

RMIT NEXT Global Executive Series

Discussion #1 – April 21, 2020

Key Messages

Thank you for participating in the first discussion of the *RMIT NEXT Global Executive Strategy Discussion Series*.

This paper collates the key messages from the discussion, providing a platform to build upon throughout the Series.

Scene Setter

A number of presentations around the global context were provided to set the scene for the discussion. This included the Future of Work; Future of Education; Thoughts on our Global Environment; Opportunities in Europe; Vietnam, through our offshore partnerships (current and future); research partners; international student recruitment and pathways. The discussion was framed by three opening thoughts:

1. The current situation is changing our relationship between geographic locations and virtual networks. As education institutions around the world move to digital modes of delivery, we must reconsider the strategic value of our campuses and locations. How will our nerve centers evolve to become not just places for mass gatherings of students, but intensified offerings of our specialized studio environments, lab environments and places where collaboration can occur through clustering?
2. In the new atmosphere of Coronavirus tracking apps, border closures and police interventions, we need to adapt our ways of thinking about basic security and access. By rethinking global entitlements and who has access to countries, cities, health systems and education, we can examine the nature of economic citizenship and our role in addressing global inequality. How can security, access and pathways be redesigned and enhanced by building trust and definitions of global competence, that fit with our mission and our values?
3. This crisis will lead us back into a more urgent set of efforts on sustainable development. It will prompt us to reconsider our responsibility to contribute sustainably to the ecosystems surrounding each of our key global operations. The global situation has highlighted questions about our contribution and what matters most in order to create the most sustainable future for our institution.

Key Messages

- **2020 is a timely year to be thinking ahead**

The timing of the COVID-19 pandemic, when we are in our final year of our *Ready for Life and Work* strategy, creates a unique opportunity for RMIT to reconsider our global value proposition and future direction. As we experience a distinct shift in the global environment, we must consider what our contribution will be in a post COVID-19 world.

The recent digital transition of the education sector has highlighted the importance of technology and the ability for institutions to adapt to rapid change. RMIT's online delivery has proven that both our technological capability and agile approach position us to readily respond to a fast-changing world. However, looking ahead we must consider our ability as a global university to embody the three transformational competencies of creating new value, sharing responsibility and resolving conflicts, tensions and dilemmas.

- **We've never been so connected**

The COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted our capacity to connect – across campuses, countries, partners and pathways. With isolation restrictions prompting the rapid online transition of our learning, teaching, research and professional services, we have demonstrated our technological capability to transcend borders and stay connected as a global community.

As we look to the next five years, this digital connectivity presents new opportunities to further our collaboration, partnerships, student offerings and global reach. It also raises questions about the shifting importance of place, the role of our campuses in an increasingly digital world, and how we can continue to provide value to our students, staff, alumni and partners through our physical and digital presence.

- **We need to shift our thinking from location-centric to student-centric**

As a university with a global network of international students, staff, campuses and partnerships, RMIT has the potential to offer a truly global student journey. However, our campus-based student engagement narrative – in which students study at RMIT Melbourne, RMIT Vietnam or our partner institutions rather than simply RMIT – is limiting the way our students engage with our global network.

By shifting our thinking to place students at the center of their journey, with campus a secondary consideration, we would be able to better leverage the global benefits of RMIT's value proposition and increase the global connectivity of the RMIT student experience. Further, shifting our thinking away from campuses could enable us to unify our global approach to student recruitment, partnerships and pathways.

- **Being ‘global’ is shifting away from geographic places**

The COVID-19 situation is changing our relationship with place. As the world moves online, our perception of connectivity and identity are becoming less entrenched in geographic locations. This is shifting security and access – to cities, countries, markets and organisations – creating new opportunities to increase our global reach.

The digital transition is also shifting the role of our campuses away from places of traditional information transfer, to potential innovative precincts of connectivity and collaboration. While our campuses will continue to contribute to our institutional value proposition, the increasing digital connectivity of our offerings may result in a global presence that is not defined by our campuses or geographic locations. This could present new opportunities to move into neighbouring countries and rural areas, without establishing a physical presence in these regions.

- **Sustainability will be a key concern as we emerge from COVID-19**

A positive outcome of the current situation is the environmental impact of reduced human mobility, with pollution in major urban areas falling drastically since the implementation of COVID-19 social distancing restrictions. This has demonstrated the potential for a low-carbon future, bringing environmental sustainability to the forefront of public debate and increasing the urgency of sustainable development efforts. Our research work on sustainability, including out of RMIT Europe, places us in a position to leverage this opportunity.

As RMIT plans for its next five years, we must consider our role as a global university and how we contribute to the ecosystems around us.

Our *Ready for Life and Work* strategy recognized the importance of sustainability by focusing on the long-term management of our resources. How can our next strategy build on this to ensure environmental sustainability continues to be a priority and part of our global identity?

- **Partnerships have never been more important**

As the education sector experiences rapid change and expected decreases in student demand, we must create new opportunities to maintain RMIT’s scale, complexity and impact in a post COVID-19 world. These opportunities could be established through creating new international partnerships at scale. Our *Ready for Life and Work* strategy prompted our thinking around how to build a ‘networked university’. As we look beyond 2020, we must consider how to put this into practice and find new ways to embed RMIT into strategic regions offshore.

This could be through pursuing new major industry partners, as utilized by many universities in Vietnam; by focusing on applied research aligned to government and industry priorities, as demonstrated by RMIT Europe; or by seeking out partnerships that will provide access to new student groups, such as vocational education in Vietnam. As we consider partnership possibilities, we should also reflect on how our global offshore partnerships can enhance our onshore offerings, global community and the overall RMIT contribution.

- **We need to decide what we want to be known for globally**

The timing of the COVID-19 pandemic provides a unique opportunity for RMIT to rethink our global value proposition and shape how we want to be known. As we consider the contribution RMIT will offer in five years, we also must consider whether we have the right mix of people and infrastructure to deliver what we want to be known for in each place.

Do we want to be known as a gateway – to geographic areas, resources, research and a diverse global community? This focus could provide the flexibility for innovative thinking that connects our students to industry in new ways and new places. It could enable us to leverage our global network and provide students with a more globally engaged educational journey.

Do we want to be known for our global capability and identity? Being a global university is a core part of RMIT's value proposition. However, can we be truly globally integrated if we continue to limit our operations to the English language? Adapting to the language of service and the language of the communities where we operate could increase our accessibility and further embed RMIT in different regions. It could also increase the global nature of our student community, providing more diversity within our campuses and RMIT network.

Next steps

As this summary has outlined, the first discussion in this Series was broad ranging and posed some big questions that require further exploration.

The next discussion will be held in June, with a framing paper circulated prior. In the meantime, please continue to engage in the discussion via the Microsoft Teams Group. We will also use workshops to have break away discussions – and we encourage any members of the Global Executive who are interested in exploring a topic within a smaller group to take this forward as a workshop, and report back to the Series. The NEXT team can assist in organising and facilitating workshops or team-based discussions.