

# Full-speed ahead as RMIT builds to wow tomorrow's education

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RMIT has a reputation for cutting-edge architecture, from the award-winning — but somewhat polarising — green, tessellated edifice of Storey Hall, to the sequinned cube of the university's new Design Hub.

Now RMIT's newest addition to Swanston Street, the Swanston Academic Building, is only six months from completion, with 400 construction workers doing split shifts to finish it by August. With its stippled, multi-hued edifice and dramatic, jagged interior and windows, RMIT wants it to challenge the "rack-and-stack" approach to high-rises — where people are installed on one level and rarely leave it — by creating a "permeable" building that encourages students to move between floors and mix with staff.

Within the 11-storey building will be seven "portals", or common areas, for students, each with a different theme.

The "cloud" portal will feature soft, white furniture, a cool southerly aspect and an emphasis on quiet discussion, while the "nightclub" portal is a place where students can play music and chat. An "industrial" portal will mimic the milk crate/retro aesthetic of Melbourne's cafe scene while the largest "landscape" portal will be planted with half-a-dozen mature trees and offer outdoor views of Swanston Street.

The aim, says Carey Lyon, one of the principal architects and director of Lyons Architecture, is to entice students to remain in the building and collaborate with each other, rather than disappearing into the city between classes.



The building overlooks the city.

"You go down to Melbourne Central and find students sitting around a cafe table and doing work together . . . we wanted to take that model and put it back into the building," Mr Lyon said.

One of the largest university building projects in Australia, the Swanston Academic Building wraps around the Oxford Scholar Hotel, also owned by RMIT, and has eye-catching triangular sun shading, placed according to thermal modelling.

Professor Ian Palmer, the head of the university's College of Business, which will be the tenant in the new building, said it was not built for Generation X, but for Generation Z and onwards. All floors will have high-speed wireless access and students will be able to download study material, compare notes with staff on moveable screens and indulge in what the jargon-happy education world calls "plug and play" learning. "The 'wow' factor is going to be pretty huge," Dr Palmer said.

The \$200 million building will take a large chunk out of the university's \$600 million budget for its building program, which includes the \$60 million-plus Design Hub on the corner of Swanston and Victoria streets, designed by Sean Godsell.



Construction workers are busy in RMIT's soon-to-be-completed Swanston Academic Building.