

TOP 50 VOICES IN STUDENT ENGAGEMENT



RMIT University
Club Program Coordinator

Jack is dedicated to enhancing student experiences by managing volunteers, engaging stakeholders, and ensuring efficient operations. His mission is to foster strong relationships, lead with integrity, and drive community engagement through effective communication, collaboration, and financial management.



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Can you share a bit about your background and the journey that led you to your current role?

Originally from Aireys Inlet on the Great Ocean Road, I hold a Bachelor of Applied Science from the University of Ballarat (now Federation University). After graduation, I worked with the World Masters Games and in corporate health.

In mid-2004, I answered a job advertisement in the AFL footy record for a position in South Africa promoting Australian Football. Although I didn't realise it was a volunteer role, I spent most of 2005 and 2006 in South Africa's North West Province, running clinics and training players, coaches, umpires, and administrators in Potchefstroom, Rustenburg, and Vryburg. Living with host families in townships was an eye-opener.

Working in South Africa was one of the best things I have ever done, and I recommend working internationally to anyone. It pushes you outside your comfort zone, forces you to learn new skills and languages, and can set you up for life.

Upon returning to Australia, I joined AFL Northern Territory, where I ran football programs in Darwin and remote communities. I later moved to a role involving clubs and leagues in Darwin and regional centres like Katherine, Tennant Creek, Wadeye, Tiwi Islands, and Gove.

After five years in Darwin, I returned to Melbourne to work at RMIT managing Sport and Recreation clubs. My role has changed significantly to be almost unrecognisable from how it started and the scope has expanded greatly. **I now manage 55 Sport and Creative clubs, 220 club leaders and two staff.**

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What are the key responsibilities and goals in your role for boosting student engagement and retention at your university?

RMIT offers clubs, club leaders, and students the chance to shape and co-create their experiences through inclusive, safe, and engaging activities. My role focuses on growing the club program by increasing membership and the number of clubs, while ensuring they operate efficiently. This creates opportunities for students to have fun, make connections, learn new skills, and enjoy their time at RMIT.

I manage the clubs' training, development, insurance, finance, risk management, and administration, all of which contribute to a successful environment. Our training includes RMIT's AAA (Active, Applied & Authentic) pedagogy, part of the current Education Plan. Clubs are a great way to develop individuals and enhance the university experience.

My work emphasizes risk management and safety, supported by a thorough understanding of RMIT's OHS and risk management frameworks. I consult with internal and external stakeholders to help clubs and student leaders succeed.



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What advice would you give to someone new to this field?

For someone new to working with clubs, building strong relationships and understanding club operations are essential. Start by engaging directly with club leaders to gain insights into their goals and challenges. Attend their meetings, training sessions, and events to see firsthand how the club operates and establish trust by being accessible and approachable.

Next, familiarize yourself with each club's structure, business plan, and finances. Understanding the club's hierarchy, decision-making processes, and strategic goals will help you identify where they may need support, such as in fundraising, marketing, or leadership development.

Stay updated on club activities, seek feedback, and adapt your approach based on the current circumstances. Effective communication is crucial—be clear and transparent about your role and how you can assist, and keep clubs informed about changes, opportunities, and resources. Regular updates help maintain engagement and ensure clubs feel supported.

Develop a supportive approach that empowers club leaders to succeed independently. Offer training, workshops, and resources that build their skills and confidence.

By focusing on relationship-building, operational understanding, continuous learning, and effective communication, you can successfully support clubs and contribute to their long-term success. Learn the roles of key stakeholders and make connections as quickly as possible.

What achievement in your role related to student engagement and retention are you most proud of, and why does it stand out to you?

I am most proud that **since I have been at RMIT, club memberships have increased by approximately 130%**. It's been wonderful to see increased engagement and a growing number of clubs being supported by RMIT.

I enjoy seeing students find their people, learn new skills, and make the most of their time at RMIT by joining a club. Many people tell me that their club involvement is one of the highlights of their time at university.

Alongside the improved engagement, I see our leadership development and club training offerings as a massive achievement. Clubs now have access to more resources, more assistance, and are generally better equipped to handle challenges beyond the university setting because of the skills gained through their club engagement at RMIT. The world is more complicated, our student leaders are busier than ever, and **I am so proud to have been able to help them prepare and grow skills they might not have otherwise developed.**

I like to think I will leave the RMIT clubs program in a better place than I found it.



What motivates you to continue working in student engagement?

I enjoy having a positive impact on students' journeys at RMIT while helping them foster a community, build skills, and grow during their university experience. Seeing students co-create their experiences and journeys is rewarding and makes it enjoyable to come to work every day.

Watching clubs grow, students connect, feel like they belong to RMIT, and become positive members of the community, as well as connected global citizens, is incredibly fulfilling. Every year, a new group of students get involved with clubs, which keeps my motivation strong. My role continues to evolve and broaden, which also keeps things interesting. There have been significant changes since I first started at RMIT, along with constant shifts in the university landscape in Australia.

Some of the best moments occur when talking with students at events or after training days. These interactions help build personal relationships, which are essential when working with both volunteers and paid staff. Such conversations truly highlight the value of the work I do and its impact on students' university experiences.

What strategies have you implemented to increase student involvement?

This is a challenging question to answer, as I find there are few truly new and innovative strategies, especially within a structured university environment. **My strategy is to ensure my outstanding club leaders have the tools, resources, and support needed to create a positive environment.** This, in turn, makes it easier to run clubs and creates multiple engagement opportunities for RMIT students and members of the RMIT community.

Additionally, finding highly engaged student leaders is key to ensuring clubs run successfully and provide opportunities for students to get involved.

Jack's top 10 essential skills for managing clubs:

- 01 CONFLICT RESOLUTION
- 02 ORGANISATION
- 03 NETWORKING
- 04 PUBLIC SPEAKING
- 05 MARKETING/PROMO
- 06 TIME MANAGEMENT
- 07 ATTENTION TO DETAIL
- 08 FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT
- 09 STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT
- 10 DATA ANALYSIS