



# **AVCC Response on Indigenous Higher Education Advisory Council Conference Report**

September 2006



**Australian Vice-Chancellors' Committee**  
*the council of Australia's university presidents*



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## Foreword

The Australian Vice-Chancellors' Committee (AVCC) is the peak national representative body of Australia's university sector comprising the Vice-Chancellors of 38 Australian universities. Its charter is to advance higher education through voluntary, cooperative and coordinated action. It is non-partisan and exists exclusively for educational purposes, with its continuing aim to serve the best interests of the university sector, and through them, the nation.

The AVCC is an active player in the determination and formulation of public policy, to advance higher education for those Australian and international students and staff who are involved in the higher education sector, and to the long-term benefit of their individual communities, regions and nations. In pursuit of its aims, the AVCC has developed a set of targets to achieve by the year 2020. The AVCC's vision for Australian university education in 2020 has five defining features, one of which relates directly to Indigenous higher education:

*Australia's universities will meet the needs of Australia's Indigenous peoples through education, research and community service comparable to the support provided to all Australians.*

The AVCC is advised on Indigenous higher education issues by the AVCC Committee on Indigenous Higher Education. This Committee is chaired by Professor Marcia Langton AM and includes Indigenous representatives from a number of Australian universities as well as a number of Vice-Chancellors. It is the AVCC's only permanent Committee.

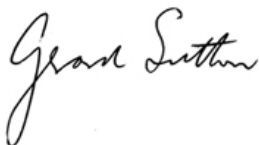
In October 2005, the AVCC wrote to the then Minister for Education, Science and Training to put forward for the Government's consideration a set of themes relating to opportunities and access to higher education for people from an Indigenous background which had been identified by the AVCC Committee on Indigenous Higher Education, namely:

- (i) barriers between different levels of schooling and higher education;
- (ii) support for Indigenous students in higher education;
- (iii) postgraduate coursework and research students; and
- (iv) improved Indigenous education as a Government priority.

In November 2005, the AVCC was pleased to be represented at and actively participate in the Indigenous Higher Education Advisory Council's (IHEAC) inaugural conference.

The AVCC welcomes IHEAC's consequent conference report to the Minister for Education, Science and Training, the Hon. Julie Bishop MP which was released in July 2006. Given the importance of education in general and higher education in particular to improving the well-being of not only Australia's Indigenous community, but Australia's well-being as a whole, IHEAC's report is a long-overdue call for action.

This AVCC response on the IHEAC Conference Report has been developed with considerable input from the AVCC Committee on Indigenous Higher Education. It is framed with the overriding objective of working with the Government and Indigenous communities within and without the university sector to achieve better education outcomes for people from an Indigenous background.



Professor Gerard Sutton  
AVCC President  
September 2006

## Executive Summary and Recommendations

In November 2005 the ministerially appointed Indigenous Higher Education Advisory Council (IHEAC) held its inaugural conference entitled *Education Led Recovery of Indigenous Capacity: reshaping the policy agenda*. As part of its terms of reference IHEAC is tasked to hold such a conference each year and to provide regular advice to the Minister for Education, Science and Training. Prior to IHEAC's establishment, there had been little Government action on Indigenous higher education.

The IHEAC Conference Report and associated strategic plan were released in July 2006 as *Improving Indigenous Outcomes and Enhancing Indigenous Culture and Knowledge in Australian Higher Education*.

This AVCC response on the IHEAC Conference Report addresses each of the seven priority areas identified by IHEAC and makes a number of recommendations for future consultative action. The AVCC's starting premises are its Vision for 2020 and the AVCC Committee on Indigenous Higher Education's four strategic themes, the latter which are largely consistent with the IHEAC priority areas.

**IHEAC Priority 1: Encourage universities to work with schools and TAFE colleges and other registered training organisations to build pathways and raise levels of aspiration and confidence of Indigenous students**

### AVCC Recommendation 1:

***The AVCC supports IHEAC Priority 1, welcomes the Minister's commitment of funding towards this priority and recommends that:***

- ***pathway scholarships be developed to provide financial assistance to Indigenous students from secondary school (as early as Year 9, but at least from Year 12) to the completion of a higher education award;***
- ***appropriate programs be developed to assist universities to work in cooperation with schools and vocational and technical education providers;***
- ***all levels of Government work together with the Indigenous community and other stakeholders in implementing the MCEETYA recommendations on Indigenous education; and***
- ***programs be developed to provide advice to students, parents and teachers in secondary school to assist with appropriate subject choices that lead towards tertiary study.***

**IHEAC Priority 2: Develop a concerted strategy to improve the level of Indigenous undergraduate enrolment**

### AVCC Recommendation 2:

***The AVCC supports the targets set as a step in the direction of achieving the AVCC's Vision for 2020 but cautions that the implementation of such targets must take account of the sector's diversity.***

**AVCC Recommendation 3:**

*The AVCC further recommends a focus on pathways to higher education leading to an increase in the numbers of Indigenous people studying at university.*

**IHEAC Priority 3: Improve the level of Indigenous postgraduate enrolment, enhance Indigenous research and increase the number of Indigenous researchers**

**AVCC Recommendation 4:**

*The AVCC supports the targets set as a step in the direction of achieving the AVCC's Vision for 2020. The AVCC will look at strategies to bring about the achievement of these targets such as:*

- *earnings replacement scholarships for Indigenous people in current employment who are considering taking up postgraduate scholarships;*
- *adequate supervision arrangements for Indigenous students, including appropriate cultural support; and*
- *allowing credit for recognised prior learning.*

**IHEAC Priority 4: Improve the rates of success, retention and completion for Indigenous students**

**AVCC Recommendation 5:**

*The AVCC supports IHEAC Priority 4 and recommends that:*

- *the study of first year experiences of Indigenous university students be completed by the end of 2007;*
- *the setting of retention and completion targets should be postponed until after the findings of the study of first year experiences are available. In any event, the AVCC through its Committee on Indigenous Higher Education will begin looking at this issue in the second half of 2007;*
- *a longitudinal data analysis or a longitudinal study of Indigenous students be conducted with a view to identifying the number of Indigenous students who leave university and return at a later date; and*
- *a Carrick Institute Priority Project be commenced across a number of institutions as soon as possible.*

**IHEAC Priority 5: Enhance the prominence and status of Indigenous culture, knowledge and studies on campus**

**AVCC Recommendation 6:**

**The AVCC:**

- *supports a review of the Indigenous Education and Support Centres with a view to strengthening the role of these centres in improving Indigenous education outcomes;*
- *would like to discuss the issues of the review of undergraduate curricula and Indigenous Studies with IHEAC in more detail; and*
- *supports further discussion between the AVCC and IHEAC on the appointment to Elders to specific roles, while affirming that the appointment of persons to specific roles within universities is a matter for each individual university.*

**IHEAC Priority 6: Increase the number of Indigenous people working in Australian universities**

**AVCC Recommendation 7:**

**The AVCC:**

- *acknowledges that the current employment rates of Indigenous staff across Australian universities are not acceptable;*
- *supports the principle of increasing the number of Indigenous staff in universities. In order to take account of the diversity of institutions and the difficulty in attracting staff, no employment targets as such should be set; and*
- *recommends that DEST provide new funding for the employment of Indigenous employment officers.*

**IHEAC Priority 7: Improve the participation of Indigenous people in university governance and management**

**AVCC Recommendation 8:**

**The AVCC:**

- *supports the idea of a National Summit;*
- *will encourage universities to include Indigenous people in their recommendations of potential council members when asked; and*
- *will conduct a survey of the Indigenous status of senior university management to be completed in 2006 with the results to be referred to the AVCC Committee on Indigenous Higher Education for analysis.*

# 1. Indigenous Higher Education in Australia in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century

## 1.1 Indigenous higher education and other levels of education

Indigenous higher education in Australia at the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century faces many challenges. Most notably, Indigenous people are significantly under-represented in most higher education awards. This is partly due to the low number of students achieving Tertiary Entrance Ranks (TERs). The Productivity Commission has shown that only 43% of Indigenous students reach Year 11 or 12 compared to 74% of all people.<sup>1</sup> Only one in three Indigenous students actually complete Year 12<sup>2</sup>. This has a flow-through effect on participation in university education particularly at the Bachelor level due to few children from Indigenous backgrounds achieving TERs.

At the higher education level, under-representation applies to both enrolments and completions. A question on notice to the then Minister for Indigenous Affairs, the Hon. Amanda Vanstone MP revealed the participation rate of Indigenous students in higher education to be 1.2% in 2003 and 1.22% in 2004. In response the Minister also noted that “the proportion of Australian students that would be expected to be Indigenous, if Indigenous people were represented according to their proportion of the higher education aged population” would be 2.5%.<sup>3</sup>

Table 1 shows the actual enrolments and completions for Indigenous students when compared to their non-Indigenous peers.

**Table 1: Indigenous and non-Indigenous higher education participation (enrolments) and completions 2003**

Level of study	Indigenous		Non-Indigenous	
	Enrolments	Completions	Enrolments	Completions
Doctorate	182	12	30,671	4,048
Masters	504	120	78,798	19,590
Honours	94	38	11,627	8,523
Grad. Diploma/Certificate	393	137	36,084	23,929
Bachelors	5,364	698	498,526	95,606
Associate Degree	206	56	1,907	371
Other	2,245	130	29,148	3,745
Total	8,988	1,191	686,761	155,812

Source: IHEAC, *Improving Indigenous Outcomes and enhancing Indigenous Culture and Knowledge in Australian Higher Education*, Department of Communication, Information Technology and the Arts, Canberra, March 2006; Appendix 2, page 30

<sup>1</sup> Steering Committee for the Review of Government Service Provision, *Report on Government Services – Indigenous Compendium*, Productivity Commission, May 2005, page 24.

<sup>2</sup> Suzanne Mellor, Mathew Corrigan, *The case for change: A review of contemporary research on Indigenous education*, The Australian Council for Educational Research, Melbourne, 2004, page 2.

<sup>3</sup> Minister for Indigenous Affairs. Answer to Question on notice, Question Number 1035 and 1036 of 2005, Senate Hansard, 5 September 2006, pages 181 – 185.

The AVCC has identified the concerns about low numbers of secondary students progressing to higher education in its first strategic theme on the barriers between the different levels of schooling and higher education in Australia.

Apart from the low numbers of students completing Year 12 alluded to above, the complexity of the education system in Australia affects Indigenous participation in higher education in a number of ways.

The problems are made worse by various inconsistencies between the various education systems across Australia, and between the public and private systems. However, all systems seem to be universally bad at assisting Indigenous students from an early age. Ideally any problems should be picked up at primary school level, and Indigenous students should have the same opportunity to attend pre-school or kindergarten as non-Indigenous students.

There are additional problems for Indigenous children from regional and remote areas of Australia as these also have further educational disadvantage attached to them.

The AVCC has identified a number of strategies to address some of these problems that warrant further investigation. These include:

- examining good practice in current enabling programs to assist students without adequate TERs to make the transition to higher education;
- developing a database of 'what works' in enabling programs, similar to the 'Dare to Lead' program, focussing in particular of what works in terms of students successfully moving from an enabling program into employment or further study;
- allowing more tutorial support for Indigenous students at all levels of education once they have been identified as potential beneficiaries of such support;
- offering appropriate careers advice to students, such as having on site careers advice even in regional and remote communities, rather than exclusively online sources;
- offering 'education pathway' scholarships for Indigenous students from secondary school into tertiary education. Such scholarships could begin in Year 9 and carry through to the completion of a bachelor degree or other higher education award. They would encourage the completion of schooling and build a visible pathway for students to a completed higher education award;
- Government funding for University outreach programs into schools. Such programs already exist in some universities and are successful but costly to run. A previous Government program, the Vocational and Education Guidance for Aboriginals Scheme (VEGAS), was discontinued by the Government despite working well and fulfilling such a role; and
- early mentor programs for students with mentors from their own communities.

### 1.2 Support for Indigenous students at university

Once at university, Indigenous students need support to complete their studies. Such support may be financial, academic or in terms of access to appropriate services.

In terms of financial support the AVCC has been concerned about the changes to ABSTUDY that came into effect in 2000. The Department of Education, Science and Training (DEST) has recently released a report into the effect of those changes<sup>4</sup>, which the AVCC will consider carefully. Financial support is largely a matter of assisting with living costs. The AVCC will also investigate the financial situation of students through a survey to be completed in early 2007: the survey will include a specific component on Indigenous students.

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<sup>4</sup> Department of Education, Science and Training, *Review into the impact of the policy changes to ABSTUDY that came into effect in 2000*, Canberra, July 2006.

Academic support services could be improved through more flexible rules in the application of the Indigenous Tutorial Assistance Scheme. The AVCC is aware that a new reporting regime is currently being implemented and will monitor what effect this will have on the services available through the program.

### 1.3 Postgraduate coursework and research students

Table 2 shows the figures needed for Indigenous students to achieve parity with non-Indigenous students in higher education in proportion to their populations. Thus in order for Indigenous students to be represented in PhD programs at the same rate as non-Indigenous students, their number needs to increase by 282% to 695.

Most significantly, this table shows that Indigenous students are under-represented in all degrees from Bachelor degrees to PhDs. Only in programs lower than Bachelor qualifications are Indigenous students over-represented.

**Table 2: Indigenous higher education participation rates – current and at full parity for 2003 population aged 15+**

Level of study	Current Indigenous participation number	Parity participation number	%increase needed for parity
Doctorate	182	695	282%
Masters	504	2,593	414%
Honours	94	234	144%
Grad Diploma/Certificate	393	1,293	229%
Bachelors	5,364	11,546	115%
Assoc Degree	206	40	-81%
Other	2,245	821	-63%
Total	8,988	17,221	92%

Source: IHEAC, *Improving Indigenous Outcomes and enhancing Indigenous Culture and Knowledge in Australian Higher Education*, Department of Communication, Information Technology and the Arts, Canberra, March 2006; Appendix 2, page 30.

Table 3 shows the changes in enrolments, commencements and completions for Indigenous postgraduate students in 2001 and 2004. The figures show that in all of these categories of postgraduate study Indigenous rate improved, except for Honours programs. It must be noted that these statistics should not necessarily be construed as representing an upward trend. The completion rates for Indigenous students fluctuate significantly due to the low number of students. The figures used in these tables, which are derived from the publication *Students 2004* published by DEST actually refer to the calendar year 2003. A look at the 2003 publication *Students 2003* shows that in 2002 there were only ten Doctorates completions and with 94 Masters (eight by Research, and 86 by coursework) completions, but 44 honours completions.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>5</sup> Department of Education, Science and Training, *Students 2003*, Table 49.

**Table 3: Indigenous higher education enrolments, commencements and completions 2001 and 2004**

Level of study	Enrolments		Commencements		Completions	
	2001	2004	2001	2004	2001	2004
Doctorate	131	209	29	47	8	12
Masters by Research	124	135	45	51	12	16
Masters by Coursework	289	448	125	202	84	104
Honours	98	96	31	19	41	38

Source: IHEAC, *Improving Indigenous Outcomes and enhancing Indigenous Culture and Knowledge in Australian Higher Education*, Department of Communication, Information Technology and the Arts, Canberra, March 2006; Appendix 2, page 32

Under its third theme the AVCC is investigating the issues affecting postgraduate enrolments, and possible solutions to them. Importantly the AVCC is aware that many Indigenous students are not able to enter postgraduate study due to family responsibilities. They are frequently in senior employment positions where an extended family may rely on that income, and to leave that employment for further study is not financially feasible. The problem at the heart of this issue is not so much a lack of scholarships but a lack of sufficiently funded scholarships to allow them to undertake further study. The model of the medical scholarships of up to \$60,000 has been suggested as a solution for the other areas.

The IHEAC Conference explored these statistics, as well as the themes and real-life stories behind the statistics. In their discussion paper informing the conference Richard James and Marcia Devlin report on some of the factors affecting Indigenous students.<sup>6</sup> While many of these are not unique to Indigenous students they affect students from Indigenous backgrounds disproportionately:

- financial pressures: these are often exacerbated for Indigenous students considering postgraduate study as they are often the main breadwinner for families, but equally affect undergraduate students;
- social and cultural isolation: Indigenous students often feel isolated from mainstream students and staff;
- insufficient preparation for study and/or insufficient academic support: because many Indigenous students come from disadvantaged backgrounds they are frequently ill-prepared for tertiary study and do not receive the right support once they commence tertiary education;
- basis of admission: many Indigenous students are admitted on the basis of special admissions schemes which often contribute to inadequate preparation and feelings of unworthiness of the place because they felt they needed a 'special' entry mechanism<sup>7</sup>; and
- experiences of racism.

<sup>6</sup> Richard James, Marcia Devlin, 'Towards a new policy environment for Indigenous people, culture and knowledge in Australian Higher Education', Centre for the Study of Higher Education, The University of Melbourne, October 2005.

<sup>7</sup> Suzanne Mellor, Mathew Corrigan, *The case for change: A review of contemporary research on Indigenous education*, The Australian Council for Educational Research, Melbourne, 2004, pages 21-2.

**1.3.1 Indigenous Staff**

The situation of Indigenous students at undergraduate and postgraduate level is compounded by the lack of Indigenous staff at universities. Students at both undergraduate and postgraduate level would benefit from having more Indigenous staff in academic roles in universities. This would assist from a mentoring and role-model perspective and assist in reducing the isolation experienced by many students.

Table 4 shows that while Indigenous staff numbers in teaching and/or research have increased by 16% between 2001 and 2004, there would need to be a further increase of almost 700 Indigenous staff in order to achieve parity. The number of other staff has similarly increased by 34% between 2001 and 2004, but would require a further increase of approximately 750 staff in order to attain parity with non-Indigenous staff.

**Table 4: Indigenous and Non-Indigenous Higher Education Staff 2001-2004, and 2010 estimate at 2001-04 growth rates**

	2001	2004	%change 2001-04	2010 estimate	Parity number
<b>Teaching and/or Research</b>					
Indigenous	229	266	16%	350	960
Non-Indigenous	35,447	39,625	12%	47,000	
% Indigenous	0.64%	0.67%		0.74%	
<b>Other</b>					
Indigenous	323	434	34%	640	1180
Non-Indigenous	42,229	47,333	12%	57,000	
% Indigenous	0.76%	0.91%		1.11%	
<b>All staff</b>					
Indigenous	552	700	27%	990	
Non-Indigenous	77,676	86,958	12%	104,000	
% Indigenous	0.71%	0.80%		0.95%	

Source: IHEAC, *Improving Indigenous Outcomes and enhancing Indigenous Culture and Knowledge in Australian Higher Education*, Department of Communication, Information Technology and the Arts, Canberra, March 2006; Appendix 2, page 34.

## **1.4 Indigenous education as a key Government priority**

The fourth and final AVCC priority for action on Indigenous higher education is to make Indigenous education in general, and Indigenous higher education in particular, a key Government priority. The AVCC has been disappointed that Improved Indigenous Education Outcomes are not at present a key objective of the Government's new arrangements for Indigenous Affairs as one priority in addressing the multiple needs of Indigenous people in Australia.

The establishment of IHEAC and the initial support shown to IHEAC by the Minister are a welcome sign that Government may take issues of Indigenous higher education seriously.

The AVCC also welcomes the commitment of the Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs (MCEETYA) to improving Indigenous education outcomes as set out in *Australian Directions in Indigenous Education 2005 – 2008*<sup>8</sup> which was approved by MCEETYA in July 2006.

The AVCC is committed to working with IHEAC and the Government to achieve better education outcomes for Indigenous students and thereby begin building a better Indigenous community.

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<sup>8</sup> Australian Education Systems Officials Committee Senior Officials Working Party on Indigenous Education, *Australian Directions in Indigenous Education 2005 – 2008*, MCEETYA, July 2006, available from [www.mceetya.edu.au](http://www.mceetya.edu.au).

## 2. The IHEAC Priorities

In order to address the disadvantage faced by Indigenous staff and students, IHEAC has developed seven priorities. The AVCC is committed to achieving its vision for 2020, and many of the IHEAC priorities are consistent with this aim. Below, the AVCC position on the findings of the IHEAC Conference report is developed in the context of the AVCC vision for 2020, and the strategic themes identified by the AVCC Committee on Indigenous Higher Education.

### **IHEAC Priority 1: Encourage universities to work with schools and TAFE colleges and other registered training organisations to build pathways and raise levels of aspiration and confidence of Indigenous students**

IHEAC is concerned that secondary school students from Indigenous backgrounds do not achieve the same school retention rates as non-Indigenous children. IHEAC aims to intervene earlier than the end of Year 12 in reaching out to schools and their Indigenous students at an earlier stage. Such an intervention is intended to build confidence and achievement. IHEAC indicates that the policy settings at the Commonwealth and State/Territory level do not encourage such activities and recommends that these be looked at. IHEAC further recommends that the Minister fund three 'lighthouse' projects in this area and at the launch of the IHEAC report the Minister indicated that she would take up this recommendation and committed some funding towards the 'lighthouse' projects.<sup>9</sup> The Minister has also put forward \$750,000 for partnership projects to increase the number of cross-sectoral partnerships and pathways for Indigenous students.

The AVCC welcomes the Minister's commitment of funding towards the lighthouse and partnership projects. The AVCC notes that MCEETYA also wishes to see increased partnerships between secondary schools, higher education institutions and Indigenous communities.<sup>10</sup>

In order to encourage more Indigenous children to complete Year 12 and to go on to higher education, new pathways scholarships should be investigated. Such scholarships should start early in secondary education, and continue on into higher education. MCEETYA notes that too many Indigenous students drop out at or before Year 10, and too few remain to complete Year 12 and move onto higher education.<sup>11</sup> The AVCC itself, through its Committee on Indigenous Higher Education, will form a working group to investigate new forms of scholarships.

The AVCC is aware that a number of universities already run programs with schools, which are successful, but costly. The cost of such programs may be a deterrent where there is no assistance available for the universities. At the same time as encouraging universities to work with schools and other training providers, those institutions should also be encouraged to work with universities in their region. The abolition of the VEGAS program had a detrimental effect on the delivery of such partnership programs, and a similar program for higher education providers should be implemented again.

As noted above, in order to achieve better school retention rates and Year 12 completions, the AVCC believes Governments and communities must intervene as early as possible; and the AVCC encourages State Governments and the Commonwealth Government to implement recommendations 1 and 2 from the MCEETYA commitments on Indigenous education which stress the importance of access to high quality early childhood education services for 0-5 year olds

<sup>9</sup> The Hon. Julie Bishop MP, Media Release: Supporting Indigenous Higher Education, 18 July 2006, available from [www.dest.gov.au/ministers/bishop/](http://www.dest.gov.au/ministers/bishop/).

<sup>10</sup> Australian Education Systems Officials Committee Senior Officials Working Party on Indigenous Education, *Australian Directions in Indigenous Education 2005 – 2008*, recommendation 11.6.

<sup>11</sup> Australian Education Systems Officials Committee Senior Officials Working Party on Indigenous Education, *Australian Directions in Indigenous Education 2005 – 2008*, page iv.

and to 'providing all Indigenous children with access to two years of high quality early childhood education' prior to the first year of formal schooling.<sup>12</sup>

**AVCC Recommendation 1:**

***The AVCC supports Priority 1, welcomes the Minister's commitment of funding towards this priority and recommends that:***

- ***pathway scholarships be developed to provide financial assistance to Indigenous students from secondary school (as early as Year 9, but at least from Year 12) to the completion of a higher education award;***
- ***appropriate programs be developed to assist universities to work in cooperation with schools and vocational and technical education providers;***
- ***all levels of Government work together with the Indigenous community and other stakeholders in implementing the MCEETYA recommendations on Indigenous education; and***
- ***programs be developed to provide advice to students, parents and teachers in secondary school to assist with appropriate subject choices that lead towards tertiary study.***

**IHEAC Priority 2: Develop a concerted strategy to improve the level of Indigenous undergraduate enrolment**

Under this priority IHEAC raises concerns about the significant drop in Indigenous students entering university. In particular there was a significant drop in the years following the changes to ABSTUDY in 2000.

IHEAC specifically asks the Federal Government to work with universities 'to develop a concerted strategy' to raise the number of Indigenous undergraduate enrolments. In order to achieve this IHEAC proposes a set of targets to achieve for completions in undergraduate education and vocational and technical education per annum. IHEAC acknowledges that the flow of Indigenous students into higher education must be increased for the targets to be reached, and priority one is intended to assist with that process.

<b>Tertiary Award</b>	<b>Completion target for 2010</b>
Bachelor	1,500
Associate Degree	120
TAFE Certificate IV	5,000
Diploma	1,500

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<sup>12</sup> Australian Education Systems Officials Committee Senior Officials Working party on Indigenous Education, *Australian Directions in Indigenous Education 2005 – 2008*, recommendations 1 & 2.

The AVCC acknowledges the value of these targets which are not inconsistent with the AVCC's Vision 2020 that "Australia's universities will meet the needs of Australia's Indigenous peoples through education, research and community service comparable to the support provided to all Australians." The achievement of IHEAC's targets would be a step in that direction.

At the same time these targets are ambitious given the recognised low number of Indigenous students completing Year 12. Setting targets by itself will not produce the number of students to achieve these targets. In conjunction with the first priority identified by IHEAC, the targets may be achievable, but will depend on adequate support for Indigenous students completing their secondary education.

Setting targets is problematic due to their inflexible nature. There is an additional problem in making such targets binding in that universities have varying enrolments of students from Indigenous backgrounds. Table 5 below shows the number of students from an Indigenous background by university. There is clearly variation between States and Territories and between universities. There is thus a concern about how to implement these targets. The figures presented by IHEAC are national targets, and Table 5 illustrates that currently universities have widely varying enrolments of Indigenous students. Therefore the best way to achieve such targets may be by means of an incentive-based program which rewards universities who increase their Indigenous enrolments by a certain number of percentage points. In this way both Government and universities can work to increase the number of enrolments and the number of completions while taking into account the diversity of the sector.

While it is important to do everything possible to assist Indigenous students to complete their degrees, a further concern is that the current reporting system seems to be biased towards commencements and completions. Many Indigenous students gain significant benefits from only completing part of their degrees such as one year, or even just one subject. Current DEST practices would count this attrition. Indigenous students often seek employment with the skills gained from such partially completed degrees, and it should be considered a success if a student secures such employment. Current data collection practices also fail to take adequate account of students who leave university after one year or one subject, and subsequently return to study. There is a real need to celebrate all successes even if they are not 'completions.'

**AVCC Recommendation 2:**

***The AVCC supports the targets set as a step in the direction of achieving the AVCC's Vision for 2020 but cautions that the implementation of such targets must take account of the sector's diversity.***

**AVCC Recommendation 3:**

***The AVCC further recommends a focus on pathways to higher education leading to an increase in the numbers of Indigenous people studying at university.***

**Table 5: Self-identified Commencing and All Indigenous Students by State, Institution and Gender, 2004**

University	Commencing Students			All Students		
	Males	Females	Persons	Males	Females	Persons
Charles Sturt University	51	70	121	125	183	308
Macquarie University	13	35	48	41	133	174
Southern Cross University	32	87	119	83	164	247
The University of New England	31	68	99	83	174	257
The University of New South Wales	27	36	63	109	102	219
The University of Newcastle	50	63	113	132	194	326
The University of Sydney	29	88	117	79	202	281
University of Technology, Sydney	62	101	163	130	208	338
University of Western Sydney	23	74	97	53	147	200
University of Wollongong	13	15	28	58	77	135
Deakin University	46	92	138	135	222	357
La Trobe University	7	16	23	32	41	73
Monash University	11	22	33	38	58	96
RMIT	10	12	22	27	29	56
Swinburne University of Technology	1	7	8	5	12	17
The University of Melbourne	40	55	95	97	165	262
University of Ballarat	2	2	4	4	8	12
Victoria University	6	6	12	19	16	35
Bond University	2	0	2	2	0	2
Central Queensland University	40	108	148	109	200	309
Griffith University	78	119	197	168	257	425
James Cook University	45	135	180	110	280	390
Queensland University of Technology	53	93	146	167	243	410
The University of Queensland	32	47	79	99	156	255
University of Southern Queensland	38	80	118	74	150	224
University of the Sunshine Coast	10	8	18	23	17	40
Curtin University of Technology	102	163	265	187	321	508
Edith Cowan University	73	131	204	130	274	404
Murdoch University	32	36	68	55	97	152
The University of Western Australia	27	24	51	58	84	142
Flinders University	12	28	40	37	82	119
The University of Adelaide	29	33	62	66	66	132
University of South Australia	30	82	112	75	229	304
University of Tasmania	21	68	89	67	148	215
Charles Darwin University	33	81	114	70	160	230
The Australian National University	12	20	32	32	56	88
University of Canberra	26	18	44	49	48	97
Australian Catholic University	25	90	115	69	220	289
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>1,187</b>	<b>2,216</b>	<b>3,403</b>	<b>2,912</b>	<b>5,226</b>	<b>8,146</b>

Source: Department of Education, Science and Training, Student Statistics 2004

### **IHEAC Priority 3: Improve the level of Indigenous postgraduate enrolment, enhance Indigenous research and increase the number of Indigenous researchers**

Research is a core activity for universities, and IHEAC considers high quality Indigenous research 'to be a cornerstone of Indigenous higher education'.

IHEAC proposes the following completion targets to be achieved annually:

<b>Postgraduate Award</b>	<b>Completion target for 2010</b>
Honours	50
Grad Diploma/Certificate	200
Masters	300
PhD	50

The achievement of targets is, however, dependent on a sufficient number of students completing their undergraduate degrees. The AVCC will lobby Government for more generous scholarships for Indigenous students to progress to higher degrees. In particular, many Indigenous university graduates are older and have family responsibilities and may for that reason be discouraged from further study, and instead enter or remain in the labour market.

The AVCC believes that there is a need for substantial scholarships for Indigenous people in current employment to re-enter university in order to gain postgraduate awards. Family responsibilities mean many would be prevented from leaving their employment, unless they had access to substantial income. An earnings replacement scholarship program would fulfil such a role.

A further option is to provide pathway scholarships from undergraduate to postgraduate education. Similar to the scholarships proposed under the AVCC's response to the first IHEAC priority, such scholarships would build visible pathways for Indigenous students.

The same issue about the nature of targets applies as it does for undergraduate students. Binding targets would not have an equitable effect across universities, and would be difficult and potentially unfair to administer.

#### **AVCC Recommendation 4:**

***The AVCC supports the targets set as a step in the direction of achieving the AVCC's Vision for 2020. The AVCC will look at strategies to bring about the achievement of these targets such as:***

- ***earnings replacement scholarships for Indigenous people in current employment who are considering taking up postgraduate scholarships;***
- ***adequate supervision arrangements for Indigenous students, including appropriate cultural support; and***
- ***allowing credit for recognised prior learning.***

#### **IHEAC Priority 4: Improve the rates of success, retention and completion for Indigenous students**

Indigenous university award completions could be doubled if Indigenous students were able to achieve the same progress rates as non-Indigenous students. The IHEAC Report notes that “Indigenous students who have withdrawn report that the factors in their decision to withdraw include financial pressures, social or cultural alienation, the academic demands of study and insufficient academic support.”

The report continues: “a key challenge for universities is to embrace and support Indigenous students who may have had disadvantaged educational backgrounds without compromising the academic standards that Indigenous people have a right to expect and aspire to.”<sup>13</sup>

IHEAC makes a number of further recommendations under this priority:

- (i) an independent study into the first year experiences of Indigenous students;
- (ii) setting of targets for retention and completion rates, with incentives for institutions meeting and exceeding these targets; and
- (iii) having the Carrick Institute for Learning and Teaching in Higher Education establish a priority related to the development and dissemination of good practice on Indigenous higher education as part of its Priority Projects Programme.

The Minister has already committed funding towards the study of the first year experiences of Indigenous education, and the AVCC would support such a study and the gathering of information for it. Such a study should be commenced and completed with urgency, in order to inform the setting of targets for retention and completion rates. It is important that such a study take into account external, part-time and mature age students, and whether they are from a regional or remote background.

A Carrick Institute Priority Project on good practice in Indigenous higher education would be positive step forward in documenting and disseminating information and data to all relevant stakeholders.

#### **AVCC Recommendation 5:**

***The AVCC supports IHEAC Priority 4 and recommends that:***

- ***the study of first year experiences of Indigenous university students be completed by the end of 2007;***
- ***the setting of retention and completion targets should be postponed until after the findings of the study of first year experiences are available. In any event, the AVCC through its Committee on Indigenous Higher Education will begin looking at this issue in the second half of 2007;***
- ***a longitudinal data analysis or a longitudinal study of Indigenous students be conducted with a view to identifying the number of Indigenous students who leave university and return at a later date; and***
- ***a Carrick Institute Priority Project be commenced across a number of institutions as soon as possible.***

<sup>13</sup> IHEAC, *Improving Indigenous Outcomes and Enhancing Indigenous Culture and Knowledge in Australian Higher Education*, page 20.

**IHEAC Priority 5: Enhance the prominence and status of Indigenous culture, knowledge and studies on campus**

Under this priority IHEAC is also looking for particular action from universities. Some of the issues of particular concern are:

- the place and role of Indigenous culture on campus;
- the place and role of Indigenous Support and Education Centres;
- Indigenous content in courses; and
- levels of support and resourcing for Indigenous students.

In regard to these issues IHEAC makes a number of recommendations, including:

- (i) a review of the Indigenous Education and Support Centres;
- (ii) reviewing undergraduate curricula and the place of Indigenous Studies;
- (iii) the idea of inviting Elders to accept honorary fellow positions to ensure a place for Indigenous culture and its enhancement on university campuses; and
- (iv) appointing suitably qualified Indigenous people to professorial appointments and other senior positions.

An independent review of the Indigenous Education and Support Centres is timely and appropriate. At the inaugural IHEAC Conference the National Indigenous Higher Education Network (NIHEN) presented a review of the roles, responsibilities and services provided by the Centres.<sup>14</sup> NIHEN showed the diversity of the Centres across Australia in the provision of academic support, research and cultural support. The proposed review should be conducted external to DEST and have terms of reference that look at how to strengthen these centres. The AVCC believes the Indigenous Education and Support Centres play a valuable role, and the review should not seek to reduce or restructure them.

The review of undergraduate curricula is a difficult issue to address. It is clear that many students complete their university education with very little knowledge of Indigenous culture and knowledge. A review of the role of Indigenous studies with a view to enhancing its status would also be beneficial.

However, the question of who would conduct such reviews needs to be considered carefully. The AVCC would seek to discuss these proposals with IHEAC in more detail.

Appointment of Elders to specific roles and the appointing of suitable people to the role of professor and other senior positions is a matter for individual universities. However, IHEAC should be invited to make proposals to vice-chancellors about what sort of positions they may see as being of benefit in advancing Indigenous higher education in Australia in the context of future meetings between the AVCC and IHEAC.

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<sup>14</sup> NIHEN, *A National Review of the Roles, Responsibilities and Services provided by Indigenous Higher Education Support Centres*, paper presented to inaugural IHEAC Conference, Canberra, November 2005.

**AVCC Recommendation 6:*****The AVCC:***

- *supports a review of the Indigenous Education and Support Centres with a view to strengthening the role of these centres in improving Indigenous education outcomes;*
- *would like to discuss the issues of the review of undergraduate curricula and Indigenous Studies with IHEAC in more detail; and*
- *supports further discussion between the AVCC and IHEAC on the appointment to Elders to specific roles, while affirming that the appointment of persons to specific roles within universities is a matter for each individual university.*

**IHEAC Priority 6: Increase the number of Indigenous people working in Australian universities**

Indigenous staff numbers are low relative to total staff numbers, with Indigenous staff representing only 0.8% of the total staff workforce. As well as setting a target for Indigenous employment, IHEAC recommends:

- developing Indigenous recruitment policies and strategies, and to ensure Indigenous people are represented on selection panels;
- following best practice across human resource policies with respect to staff development for Indigenous people, including mentoring schemes; and
- ensuring Indigenous people are represented on promotion and confirmation and academic committees.

While recruitment and human resources issues are clearly a matter for individual universities, universities are clearly targeted with these recommendations. The AVCC may be able, through its Committee on Indigenous Higher Education, to assist in information collection and dissemination on Indigenous employment strategies.

As such a strategy is a DEST requirement, universities already have specific employment strategies in place. The successes of such strategies would be added to if DEST made available some specific funding for the implementation of these strategies. Such funding should not come from current funds but be new funding with the specific purpose of funding Indigenous employment officers.

Table 4 above shows that the employment of Indigenous general staff in universities is much higher than of academic staff. While it is clearly desirable to have more Indigenous academic staff, the current higher rates of Indigenous general staff at universities can lead to the development of a critical mass of Indigenous people employed in universities. Many of these staff may themselves go on to further study, and they also expose other members of their community to higher education. The employment of Indigenous general staff is also aided by cadetships available through the Department of Employment and Workplace Relations which are not available for the employment of academic staff.

The AVCC is concerned that Indigenous staff in universities are being over-burdened with representation on university committees and panels. While the AVCC supports representation, it must be noted that this over-burdening is due to the low employment rates of Indigenous staff in universities. Indigenous staff representation on university panels and committees should thus be

more focussed on policy issues, programs and activities where the university and the Indigenous community would benefit from such representation.

**AVCC Recommendation 7:**

**The AVCC:**

- ***acknowledges that the current employment rates of Indigenous staff across Australian universities are not acceptable;***
- ***supports the principle of increasing the number of Indigenous staff in universities. In order to take account of the diversity of institutions and the difficulty in attracting staff, no employment targets as such should be set; and***
- ***recommends that DEST provide new funding for the employment of Indigenous employment officers.***

**IHEAC Priority 7: Improve the participation of Indigenous people in university governance and management**

IHEAC makes the following recommendations under this priority:

- a joint national summit in 2007 between the AVCC, Chancellors, and IHEAC to discuss progress in Indigenous higher education;
- appointing suitable Indigenous people to university councils and other governing bodies in order to improve council expertise on Indigenous issues. A related recommendation is the preparation of a briefing booklet on contemporary issues in Indigenous higher education; and
- the designation of senior positions with responsibility for Indigenous issues, for example Pro-Vice-Chancellors “with responsibilities to ensure equity, continuing improvement in Indigenous higher education outcomes and the enhancement of Indigenous culture and knowledge in Australian universities”.

The AVCC supports a national summit and seeks to discuss the agenda for this summit at an early stage.

The appointment of university council members is not directly a responsibility of Vice-Chancellors.. Notably Government could affect change on this matter by changing the National Governance Protocols, and has used such a mechanism before to influence the constitution of councils. The AVCC will comment on any proposals put forward by Government. Currently universities are from time to time asked to put forward recommendations for new Council members, and it may be appropriate for Indigenous people to be included in such recommendations.

The recommendation that a senior university official, such as a Pro-Vice-Chancellor might have direct responsibility for Indigenous higher education, is a matter for each university to consider in the context of its own institutional arrangements. However, as the proposal has merit the AVCC will, through its Committee on Indigenous Higher Education, conduct a survey on how many senior university managers are from Indigenous backgrounds. The AVCC aims to complete this survey in 2006, and will ask its Committee on Indigenous Higher Education to analyse the findings and make recommendations.

**AVCC Recommendation 8:**

*The AVCC:*

- *supports the idea of a National Indigenous Higher Education Summit in 2007;*
- *will encourage universities to include Indigenous people in their recommendations of potential council members when asked; and*
- *will conduct a survey of the Indigenous status of senior university management to be completed in 2006, with the results to be referred to the AVCC Committee on Indigenous Higher Education for analysis.*