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# Returning to learning

Starting or returning to study?  
Here's what you need to know.



## Contents

Introduction	2
Returning to study	3
New to uni-speak?	4
7 tips for balancing work, life and study	5
Here's what our students say	6
RMIT at a glance	11
What's in it for you?	12
Why choose RMIT?	13
Interested in applying?	14
Need more information?	14



**Don't let the unknown stop you. You'll find a way. You'll ask for help when you can't. And when you finish – an assignment, a course, the first year – you'll know it's been worth it.**

**Zara Smith** (cover image)

Bachelor of Business (Human Resource Management)

# Introduction

**First time at uni, or returning after a break?  
Here's what to expect.**

If it's your first time at uni, or your first time back in a long time, you may have some questions about what it's going to be like. You're not the only one.

It may surprise you to find out that 30 per cent of RMIT students are mature age students, who are usually 'non-Year 12s' entering study after life experiences other than high school; are aged over 25; and who might've taken extended breaks to pursue careers, raise families or go travelling before continuing their studies.

The gap between high school and university could be a few months or a few years, but no matter how long you've been away from study, it's never too late to get back into it.

So, if you're thinking about returning to learning, this guide will give you the information and insight you need to feel more confident in taking the next steps.

We hope you find it helpful.

Sincerely,

**RMIT**

The RMIT team

# Returning to study

Starting or returning to uni can seem daunting at first, but it's a lot easier if you know what to expect ahead of time.

For Zara Smith, taking the plunge and going back to uni at 31 brought with it a whole different set of challenges compared with entering university straight from high school. Zara's experience isn't uncommon among returning students.

"There were so many questions running through my head," she says. "How do I write an essay again? How do I cope being the oldest student in the room? How will I manage with other life commitments like full-time work, overseas assignments, planning a wedding and managing a household?"

For non-Year 12 students, starting university – or re-entering after a long absence – can seem daunting at first.

In Zara's case, keeping in mind her end goal of upskilling and taking her career in recruitment to the next level was key in keeping up her momentum towards finishing her degree. Her advice to other mature age students: "Don't let the unknown stop you".

"You'll find a way. You'll ask for help when you can't. And when you finish – an assignment, a course, the first year – you'll know it's been worth it," she says.

Any initial nervousness will usually fall away once you get immersed in your studies. But if you want to be prepared ahead of time, here are some things to think about when considering further study.

## Keep your end goal in mind

Whether you're interested in switching career paths, going further in your existing role or just learning more about a topic that interests you, it's important to always keep your end goal in mind when commencing further study.

For Diploma of Building and Construction (Building) student Madeline Blackwood, realising she liked organising teams and seeing projects come together gave her the impetus to enrol at university and complete her diploma.



Zara Smith

Along with recommending new students stay focused on the goal that's brought them to university in the first place, she advises them to overcome any reluctance to ask for help along the way.

"Ask all the questions you can. It's okay not to know everything. ... You just have to dive in. You'll be amazed by what you can accomplish."

## Balancing work, life and study may not be as hard as you think

Balancing study with full-time work, family and personal commitments can seem overwhelming at times. But keeping your eye on the finish line can help.

For Kathy Bates, who studied the Master of Public Policy, studying what she's passionate about meant that it became less about how to do something and more about how much she wanted the result.

"I loved [my course], so it didn't feel like work. I had six-hour classes on a Saturday and they went by in a blink. I didn't need to prioritise [study] because I wanted to do it," Kathy says.

"When you find things you enjoy, you just make it work."

So before you ask yourself how to make it happen, ask how much you want the end goal.

If your reason for studying is not compelling enough, then your ability to find balance will seem like a struggle. But if you have a compelling enough 'why', managing your priorities will still be a juggling act but, ultimately, you'll make it work.



Kate Mildenhall

## You're not the only one

It can come as a surprise to learn that around 30 per cent of RMIT students are aged between 25 and 44.

When you enrol, expect to be sharing the classroom with people at all stages of life, including those training to advance in their jobs or re-skilling for a change in direction.

## We're here to help you make the most of your studies

Many students at RMIT achieve beyond their expectations, like Kate Mildenhall, author of *Skylarking*.

"I sat in my first year of classes sighing and swooning every time I heard a writer tell us about landing a publishing deal, or being invited to a writers festival. It seemed so impossible a dream," she says.

"Now, those things have happened to me, and I can only say that it would have been impossible without this course, all that I have learnt and the connections I have made during my time at RMIT. The teachers, tutors and guests are first-class."

# New to uni-speak?

If you've never studied at university before, or a lot of things have changed since you've last been here, the terminology used to describe different study options can be confusing. We've put together a short explainer to make sense of it all.

## Levels of study

Most unis offers a range of qualifications. These can include undergraduate degrees, vocational diplomas and certificates, and advanced postgraduate degrees. Here's the difference between them.

## Undergraduate qualifications

### Bachelor and associate degrees

University qualifications such as bachelor and associate degrees take between two and five years to complete, and classes consist of lectures and tutorials. Full-time students will have between 12 and 20 contact hours per week and may need to spend the same amount of time studying outside of class.

Your contact hours on campus will often include lectures that are generally one to two hours long and can include anywhere from 30 to 350 students. Tutorials generally run for one hour and are smaller and less formal, allowing students to discuss and develop ideas that have been introduced in lectures. Your coursework can vary and may involve assignments, reading and group work.

### Certificates and diplomas

Certificates, diplomas and advanced diplomas are considered vocational education courses and are hands-on and practical in nature. These take between six months and two years to complete, with classes including a mixture of seminars, practical labs and workshops. A full-time student will have between 20 and 30 contact hours a week, with less work required outside of class in comparison to a university degree.

## Postgraduate qualifications

### Graduate certificates and diplomas

A graduate certificate or diploma is completed after studying a bachelor degree and can help you build on the knowledge gained during your undergraduate degree or give you extra vocational skills to broaden your employment options. A graduate certificate usually takes six months to one year of full-time study, and a diploma between one and two years. [More information on these and other postgraduate study options can be found here.](#)

If you're considering applying but have questions about any of the qualifications listed above, we have a whole team of experts who'd be happy to help. Come [visit](#), or [contact us](#) at any time.

## Study pathways

Study pathways are ways for you to transfer from one RMIT course to another, based on your previous educational experience. There's often more than one way to get into a degree, so don't worry if you don't meet all the entry criteria at first.

Your previous studies may be recognised in one of two ways:

- Completed or partly completed certificate, diploma and advanced diploma qualifications may be credited towards a degree.
- Partly completed degree studies may be credited to other RMIT courses.

Some certificates and diplomas allow you to earn credit that may be transferred to a degree at a later stage. Having previous study acknowledged may reduce the duration of your course and save you

money. Alternatively, partly completed studies may be credited to other RMIT courses. There are a number of recognised pathway options, and you can [check here to see if a course you're interested in offers these.](#)

## Full-time and part-time study?

Full-time and part-time study refers to how many subjects you will complete in a semester. For an undergraduate course, you will tend to do four (or sometimes three) subjects per semester. Part-time refers to one or two subjects per semester.

Full-time study is generally three to four days per week, and may include 12–16 hours of classes weekly (four subjects per semester). Part-time is roughly half this time.

Full-time vocational education study is generally three to four days per week, and may include about 20 hours of classes weekly. Part-time is roughly half this time.

## Recognition of prior learning (RPL) and credit transfers

Recognition of prior learning (RPL) is where your previous work and life experiences – along with any formal, informal or non formal learning – are assessed, and determines whether your knowledge could be worth credit in lieu of study. This means you don't have to spend time learning things you already know.

A credit transfer is where your previous formal study is assessed. If you can demonstrate you meet the learning outcomes for some of your RMIT courses, then you'll receive a transfer of credit from your previous study to your RMIT course/s.

## Apply via VTAC vs apply direct

VTAC is the Victorian Tertiary Admissions Centre and the main application centre in Victoria for universities. Most students apply for university via VTAC each year.

But if you're not straight out of high-school (a 'non-Year 12 applicant'), and if you haven't already applied through VTAC for the coming intake, and you're only applying for one course, then you might be eligible to apply directly to RMIT using our in-house application system. You can check if your course accepts direct applications via the 'apply' button on the online course description.

Direct applications are available for most of RMIT's vocational education courses and a number of higher education courses.

# 7 tips for balancing work, life and study

Studying at uni is undoubtedly worthwhile for its long-term payoffs in terms of your career progression and earning potential, but in the short-term it's usually not the only thing going on in your life.

2

With that in mind, we've put together some tips for ensuring you take the time to focus on your studies, without sacrificing too much in other areas.

1

## Get the support of those around you

Professor Sara Charlesworth, from RMIT's School of Management and Centre for People, Organisations and Work, suggests that extra study is likely to affect (and benefit) more than just you, so it's important to communicate what it means for your support network.

"Sit down with your family or your manager and tell them why returning to study is important to you," she says.

"You are going to need them on side during your studies as there may be ups and downs along the way."

## Plan your time

"The first thing to recognise is that some things are going to have to give way to fit your study," Professor Charlesworth says.

"If you're working full-time, consider dropping back your hours or, if that's not possible, enrol to study on a part-time basis. Plan for your study like you would any new endeavour. Whether the course is for six months or four years, you need to make it become part of your everyday life."

She recommends using calendars or planners to work out how assignments or exams will be spaced out – especially important if you are doing multiple assignment-based courses where deadlines may be close together or overlap.

3

## Get out of the house

It can be far too tempting to get distracted by housework (or Netflix), when an essay deadline is looming. Leaving the house to find a place where you can focus can often help. Try the silent section of your library, a [study area at RMIT](#) or a local café (if you don't mind a bit of background noise).

4

## Be realistic with your expectations

"Be reasonable about what is doable in the time you have and make sure you build in some downtime. Life events have a habit of getting in the way of study, and that's OK," Professor Charlesworth says.

It's also important to keep communicating with your lecturers and teachers. They are aware of the challenges their students face and can give advice or assistance if you're struggling.

5

## Learn in a way that suits your lifestyle

Are you after flexible learning? Check whether your course is offered online or part-time.

Where's the campus located and how will you get there? Think about where you want to study.

Do you need childcare or other support services?

Have a question you can't easily find an answer to? Most universities have advisors and help centres, to assist, like [RMIT Connect](#).

6

## Don't sacrifice too much for your study

"While you will have to make some sacrifices to fit study into your life, it's important not to take on too much, otherwise you'll resent your studies, which will start to affect other parts of your life," says Professor Charlesworth.

Don't overload yourself – just complete your course more slowly if home or work-life becomes too busy. If you don't feel rushed, you will learn more deeply and also enjoy the learning process more.

7

## Keep your end goal in mind

When considering a return to study, you need to work out what your end goal is and then use that to keep motivated. It could be a career change, the next step up at work or a way to fulfil your passions. Whatever it is, it has to be compelling enough to motivate you or you won't do it.

# Here's what our students say

RMIT has over 80,000 students studying to take the next steps in their career, start a new one or learn more about what they love. Don't listen to us tell you why further study is a great idea – hear it from them.



**Being in the middle of a complete career change myself, I can empathise with not knowing what you want to do. It has taken life experiences to push me in this direction.**

**Laura Gleich**

Advanced Diploma of Business (Public Relations)

[Read Laura's story](#)





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Take up every opportunity that comes your way so that you get as much benefit out of your studies and your time at RMIT as you can. Study hard and don't be afraid to ask questions!

**Al Hancock**

Diploma of Logistics

[Read Al's story](#)



“

The teaching staff and students in the program are extraordinary. I would stay forever just to be able to learn from and with such a talented bunch. Also, I love the City campus, its proximity to my work, and the flexibility of being able to study part-time.

**Kate Mildenhall**

Associate Degree in  
Professional Writing and Editing

[Read Kate's story](#)

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**I was lucky enough to land my dream job before I even graduated, and it was through the opportunities provided to me by RMIT.**

**Courtney Saunders**  
Advanced Diploma of Myotherapy

[Read Courtney's story](#)





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**Studying the vocational education program first definitely helped me transition back to uni life, and the amount of practical activities really helped me.**

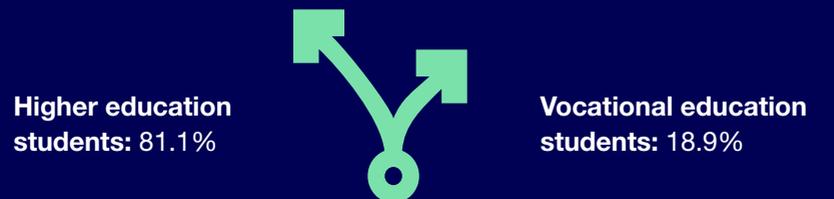
**Levi Sepuesca**  
Certificate IV in Marketing and Advanced Diploma of Marketing\*, and Bachelor of Business (Marketing) (Applied)

[Read Levi's story](#)

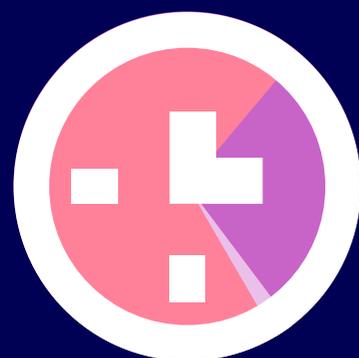
\* Programs replaced by Certificate IV in Marketing and Communication, and Advanced Diploma of Marketing and Communication

# RMIT at a glance

For over 130 years, RMIT has helped hundreds of thousands of students learn new skills, start new careers and go on to great things. We've changed a lot in that time. Here's what our student population looks like today.



**Female: 46.5%**  
**Male: 53.4%**  
**Trans or non-binary: 0.1%**



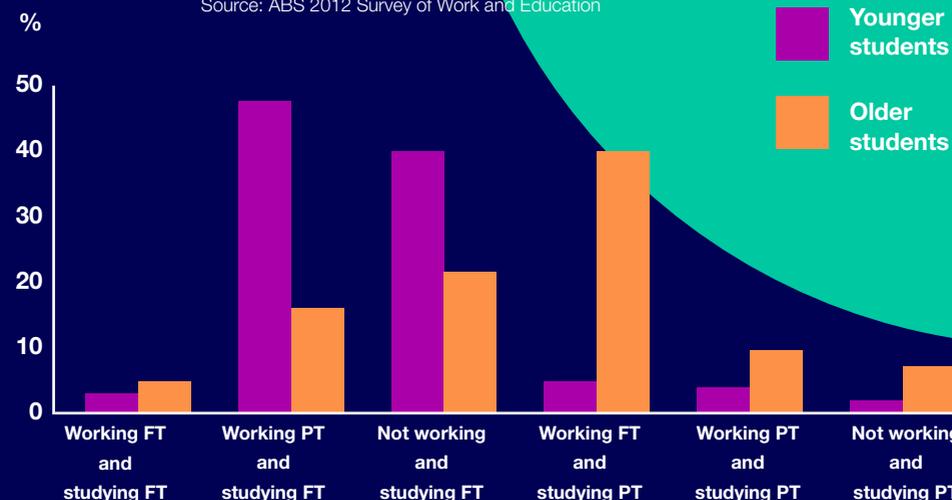
**Full-time: 71.6%**  
**Part-time: 26.7%**  
**Distance/online: 1.7%**



**Age**  
**15-19: 20%**  
**20-24: 46%**  
**25-44: 29%**  
**Over 45: 5%**

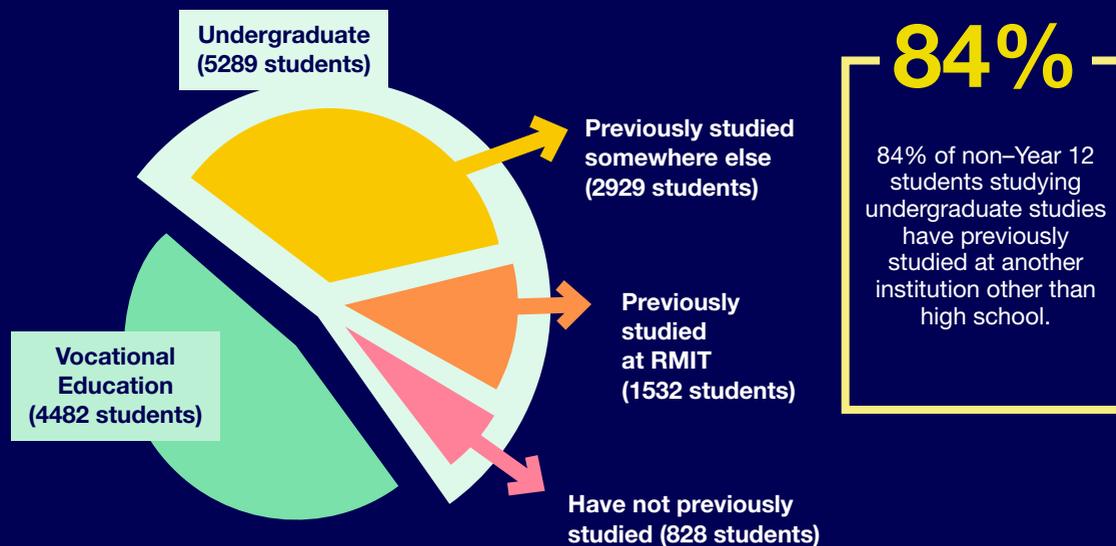
## Students by working hours and enrolment type

Source: ABS 2012 Survey of Work and Education



## Non-Year 12 enrolments

Source: RMIT Insights and Analytics



# What's in it for you?

RMIT is serious about getting you ready for what comes after university. To do that, a number of opportunities and support services have been developed to help you maintain your momentum while studying. Check out [life at RMIT](#).



## A real-world education

### > Future Ready

Future Ready is an RMIT initiative designed to help you succeed. Learn how to impress employers in our resumé-building workshops, get valuable job search advice and improve your interview game.

### > RMIT Activator

If you're an entrepreneur in the making, RMIT Activator can help you open a pop-up store, establish a social venture or commercialise your big tech idea.

### > Job Shop

This is your drop-in service centre for all things career related. Get info on job skills workshops and networking sessions, careers events, career health checks, resumé tips and online careers resources, and explore volunteer opportunities that could land you your dream job.

## A life beyond lectures

As an RMIT student, you'll find there are so many ways to make the most of your uni days. Whether it's joining a sporting team or social club, starting a band or taking a ski trip, there really is something for everyone.

### > Arts and Culture

You don't have to be an arts student to take part in RMIT's writing, dance, design, film, and visual and performing arts programs.

### > Clubs and Societies

If you're after a chance to meet new people and gain new skills, join one of the 135 student-run clubs and societies.

### > Sports and fitness

What's life with all study and no play? Whether it's sporting, personal training or a cheeky game of badminton you seek, check out your sport and fitness options at RMIT.

## Support while you study

### > Enrolment Support Lab

Staff at the Enrolment Support Lab are available to assist you with your enrolment and help you to submit documents that cannot be uploaded online.

### > Global study and work

You can study, work or travel overseas as part of your studies. RMIT has global work, exchange and study experiences to suit you at every stage of study and life.

### > Study and Learning Centre

Receive free study and learning advice while studying at RMIT. Build your academic skills in a friendly environment and improve your general academic study, writing and maths, statistics, physics and chemistry skills with experienced learning advisors.

### > Child Care

RMIT City Campus Children's Centre provides long day care to make sure your kids are in capable hands and close by while you study.

### > Equitable Learning Services (ELS)

RMIT provides support and equal opportunities for students with disabilities, long-term illnesses and/or mental health conditions, as well as for students who are primary carers of individuals with a disability.

### > Computer access

Take advantage of our student computer labs, some of which are open 24/7. If you'd prefer to use your own laptop, tablet or smartphone, you can connect to our wireless network on any RMIT campus.



# Why choose RMIT?

At RMIT you'll experience an education that prepares you for success, encourages you to think differently and equips you with the skills and knowledge to excel in your chosen career.



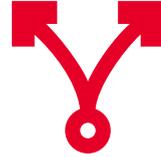
## Future ready

RMIT students are equipped with world-class technical skills, as well as an in-depth understanding of current industry practices.



## Thinking spaces

Whether you're studying in the heart of Melbourne's CBD or at our Bundoora or Brunswick campuses, you'll have access to spaces and facilities designed to let you explore, learn, research and create.



## Flexible learning

RMIT courses are designed to give you the flexibility to reach your career goals without putting your life on hold.

Online and part-time study options are available to let you learn in a way that suits your lifestyle.



## Global opportunities

RMIT is one of Australia's leading universities for international exchange.

We let you make your mark on the world through a unique study experience tailor-made for you.



## Expertise in teaching

Learn from teachers and lecturers who apply their research discoveries and specialist expertise directly to your course.



## Grow and discover

Studying at RMIT is a transformative experience that will see you encounter new people, places and ideas.





## Interested in applying?

Every university is different. Here's how we work.

Studying as a mature age student is a big choice to make, but also a worthwhile one. If you're interested in taking the next step and applying for a course, here's how to do it at RMIT.

At RMIT, the application process can vary a little according to the type of course you're interested in and your previous educational experience. If you know which course you want to apply for, just search for it on our website, select the course you're interested in and then click the 'apply' button once you're on the page.

The apply page for each course will contain specific information about intake dates and what you need to start the application process. If you're not sure which course you want to apply for, then you can [browse available courses here](#). You're also welcome to contact us if you have any questions about how or when to apply for a particular RMIT course.

## Need more information?

Get in touch if you have any questions about studying at RMIT.

### Local student enquiries

Tel. +61 3 9925 2260

### International student enquiries

Tel. +61 3 8676 7047

### Visit us

Speak to a member of the RMIT team in person by visiting us at [Info Corner](#), located diagonally across from Melbourne Central at the corner of Swanston and La Trobe streets.

This information is designed for Australian and New Zealand citizens and permanent residents of Australia.

Disclaimer: Every effort has been made to ensure the information contained in this publication is accurate and current at the date of printing.

For the most up-to-date information, please refer to the RMIT University website before lodging your application. Visit [www.rmit.edu.au](http://www.rmit.edu.au). RMIT University CRICOS Provider Code: 00122A. RMIT University Registered Training Organisation code: 3046. Prepared October 2017. 14708 1017