



Indigenous Fire and Rescue Employment Strategy Applicant and Participant Guide



Organisational Development and Leadership Unit

People and Culture

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Document overview

This document provides program details for Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people interested in applying for and participating in the Indigenous Fire and Rescue Employment Strategy (IFARES) Program.

About Fire and Rescue New South Wales

Fire and Rescue NSW (FRNSW) enhances community safety, quality of life and confidence by minimising the impact of hazards and emergency incidents for the people, environment, and economy of New South Wales. We play a critical role in building safety both legislatively and as a community service. We develop and deliver a range of community safety initiatives and prevention programs including FireED (fire education for primary schools) and IFAP (Intervention + Fire Awareness Program) to reduce fire-setting by young people. We work with other government agencies to minimise the impact of bushfires, storms, floods, landslides, building collapses, motor vehicle accidents and other emergencies.

We are a world class fire and rescue service with a long tradition of excellence in the protection of life, property, and the environment. FRNSW is made up of approximately 14,000 people state-wide, comprising approximately 7,000 retained (on-call) and permanent (full-time) firefighters and support staff, and around 7,000 community fire unit volunteers. FRNSW staff and volunteers are committed to maintaining the proud history and tradition of FRNSW, when serving the community and protecting the environment.

Firefighters are employed under a range of different working arrangements, including flexible and shift work hours to support the 24/7 response to emergencies.

About the IFARES Program

Purpose

IFARES is a recruitment readiness pathway for Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people residing within NSW and ACT (when applicable). This initiative has been designed by Aboriginal FRNSW staff and with our training partner, to increase the access for the Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people of NSW to enter careers with FRNSW.

History

The IFARES Program was established in 2014, following feedback from Aboriginal participants who took part in a 'firefighter for a day' event, held in Southwestern Sydney.

A pilot program was developed by Aboriginal FRNSW employees in collaboration with the FRNSW recruitment team and in partnership with TAFE NSW. The aim of this initiative was to increase employment access for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, residing in NSW to enter careers with FRNSW. The Pilot program exposed participants to the role, responsibilities and training of a firefighter. In addition, participants completed a Nationally Recognised Certificate in Fitness, and developed skills to support the application, interview and job-readiness requirements required of candidate firefighters.

The IFARES Program has grown exponentially since the initial pilot, with significant increase in interest and applications for IFARES. In 2021, a review of the IFARES Program was undertaken to evaluate, confirm the ongoing sustainability and seek opportunities to improve the program. Several improvements have been implemented to ensure the program reflects best practice and contributes to a diverse and inclusive culture at FRNSW. The improved program commenced in 2024.

Aim

The aim of the IFARES Program is to provide equity and opportunity for Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people to gain employment with FRNSW. Other goals include:

- Improving the recruitment practices of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people in FRNSW by raising awareness of unconscious bias in systems and processes
- Extending learnings to other emergency service agencies within Australia
- Building a supportive network of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander staff within FRNSW
- Enhancing the reputation and fire safety within at-risk communities



The program ensures Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people are provided equitable employment opportunities through:

- Enabling FRNSW to break down the barriers to recruitment
- Developing sustainable partnerships with Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people and communities
- Providing exposure to the roles and responsibilities of a firefighter
- Inspiring young people to be better and promote social change through accessing support services, reducing harm and increasing risk preparedness

The IFARES Program encourages Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people to consider careers with FRNSW and supports adult learning in a culturally safe environment where participants engage in hands on activities that can be physically, emotional and mentally challenging.

IFARES is a strategic priority for FRNSW aiming to enhance cultural alignment. It is managed by People and Culture at FRNSW who have the responsibility to oversee and coordinate the program.

Learning outcomes for IFARES participants

IFARES will provide participants with a genuine FRNSW recruit firefighter experience by immersing them into simulated training activities and routines of emergency first responders.

As part of the program, participants will engage with many aspects of FRNSW and will be exposed to a simulated version of the specialised training of FRNSW recruit firefighters, which will provide a broader experience of the capabilities of FRNSW.

Participants will also complete a Nationally Recognised Certificate III in Fitness provided by our training partner. The qualification will be delivered via a culturally safe and supportive adult learning environment with flexible online and face-to-face delivery.

A key outcome for participants is exposure to the FRNSW recruitment process. They will have targeted learning opportunities that will provide better insight relating to the recruitment of permanent firefighters. The participants throughout the program will undergo a multitude of physical, emotional, intellectual and social activities designed to build confidence, resilience and courage which will empower and inspire them towards a career with FRNSW or another of their choice. By the end of this program participants will be able to:

- Explain and display practical, theoretical, and technical skills associated with competency in FRNSW.
- Identify and demonstrate the features and benefits of effective leadership, teamwork, communication and community involvement.

- Demonstrate inter-personal, emotional and social skills and be able to solve problems, collaborate within a team and achieve outcomes for complex challenges.
- Consider a career path that suits their growing skillset, needs and interests.
- Conduct themselves as a potential representative of a trusted emergency service when working with Indigenous communities.

The IFARES Program encourages Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to consider careers with FRNSW and supports adult learning in a culturally safe environment where participants engage in hands on activities that can be physically, emotional, and mentally challenging. Additional outcomes for the IFARES participants include but are not limited to:

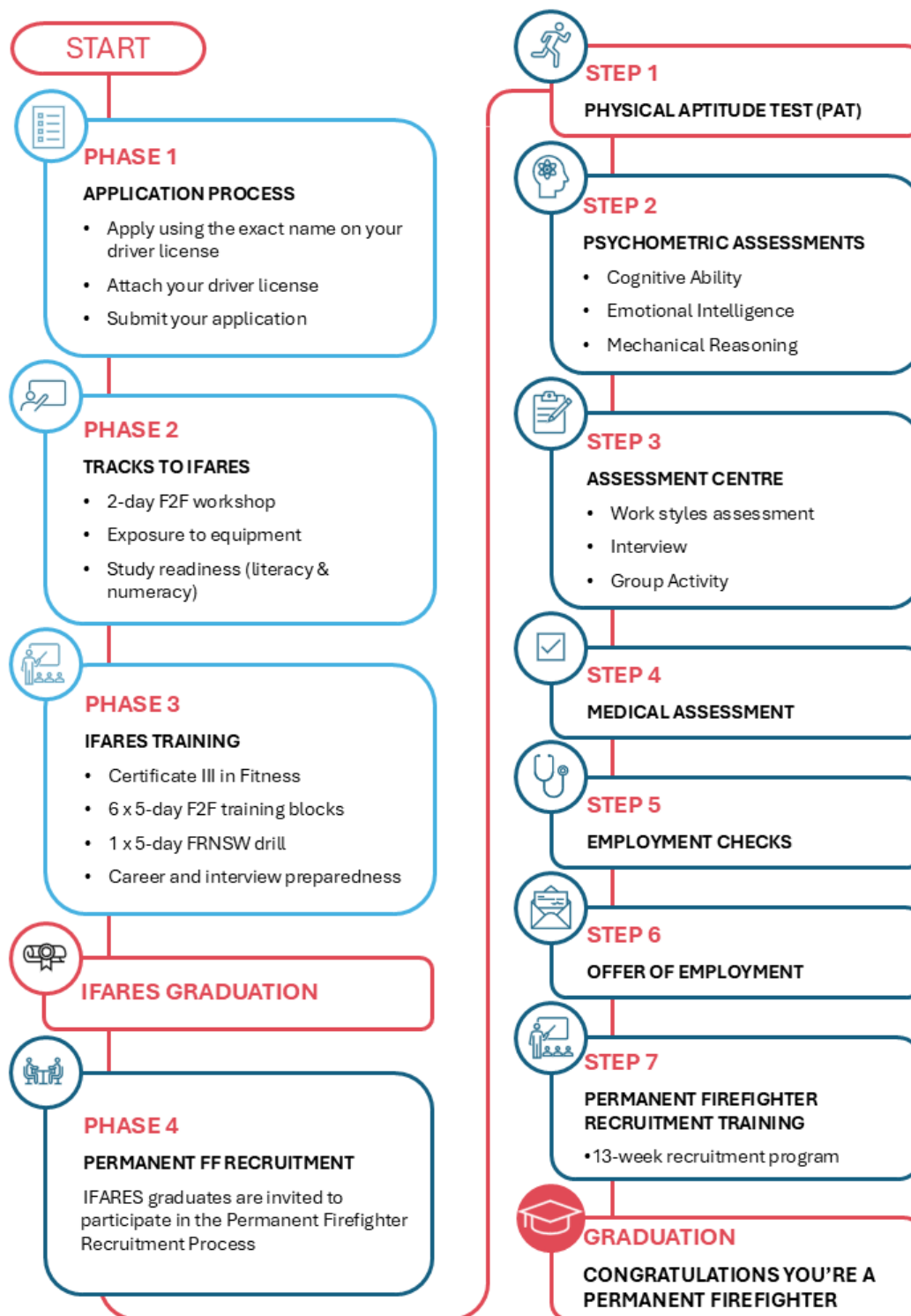
- Stronger sense of self
- Positive values
- Practical life skills
- Critical thinking
- Healthy relationships
- Cooperation and team building
- Conflict resolution
- Connection with other Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people
- Deeper connection to their community
- Resourceful problem solvers
- Educated and inspired to act



IFARES Program outline

The IFARES Program has four (4) phases with progression dependent on several assessment criteria:

- Phase 1 - Application
- Phase 2 - Tracks to IFARES
- Phase 3 - IFARES training
- Phase 4 - IFARES permanent firefighter recruitment pathway



Program phase 1: Application

The application phase consists of the applicant's desire for wanting to become a firefighter. For information on IFARES, interested applicants can visit the FRNSW IFARES website: <https://careers.fire.nsw.gov.au/ifares-faq-s>

The FRNSW careers website: <https://careers.fire.nsw.gov.au/permanent-firefighter> provides further information on working for FRNSW as a permanent firefighter.

Eligibility requirements

To apply for IFARES, participants must meet the following eligibility requirements:

- Identify as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander
- Australian citizen or Australian permanent resident or New Zealand citizen
- Minimum 18 years of age
- Reside within NSW for the duration of the program
- Valid Australian driver's licence, minimum Provisional (Red P1 or State/Territory equivalent) with demonstrated eligibility for Green P2 by the conclusion of the IFARES program
- On successful completion of the program, IFARES graduates are required to meet the satisfactory driving and criminal record requirements for permanent firefighter candidates:
 - Full licence holders must not exceed a maximum of 7 demerit points
 - Provisional licence holder must not exceed a maximum of 1 demerit point

More Information on driving requirements and criminal records checks are provided below.

Driving history

FRNSW emergency service provider and firefighters drive under emergency conditions. Being able to drive in a safe and responsible manner is an inherent requirement of the role. Candidates will be required to provide a current driving history record from the RMS (or equivalent within your state or territory) as evidence of a safe driving history.

All successful IFARES participants applying for permanent (full-time) firefighter positions in Phase 4 - IFARES permanent firefighter recruitment pathway will be assessed against the below driving criteria.

Candidates with minor traffic offences recorded against them will be considered in relation to:

- Consideration of overall traffic record e.g., ratio of not more than one (1) infringement for every two (2) years from the time the provisional driver licence is attained.
- If the candidate's result is considered borderline, an offence-free period of not less than 12 months since commission of offences / infringements may be taken into consideration as well as the general circumstances surrounding the infringements.

Candidates convicted of a Prescribed Concentration of Alcohol (PCA) offence (not including spent convictions) will be required to submit additional information, and unless the following periods of time have elapsed since the date of offence, it is unlikely that the application will be progressed:

- Low range (.05 – .08) = two (2) years
- Novice range (over zero for novice drivers) = two (2) years
- Special range (over 0.02 for special category drivers) = two (2) years
- Mid-range (.08 – <0.15) = five (5) years
- High range (0.15 or above) = ten (10) years

Candidates convicted of two PCA offences or driving under the influence of a drug will be required to submit additional information; however, it is unlikely their application will be progressed.

Candidates convicted of other serious traffic offences will be required to submit additional information; however, it is unlikely that their application will be progressed. Examples of a serious traffic offence include, but are not limited to culpable driving, negligent driving occasioning death or grievous bodily harm, driving in a dangerous manner or at a dangerous speed

Criminal record checks

Criminal record check is a requirement for all FRNSW roles and is conducted at the end of phase 4 - Permanent firefighter recruitment pathway.

Firefighters are placed in a position of trust and have privileged access to property and vulnerable people when on official business or during emergency incidents.

It is therefore imperative that FRNSW conducts stringent assessments of candidates and enforces the need to have a professional, honest, reliable workforce that adheres to ethical principles and standards.

IFARES Application process

Applicants complete an online application form, providing:

- Current resume/CV
- A response to three (3) targeted questions:
 1. Describe your cultural heritage, your family/ community networks and your Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander identity.
 2. Provide a brief description of your experience with your Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander community.
 3. List the attributes and/or skills that you believe will contribute to your success in FRNSW.
- Evidence of citizenship such as birth certificate or passport
- Driver's licence – noting P2 (Green) Provisional license is required for Phase 4.

Late applications will NOT be accepted or considered after the closing date as published on the IFARES Website: <https://careers.fire.nsw.gov.au/ifares-faq-s>.

Assessment criteria IFARES applicants

The criteria under which applications will be assessed includes:

- Meeting the eligibility requirements as listed above
- The quality and relevance of your work, volunteer and community experience evident in your resume/CV and response to targeted questions
- The quality and relevance of your skills, knowledge and abilities evident in your resume/CV and response to targeted questions
- The quality and relevance of your cultural awareness, knowledge and connection to community as evident in your resume/CV and response to targeted questions

Application review process

Applications are assessed by a panel consisting of FRNSW staff, with at least two (2) panel members identifying as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander. The panel will assess applications against the assessment criteria and select the required number to participate in phase 2 Tracks to IFARES.

Phase 2: Tracks to IFARES has availability for approximately 60 participants each intake, however, numbers may vary depending on capacity of FRNSW.

Notice of application outcome

Applicants will be notified within two (2) weeks from the application closing date. Where applications are unsuccessful, applicants are provided information and resources to support future applications or consider alternate pathways, including:

- Information on future IFARES intakes
- Information regarding on-call retained firefighter recruitment pathway
- Information regarding direct application for future permanent direct recruitment pathway.

Program phase 2: Tracks to IFARES

Successful participants will move to Phase 2 - Tracks to IFARES or 'Tracks'. Training and assessment for Tracks is provided by FRNSW firefighters, with support from our training partner. Tracks operates over two (2) days, delivered in-person and includes:

- A numeracy and literacy assessment
- FRNSW drill familiarisation i.e., Physical Aptitude Test (PAT), tools, equipment
- Individual interview

Assessment criteria for Tracks participants

The criteria under which Tracks participants are assessed includes:

- Numeracy and literacy skills
- Cultural competency including awareness, knowledge and participant's connection to community
- Ability to learn quickly and adapt to changing circumstances
- Fitness level or willingness to attain high fitness level
- Comfort and confidence with firefighter drills and equipment
- Punctuality, teamwork and resilience
- Alignment and display FRNSW values of respect, integrity, service and courage

Tracks assessment review process

Tracks participants are assessed by a panel consisting of FRNSW staff with at least two (2) identified as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander. The panel will assess participants against the Tracks assessment criteria and select the required number to participate in phase 3 IFARES training.

Phase 3 IFARES training has availability for approximately 25 participants each intake, however, numbers may vary depending on capacity of FRNSW and our training partner.

Notice of Tracks assessment outcome

Tracks participants will be notified within two (2) weeks from the completion of Tracks regarding the outcome of their Tracks assessment. Only successful participants move to Phase 3 IFARES Training.

Where applicable, the IFARES Coordinator will assess the unsuccessful tracks participants to determine suitability for a referral or consideration as an on-call retained firefighter.

Program phase 3: IFARES training

Successful Tracks participants will progress to Phase 3: IFARES training – provided by FRNSW firefighters and our training partner.

Participants will undertake training and assessment for a Certificate III in Fitness, interview skills, online testing in cognitive ability, emotional intelligence, and mechanical reasoning provided by our training partner.

Participants will also get experience and exposure to FRNSW-specific training including:

- Workplace health and safety
- FRNSW agency overview
- Hose and hydrant skills including gas prop, tower, sprinkler and hydrant drills
- Urban Search and Rescue (USAR) exercise
- Rescue techniques and equipment familiarisation
- Breathing apparatus (BA) theory and practical techniques
- Bushfire operations
- Compartment fire behavioural training (CFBT)
- Door entry
- Hose and branch handling
- Controlled burning techniques
- FIRU Canine accelerant detection
- Remotely piloted aircraft system (RPAS) operations
- Physical Aptitude Test

IFARES training participants are assigned an Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander FRNSW firefighter as a mentor to support them through the remainder of the IFARES Program.

Expectations of IFARES training participants

Our most successful IFARES participants demonstrate an increasing maturity and adherence to the expectations set both as learners and potential firefighters. During Phase 3 – IFARES Training we expect to see participants:

- Follow all reasonable directions from FRNSW instructors and our training partner staff
- Continual and consistent demonstration of their commitment to the program by meeting all course requirements.
- Proactive management of their time, effort and resources to develop good working habits, practices and relationships.
- Active contribution and provision of feedback on the variety of experiences and training given by our training partner and FRNSW.
- Model the values of FRNSW by respecting and supporting other students, our training partner, FRNSW staff and representatives and the property and equipment of each agency.
- Follow FRNSW and training partner workplace policies and procedures, including, but not limited to; code of conduct and behavioural standards, safe working practices and any other requirements to meet relevant legislative or regulatory requirements.

Assessment criteria IFARES training participants

Experience has shown our most successful participants consistently get the basics right:

- They arrive on time, prepared for each session
- When they are unsure, they seek help ahead of time
- They participate – actively contributing to discussions in sessions
- They work together – lifting their own performance while helping others to do the same
- They provide the information required
- Most of all, they are present – attending and contributing to sessions or making sure they keep up with requirements where they're not able to attend.

The criteria under which IFARES training participants will be assessed includes the requirements of Certificate III in Fitness along with:

- Demonstration of cultural competency including awareness, knowledge and participant's connection to community

- Demonstrated ability to learn quickly and adapt to changing circumstances
- Fitness level evidenced during practical activities and drills and/or demonstrated commitment to meet the fitness requirements needed during the permanent firefighter recruitment process
- Participant's comfort and confidence level in handling and using firefighter equipment observed during firefighter drills
- Participant's demonstrated teamwork, professionalism and resilience
- Participant's observed alignment to, and demonstration of FRNSW values of respect, integrity, service and courage.

Assessment review process for Phase 3 IFARES training

Participants are assessed by a panel consisting of FRNSW and training partner staff, with at least two (2) identified as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander. The panel will assess participants against the IFARES training assessment criteria above along with the requirements of Certificate III in Fitness and career readiness skills provided by our training partner.

There is no set number of participants who will then qualify for the recruitment pathway. If participants successfully complete all aspects of the IFARES training, they will progress to the FRNSW recruitment pathway.



Notice of assessment outcome

Participants will be notified within two (2) weeks from the completion of phase 3 IFARES training on whether they successfully met all requirements of the program.

Where applicable, FRNSW will assess any unsuccessful participants to determine suitability for a referral to another NSW government agency or consideration as an on-call retained firefighter.

Program phase 4: Permanent firefighter recruitment pathway

Participants that graduate from IFARES training will then move into the FRNSW permanent firefighter recruitment pathway. The permanent firefighter recruitment pathway consists of:

1. Physical Aptitude Test
2. Psychometric testing
3. Video interview
4. Assessment centre
 - a. Group task
 - b. Interview
 - c. Work styles assessment
5. Medical assessment & pre-employment checks including criminal record checks

The FRNSW careers website: <https://careers.fire.nsw.gov.au/permanent-firefighter> provides further information on working for FRNSW as a permanent firefighter.

When applicable, FRNSW will assess any unsuccessful participants to determine suitability for a referral to another NSW government agency or consideration as an on-call retained firefighter.

IFARES Program schedule and timeline

Phase 1: Application timeline

IFARES applications open in October each year with a minimum of two (2) weeks for submission. Applications are assessed in November, with applicants notified within two (2) weeks of applications closing.

Phase 2: Tracks to IFARES timeline

Tracks is delivered in-person over two (2) days, scheduled in December. The Tracks assessment is conducted during this session, with participants advised of the outcome within two (2) weeks.

Phase 3: IFARES training timeline

IFARES training commences in March/April, with training scheduled in blocks of one (1) or two (2) weeks face to face every five (5) weeks along with weekly online components over a minimum of six (6) months. Each block will focus on either Certificate III in Fitness, FRNSW-specific training, cultural learning and/or career readiness.

Phase 4: Permanent firefighter recruitment pathway

The FRNSW Permanent firefighter recruitment pathway is conducted over five (5) days. The recruitment process is scheduled within two (2) weeks of IFARES graduation scheduled in September/October.



Fees and participant costs

IFARES is a fee-free recruitment readiness pathway training program which is financially supported by FRNSW, TAFE NSW and a range of other Government funding initiatives including NSW Department of Education's Smart and Skilled and Services Australia's Away from Base.

There may be some out-of-pocket expenses for participants including travel expenses for shorter trips, related meals and incidentals.

Training and course fees

All training and course fees for the program are covered by FRNSW, TAFE NSW and through State and Federal Government funding.

Tracks to IFARES travel and accommodation costs

All participants will have the meal costs covered for the two (2) days of Tracks in December.

Participants residing within Sydney will be required to pay for their transport to and from Redfern and/or Alexandria for each of the two (2) days of Tracks in December.

Participants residing outside Sydney will have their travel and accommodation costs covered by FRNSW.

There may be some out-of-pocket travel expenses required for those participants residing outside Sydney for example the cost of travelling to and from their nearest airport or bus/train station.

IFARES training travel and accommodation costs

All participants in phase 3: IFARES training will have their meals and accommodation covered.

Participants residing within Sydney will be required to pay for their transport to and from the accommodation for each of the face to face blocks.

Participants residing outside Sydney will have their travel and accommodation costs covered by grants and administered through TAFE NSW.

IFARES Permanent firefighter recruitment pathway

Graduates of the IFARES program will need to pay for their own costs of getting to and from Sydney in the recruitment phase. Other costs may include, but not limited to, obtaining a driving history record and medical clearance.

More information will be provided to successful participants at the start of each phase of the program based on their individual circumstances.

Feedback and formal process for issues and concerns

FRNSW is committed to the fair and equitable selection of participants at all phases of the IFARES Program. Strict guideless and criteria is adhered to in selection and assessment processes.

All IFARES participants will be provided with constructive feedback, throughout the program, from their mentor, FRNSW staff and our training partner. All unsuccessful participants will be assessed to determine suitability for a referral to another NSW government agency or consideration as an on-call retained firefighter.

Should you have any feedback about any of the IFARES Program, please email IFARES@fire.nsw.gov.au with the subject line "Feedback".

Should you wish to appeal an unsuccessful decision on tracks to IFARES or IFARES training phase, please email IFARES@fire.nsw.gov.au with the subject line "Appeal".

Unfortunataly due to the volume of applicants, it is not possible to apeal a decision on IFARES applications.



Yarning Circle at FRNSW Academy, Orchard Hills



Artwork by Aboriginal artist, Nikita Ridgeway