, over a thousand Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have made their way to Deakin University, forging an enduring and dynamic relationship. Both the University and community have walked a path together over this time, and in times of challenge both have navigated this path together.

The complex legacy of Alfred Deakin presents as a potential barrier and distraction on this path. The legacy of Alfred Deakin, the man, will always be viewed generationally through different lenses, and this has been the focus of a series of 'Alfred Deakin Legacy' conversations led by senior Indigenous leaders and including members of Alfred Deakin's family.

These conversations did not shy away from the divisive nature of some of Alfred Deakin's work, and the longitudinal impacts on an inclusive and mature nation.

The considered outcome of these conversations was that we needed to ensure that, through a Tanderrum, we define a path for Deakin University. We must ensure our way is clear of any impediments and encumbrances as we continue to deliver life-changing education for First Nations students and across our wider contribution to our communities.

Consensus was reached that the work of Deakin, the University, was critical to the national agenda and in particular for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and communities. To ensure unimpeded passage, the parties to this Tanderrum, underpinned by mutual respect for each other and the future generations of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, have arrived at a position that accounts for the past and garners the future.

We do, however, reject wholeheartedly being captured by, or colluding with, the darkness of history. We should all be drawn towards the light of the future.

Through this Tanderrum, both parties agree to reject the proposition to change the name of the University and jointly commit to truth-telling and elevating the understanding and acknowledgement of the full history of our country.