

UNIVERSITIES AUSTRALIA

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# INDIGENOUS STRATEGY ANNUAL REPORT

MARCH 2021

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## FOREWORD

Through the continued commitment of Universities Australia and its 39 member universities to the Universities Australia Indigenous Strategy we have made significant progress and learnt much about how our collective efforts can support Indigenous advancement in and through universities.

This is a continuing task as we build on our successes and acknowledge our shortcomings in the development of the next iteration of the Universities Australia Indigenous Strategy for 2021-2024.

Overall, the story from the 2020 survey is positive. But there is still a lot more to be done.

Positive trends in participation continue. Enrolments of Indigenous students continue to grow – and growth significantly outstrips increases in non-Indigenous enrolments.

But Indigenous completion rates remain low – and well below those observed for non-Indigenous students.

Indigenous staff numbers have grown but are significantly below population parity.

Like the rest of society, universities faced difficult conditions in 2020 due to the coronavirus pandemic. Teaching had to be moved online in a very short timeframe. This process was faster and more successful than anyone expected. Considering the circumstances, students were fairly positive about the new online environment. The 2020 survey found that Indigenous students also had positive things to say about the rapid shift to online learning, though they also identified problems and challenges: some in common with other students; some specific to Indigenous student experience.

Universities operate a variety of pathways into study for Indigenous students. Different pathways address different challenges. Of course, universities' programs can't solve all the problems caused by disadvantage and exclusion, but their positive influence is evident from growing enrolments.

Indigenous students remain especially under-represented in several fields (STEM and Business). But universities are working to increase enrolments in a broader range of fields.

Universities Australia is working to revise and renew the Indigenous Strategy. This process was one of many in 2020 that was delayed by the pandemic.

Universities Australia is now consulting with stakeholders on priorities for the next three years. Universities Australia and the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island Higher Education Consortium (NATSHEC) invite all interested parties to contribute ideas and suggestions to renew and strengthen the Indigenous Strategy.

Our shared commitment to practical actions is integral to making meaningful advances. Moreover, this commitment needs to be appropriately resourced.

Looking towards the next edition of the Indigenous Strategy, Universities Australia is very aware that universities need to do more to support student success – to narrow the gap in completion rates and to ensure that big increases in enrolments translate more directly into increases in degree attainment.

Universities need to do more to attract Indigenous staff, to make universities welcoming and culturally safe places to work and to support career development for Indigenous academic and professional staff.

Universities need to do more to combat racism – starting within universities themselves.

Supporting and furthering Indigenous advancement in and through universities is a matter of fairness and social justice. But in addition to this, enabling Indigenous people to make a stronger contribution to higher education and research is a win for universities and for Australia as a whole. As the first edition of the Universities Australia Indigenous Strategy states, 'by better embracing the talent and resources of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, all of us will prosper'. Where Indigenous people participate in study and work at universities at a level in line with their share of the population, where Indigenous knowledge contributes to higher education and research, where universities effectively and productively engage with Indigenous communities, everybody wins.

This year's report shows where the sector can build on success, and where we need to do things differently to achieve change. We hope these findings are helpful and informative for the sector, just as they will help UA and NATSIHEC to renew the Indigenous Strategy for the next three years.

Catriona Jackson

Chief Executive, Universities Australia



Dr Leanne Holt

President, NATSIHEC



# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

## OVERVIEW

The Universities Australia Indigenous Strategy 2017- 2020 (the Strategy) is a commitment by Universities Australia and its 39 member universities to support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people's participation and success in higher education.

The Strategy is developed in partnership with the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Higher Education Consortium (NATSIHEC). NATSIHEC is an Aboriginal Corporation which represents and advocates for its members on higher education matters. Also, in 2021 the inaugural Universities Australia Deputy Vice Chancellor/Pro Vice Chancellor (Indigenous) Committee was convened. This Committee is comprised of Deputy Vice-Chancellor/Pro Vice-Chancellor or equivalent Indigenous senior staff and will have oversight and responsibilities for driving the Strategy. The Committee will sit alongside the four other Universities Australia Deputy Vice-Chancellor Committees under the Universities Australia Board.

Under the Strategy, Universities Australia's member universities collectively agreed to a number of actions pursuant to:

- improving student enrolments and performance;
- improving staff outcomes for both academic and professional staff;
- increasing the engagement of non-Indigenous people with Indigenous knowledge, culture, and educational approaches; and
- improving the university environment for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

Universities Australia, as the peak sector body representing Australia's comprehensive universities, undertook to support the efforts of its member universities by drafting the Strategy, facilitating input via consultations and agreeing to actions.

The Universities Australia actions under the Strategy are:

- sector advocacy;
- enabling the sharing of good practice; and
- reporting on progress against the Strategy.

The sector's commitment is long-term and as the sector's peak representative body Universities Australia acknowledges the need to continue to work alongside its members to advocate and maintain momentum.

## CONTEXT

This is the third annual report on progress achieved under the Strategy since its launch in 2017.

This report draws information from two main sources: data held by the Department of Education, Skills and Employment (DESE), and the Indigenous Strategy Annual Survey completed by Universities Australia's member universities. The annual reporting process is an important way for the sector to chart progress, share good practice, and to identify areas requiring further action. Universities Australia acknowledges the complications and strain that COVID-19 has placed on the sector and so commends and appreciates the effort of those involved in the production of the survey



responses and in their contribution in consultations to the 2021-24 iteration of the Strategy currently under development.

Developed in partnership with NATSIHEC, this year's annual survey had six themes.

- Theme 1: Online education during the pandemic
- Theme 2: Pathways into higher education for Indigenous students
- Theme 3: Indigenous participation by field of education
- Theme 4: Indigenous Strategy and university policy
- Theme 5: Leadership pathways for Indigenous staff
- Theme 6: Indigenous content in education design.

Consequently, this report focuses on these areas rather than every itemised action in the Strategy. There is however data on key indicators, which are used to track progress, for example student enrolments and completions, and staff ratios.

This report does not seek to rank achievements or to function as a report card by institution. Rather, it looks at how – as a sector – we can build on our achievements and focus on those areas requiring further or ongoing attention. The report and its case studies also allow us to share good practice.

## FINDINGS

All 39 survey responses were reviewed and analysed by the Universities Australia directorate together with higher education data from DESE.

Overall, the Universities Australia Indigenous Strategy has been a positive initiative in supporting Indigenous student and staff advancement in universities. All 39 Universities Australia member universities have signed up to the Strategy and its targets and have made progress toward them.

This year's report shows that positive trends continue – especially in enrolment numbers. Conversely, many of the outstanding challenges remain the same.

Not surprisingly, the ways in which individual universities have responded to implementing actions under the Strategy are varied. This year's findings show initiatives that are working well and those that could be improved. For example:

- Indigenous student enrolment rates continue to grow, however completion rates are still lagging well behind non-Indigenous students;
- member universities received positive feedback from students on the move to online learning during the pandemic, however there were unique barriers faced by Indigenous students;
- all 39 member universities are participating in initiatives that encourage Indigenous students to participate in higher education;
- all universities acknowledged that the Universities Australia Indigenous Strategy has been incorporated and/or considered in strategic planning activities;
- only 14 out of 39 universities reported having an Indigenous research strategy in place despite the target for all universities to have one by 2018;
- Indigenous staff numbers have grown since the last survey, however in 2019 just 1.3 per cent of university staff were Indigenous persons, significantly below the working-age population parity figure of 3.1 per cent; and

- a greater proportion of Indigenous staff were women, however there was also a greater proportion of Indigenous staff in lower academic positions.

As we continue our commitments under the next iteration of the Indigenous Strategy for 2021-24, it will be important to build on our successes but also to acknowledge that much more needs to be done.

# ANNUAL REPORT

## PROGRESS AGAINST THE INDIGENOUS STRATEGY

### UNIVERSITY ACTIONS

Action	Progress
Maintain growth in Indigenous enrolments at 50 to 100 per cent above non-Indigenous growth.	Annual growth in Indigenous student enrolments has more than tripled the rate of growth in non-Indigenous student enrolments in recent years. In 2019, Indigenous undergraduate enrolments grew by 4.1 per cent, while non-Indigenous undergraduate enrolments fell 0.3 per cent. Total Indigenous enrolments rose by 5.5 per cent, compared to a marginal increase of 0.4 per cent in total non-Indigenous enrolments. However, despite this significant growth, Indigenous student enrolments remain well below population parity (3.1 per cent). As a proportion of all domestic enrolments, Indigenous students increased from 1.3 per cent in 2008 to 2.0 per cent in 2019.
Aim for retention and success rates to equal those of domestic non-Indigenous students in the same fields of study by 2025.	Improvement is needed to meet the longer-term target.  Success rates for Indigenous students have consistently been in the 68 to 72 per cent range since 2008, with non-Indigenous students in the 83 to 86 per cent range. Similarly, retention rates for Indigenous students have remained in the 72 to 76 per cent range since 2008, with non-Indigenous students typically remaining in the 85 to 88 per cent range.
Aim to achieve equal completion rates by field of study by 2028.	Substantial improvement is needed to meet the long-term target.  Indigenous Bachelor award course completions grew by 106.4 per cent between 2008 and 2019. Postgraduate research course completions rose 121.2 per cent and postgraduate coursework completions rose 146.7 per cent. However, nine-year completion rates for Indigenous students remains around 47 per cent, significantly below 74 per cent for non-Indigenous students.
Include Indigenous higher education, research and employment as priority areas in core policy documents, including institutional strategic and business plans.	Whilst not specifically collected during the third annual survey, from past surveys, related questions in this year's survey and online research, it would appear that most universities include Indigenous matters in such high-level plans.
Have Indigenous research strategies in place by 2018.	The third annual report survey found that only 14 universities had a current stand-alone Indigenous research strategy. Seven universities stated they had an overarching (not Indigenous-specific) research strategy that included Indigenous research, and 18 universities stated their research strategy was under development.
Ensure that implementation of these plans and policies is devolved through the university's faculties, schools and units.	The third annual report found that whilst there are positive signs of collaboration across universities and championing by senior leadership, it is unclear how much burden has been reduced for Indigenous staff working on Indigenous-related matters. Consultations for the Indigenous Strategy refresh to date have revealed that this remains an area of concern, particularly the overburdening of senior staff.

Ensure that additional workload expected of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff is recognised in workload planning and in performance assessments and promotions processes.	The annual survey process found there is still need for the additional requirements placed on Indigenous staff to be reflected in workload planning, performance assessments and promotions processes.
Build robust, respectful and collaborative partnerships between themselves and the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities that they serve.	All Universities Australia member universities state the importance of building relationships with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. However, the degree to which these relationships are meaningfully developed varies. Further work is required by some members to meet a standard that would be considered 'robust, respectful and collaborative'.
Take a community leadership role in promoting Indigenous higher education and building opportunities for wider community engagement in it.	The survey process and other research has found that most universities are increasingly raising the profile of Indigenous higher education in their institutions through means such as hosting and promoting events that celebrate or highlight Indigenous successes.
Have current executive staff and all new senior staff complete cross-cultural training programs from 2018.	The majority of universities offer Indigenous cross-cultural programs or professional development opportunities for executive and senior staff.
Have processes that ensure all students will encounter and engage with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural content as integral parts of their course of study, by 2020.	In the third annual survey just 17 from 39 universities reported having an Indigenous-specific graduate attribute.

## UNIVERSITIES AUSTRALIA ACTIONS

Action	Progress
Regularly include Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander observers at Plenary meetings of Vice-Chancellors.	Three Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander observers are now invited to two Universities Australia Plenary meetings each year.
Hold roundtables between the Universities Australia Board of Directors and the Indigenous academy and leadership to discuss progress against this Strategy and relevant sectoral policy matters.	Universities Australia facilitates annual joint Board meetings between the Universities Australia Board and NATSIHEC Executive to discuss progress of the Universities Australia Indigenous Strategy and other Indigenous higher education matters.  Also, Universities Australia has established the DVC/PVC Indigenous Committee. The Committee will advise Universities Australia on all Indigenous matters. In particular, the Committee will track progress against the Strategy and help drive initiatives aimed at Indigenous advancement in and through universities. The inaugural meeting of the committee was held in February 2021.

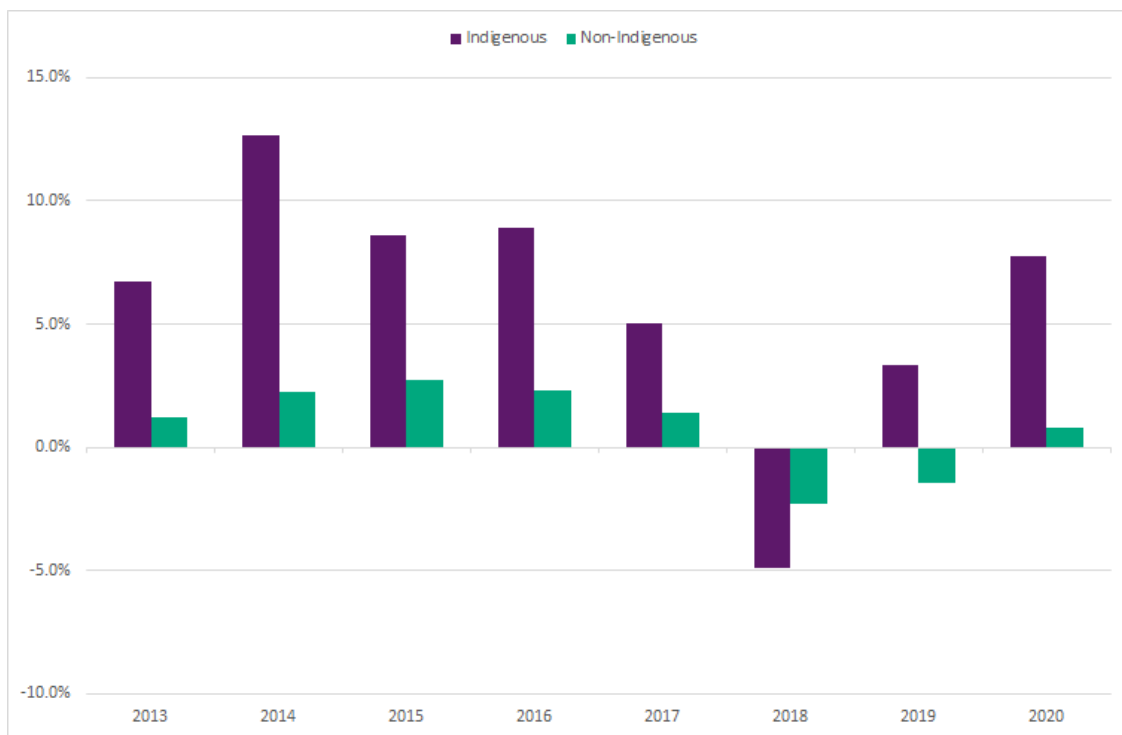
<p>Maintain formal ongoing dialogue with NATSIHEC and other Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander university leaders.</p>	<p>The Universities Australia directorate maintains regular engagement with NATSIHEC members on a range of key Indigenous higher education matters. For example, Universities Australia has a standing item at all three annual NATSIHEC meetings to discuss priorities.</p> <p>Also, the Universities Australia Board has established the DVC/PVC Indigenous Committee.</p>
<p>Develop, through the four Deputy Vice Chancellor Committees, agreed sector-wide initiatives which will be implemented in common across all member universities.</p>	<p>The DVC Academic Committee has been the only committee to complete an initiative.</p> <p>In the next iteration of the Strategy, Universities Australia will work to drive more effective efforts by the DVC Committees. The DVC/PVC (Indigenous) Committee will have a role in furthering and coordinating these efforts.</p>
<p>Include Indigenous higher education issues in all relevant submissions it makes, and advocacy work it undertakes.</p>	<p>In 2020, Universities Australia made a submission to the House Standing Committee on Indigenous Affairs inquiry into the pathways and participation opportunities for Indigenous Australians in employment and business.</p>
<p>Increase the profile of Indigenous higher education in public events such as the Universities Australia Conference.</p>	<p>In 2020, the Universities Australia conference included a session on leadership models and a workshop focusing on Indigenous student issues. Universities Australia also ran the <i>Indigenous OpportUNity</i> communications campaign encouraging Indigenous people to enrol in university.</p>
<p>Continue to advocate for increased Government investment in specific Indigenous higher education initiatives and for related outreach and participation programs.</p>	<p>In 2020, in response to the Job-Ready Graduates package, Universities Australia advocated for the extension of demand-driven places to all Indigenous students, not just those in regional or remote areas (this was included in Universities Australia's 2021 pre-Budget submission).</p>
<p>Develop, by 2018, a platform or mechanism to identify and share good practices.</p>	<p>To date, this has largely been through the annual report process and engagement with the Pro Vice-Chancellor Indigenous network and NATSIHEC. It is envisaged that the new Universities Australia DVC/PVC Indigenous Committee will assist with the sharing of good practice. Universities Australia will also seek to make more effective use of the other DVC committees.</p>
<p>Obtain annual feedback from universities on their progress towards meeting the commitments they have made in this Strategy, and publicly releasing annual reports.</p>	<p>Annual surveys are being conducted and annual reports published on the Universities Australia website.</p>

## STUDENT PARTICIPATION AND SUCCESS

### INDIGENOUS STUDENT APPLICATIONS

Figure 1 shows Indigenous student undergraduate applications grew by 7.7 per cent in 2020 following an increase of 3.3 per cent in 2019. Applications from non-Indigenous students have increased by just 0.8 per cent in 2020. Despite the increase, the share of Indigenous student applications remained at around two per cent of all undergraduate applications in 2020.

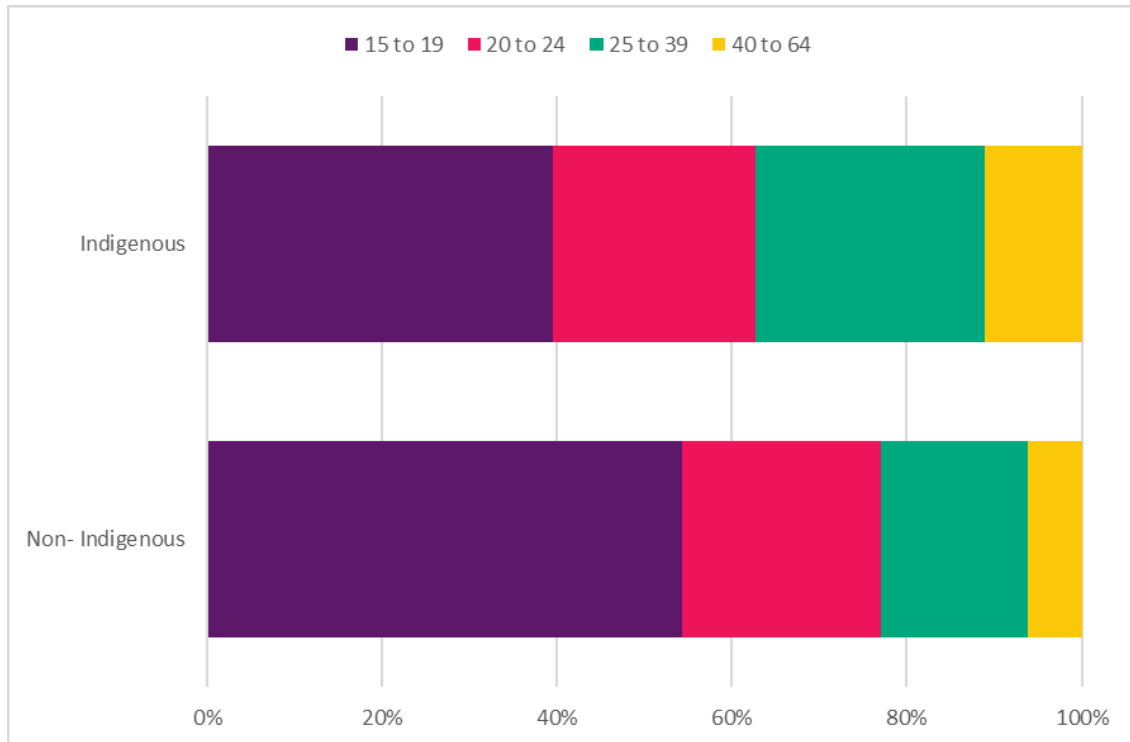
**Figure 1: Annual growth in undergraduate applications, 2013 to 2020.**



Source: Department of Education, Skills and Employment 2020, *Undergraduate Applications Offers and Acceptances*, unpublished data

Figure 2 shows Indigenous applicants for undergraduate courses are more likely to be older than non-Indigenous applicants. In 2020, 37 per cent of Indigenous applicants are aged 25 or older, compared to 23 per cent for non-Indigenous applicants.

**Figure 2: Share of undergraduate applications, by age, 2020.**

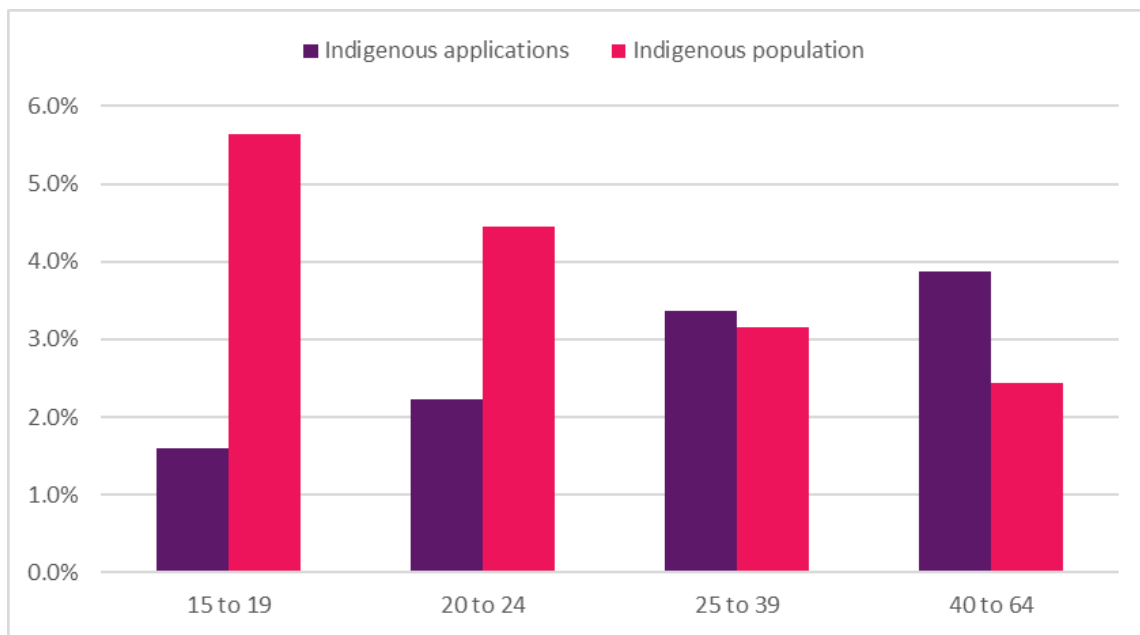


Source: Department of Education, Skills and Employment 2020, *Undergraduate Applications Offers and Acceptances*, unpublished data.

The share of Indigenous undergraduate applications at younger age cohorts remains significantly below the share of the young Indigenous population.

Only 1.6 per cent of all undergraduate applicants aged 15-19 are Indigenous, compared with an Indigenous population share of 5.6 per cent in 2020. For the 20 to 24 year age group, Indigenous people are 2.2 per cent of applicants but 4.4 per cent of the population as a whole. In contrast, for the 40 to 64 year age group, Indigenous students are 3.9 per cent of applications but represent 2.4 per cent of the total population.

**Figure 3: Share of Indigenous undergraduate applications compared to share of Indigenous population, by age, 2020.**

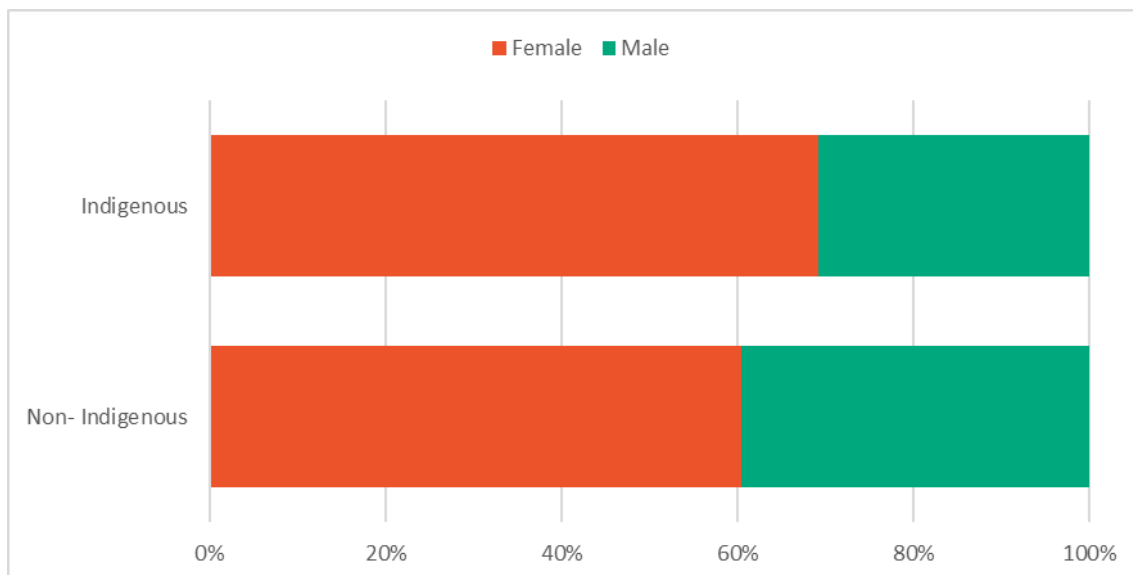


Source: Department of Education, Skills and Employment 2020, Undergraduate Applications Offers and Acceptances, unpublished data and ABS 2019, Estimates and Projections, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians, 2016 to 2031, Cat. No. 3238.0., Series B.



Indigenous student undergraduate applicants are also more likely to be female compared to non-Indigenous applicants. In 2020, 69 per cent of Indigenous student undergraduate applicants were female compared with 60 per cent for non-Indigenous applicants (Figure 4).

**Figure 4: Share of undergraduate applications, by gender, 2020.**

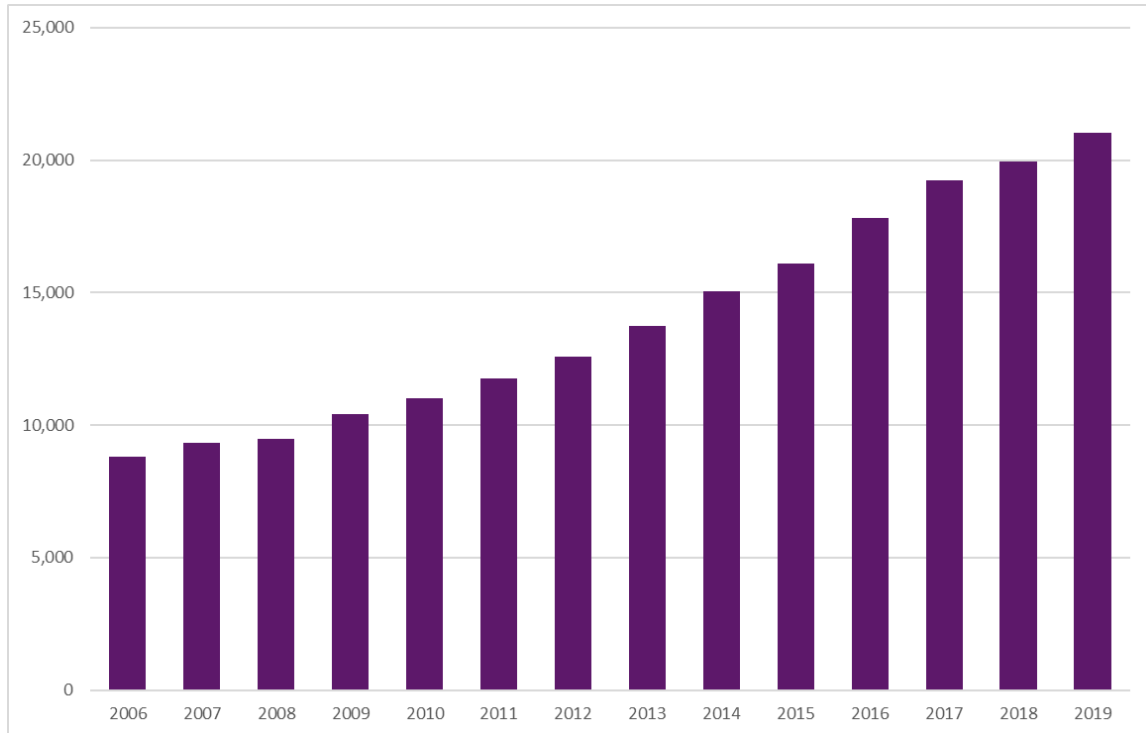


Source: Department of Education, Skills and Employment 2020, *Undergraduate Applications Offers and Acceptances*, unpublished data.

## INDIGENOUS STUDENT ENROLMENTS

Figure 5 shows overall Indigenous student enrolments have more than doubled since 2008 – increasing by 121.6 per cent – from 9,490 students to 21,033 students in 2019.

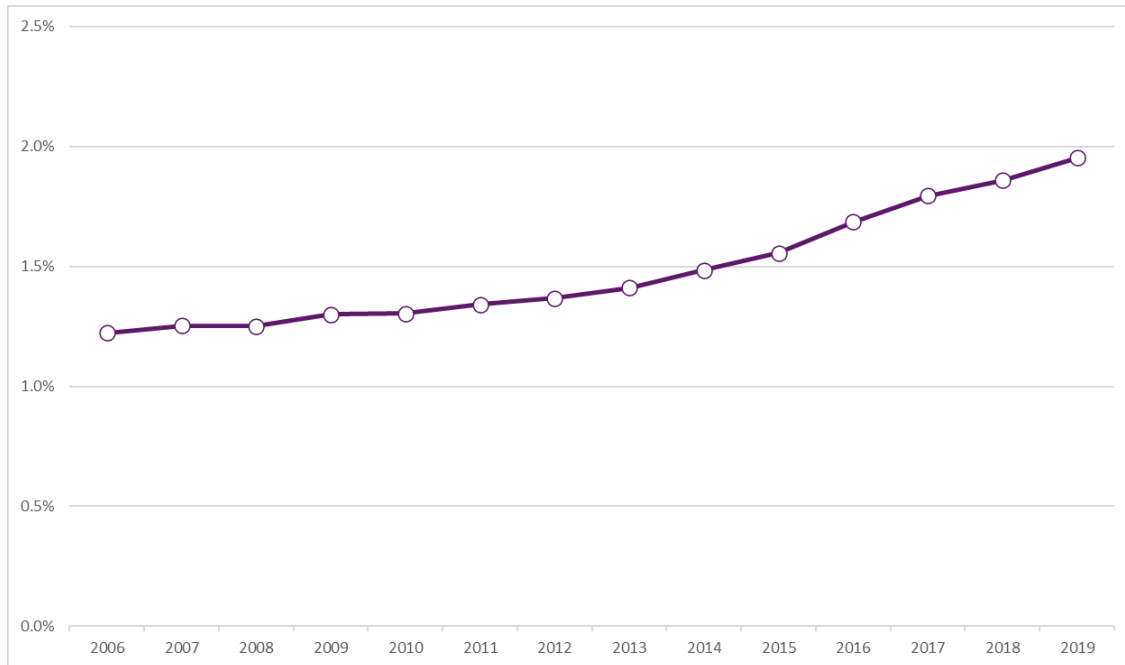
**Figure 5: Indigenous student enrolments, 2006 to 2019.**



Source: Department of Education, Skills and Employment 2020, *Selected Higher Education Statistics – 2019 Student data*, Section 11: Equity Group.

Figure 6 shows that as a proportion of all domestic enrolments, Indigenous students increased from 1.3 per cent in 2008 to two per cent in 2019. Despite this growth, Indigenous student enrolments remain well below population parity (3.1 per cent).

**Figure 6: Share of Indigenous student enrolments, 2006 to 2019.**

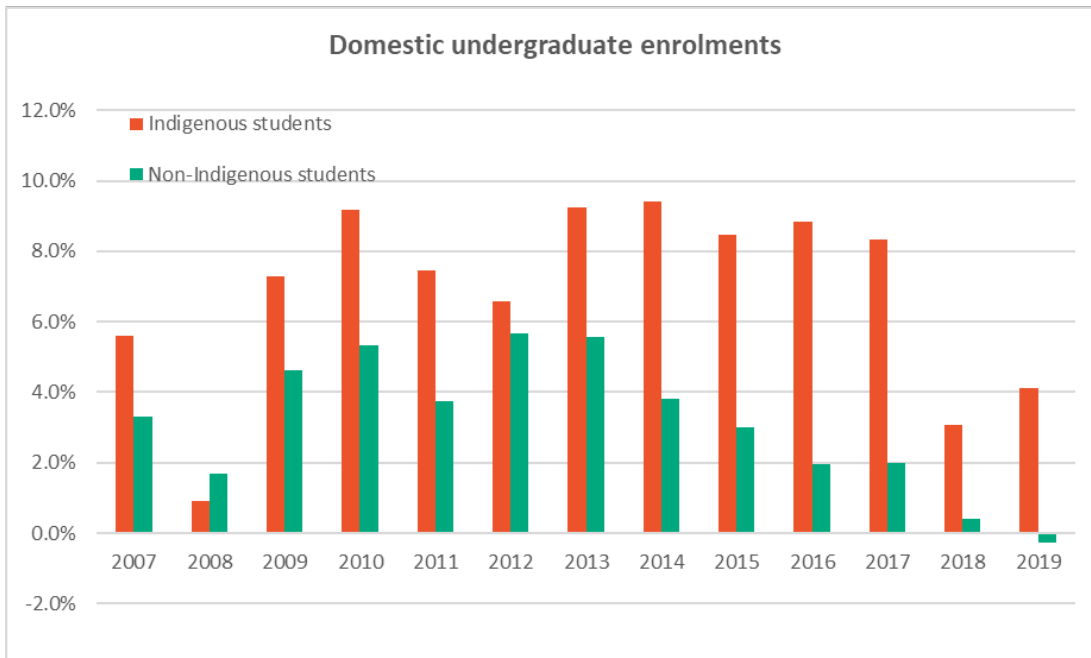
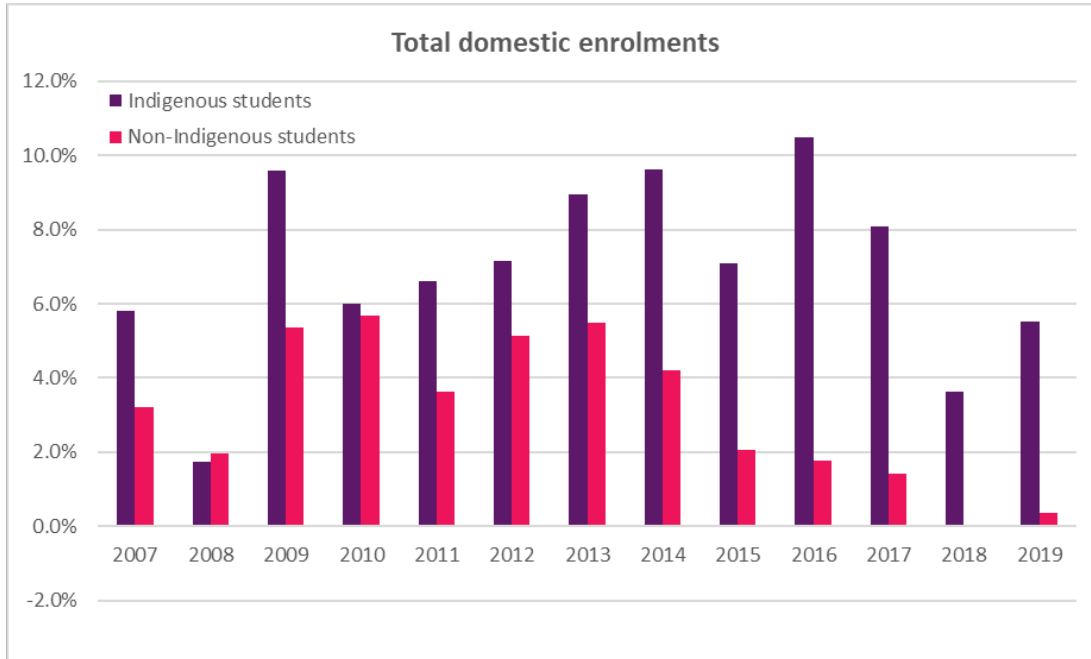


Source: Department of Education, Skills and Employment 2020, *Selected Higher Education Statistics – 2019 Student data*, Section 11: Equity Group.

Figure 7 shows annual growth in Indigenous student enrolments has more than tripled the rate of growth in non-Indigenous student enrolments in recent years.

In 2019, Indigenous undergraduate enrolments grew by 4.1 per cent, while non-Indigenous undergraduate enrolments fell 0.3 per cent. Total Indigenous enrolments rose by 5.5 per cent, compared to a marginal increase of 0.4 per cent in total non-Indigenous enrolments.

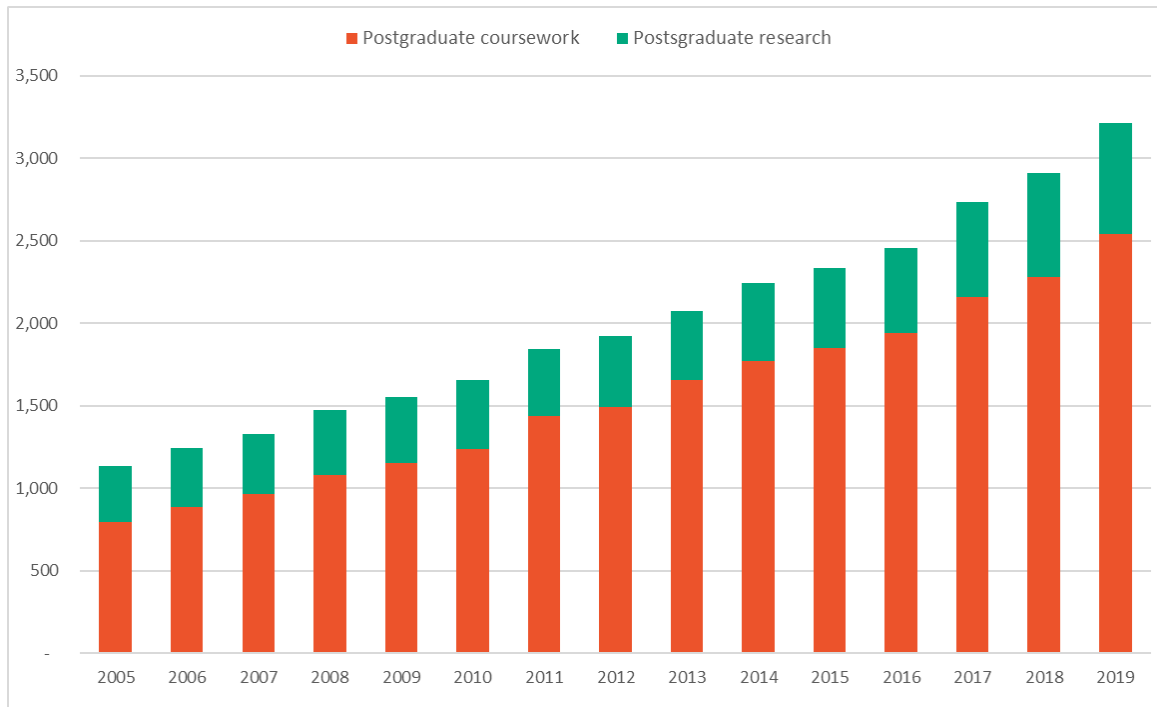
**Figure 7: Annual growth in Indigenous student enrolments total and undergraduate, 2007 to 2019.**



Source: Department of Education, Skills and Employment 2020, *Selected Higher Education Statistics – 2019 Student data*, Section 11: Equity Group.

Indigenous postgraduate student enrolments have increased since 2005 (Figure 8). The number of Indigenous enrolments in postgraduate research has doubled since 2005 – from 334 students to 677 students in 2019. Enrolment in postgraduate coursework degrees has more than tripled (growing by 218 per cent) – rising from 799 Indigenous students in 2005 to 2,540 Indigenous students in 2019.

**Figure 8: Indigenous postgraduate enrolments, 2005 to 2019.**

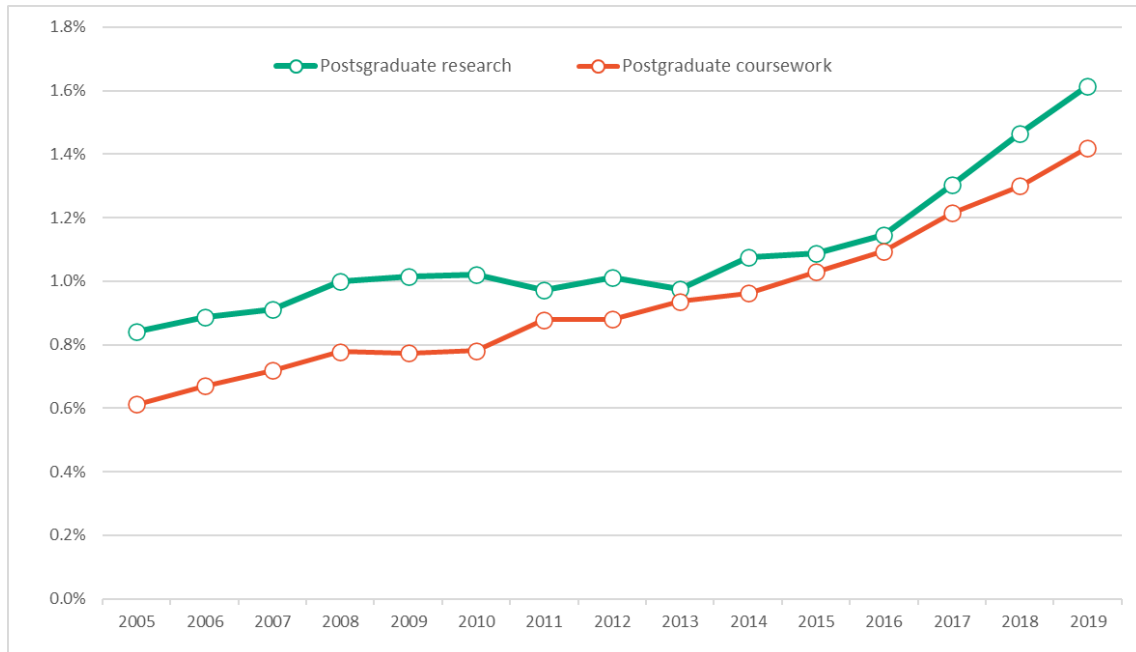


Source: Department of Education, Skills and Employment 2020, Unpublished HEIMS data.

As a result, the total number of Indigenous postgraduate students – coursework and research – as a proportion of all domestic postgraduate students grew from 0.67 per cent in 2005 to 1.46 per cent in 2019.

The share of Indigenous postgraduate research students grew from 0.84 per cent in 2005 to 1.61 per cent in 2019 and the share of Indigenous postgraduate coursework students also grew from 0.61 per cent to 1.42 per cent over the same period (Figure 9).

**Figure 9: Share of Indigenous postgraduate enrolments, 2005 to 2019.**



Source: Department of Education, Skills and Employment 2020, Unpublished HEIMS data.

## COURSE LEVEL

Indigenous student enrolments in Bachelor degree courses increased by 127.1 per cent, from 6,352 in 2008 to 14,424 in 2019. Indigenous enrolments in enabling courses have more than doubled from 871 in 2008 to 2,012 in 2019. While Indigenous student postgraduate research enrolments grew by a more modest 74.6 per cent over the period – from 393 to 686 – enrolments in postgraduate coursework degrees have more than doubled from 1,138 to 2,769.

**Table 1: Indigenous enrolments, by course level, 2008 and 2019.**

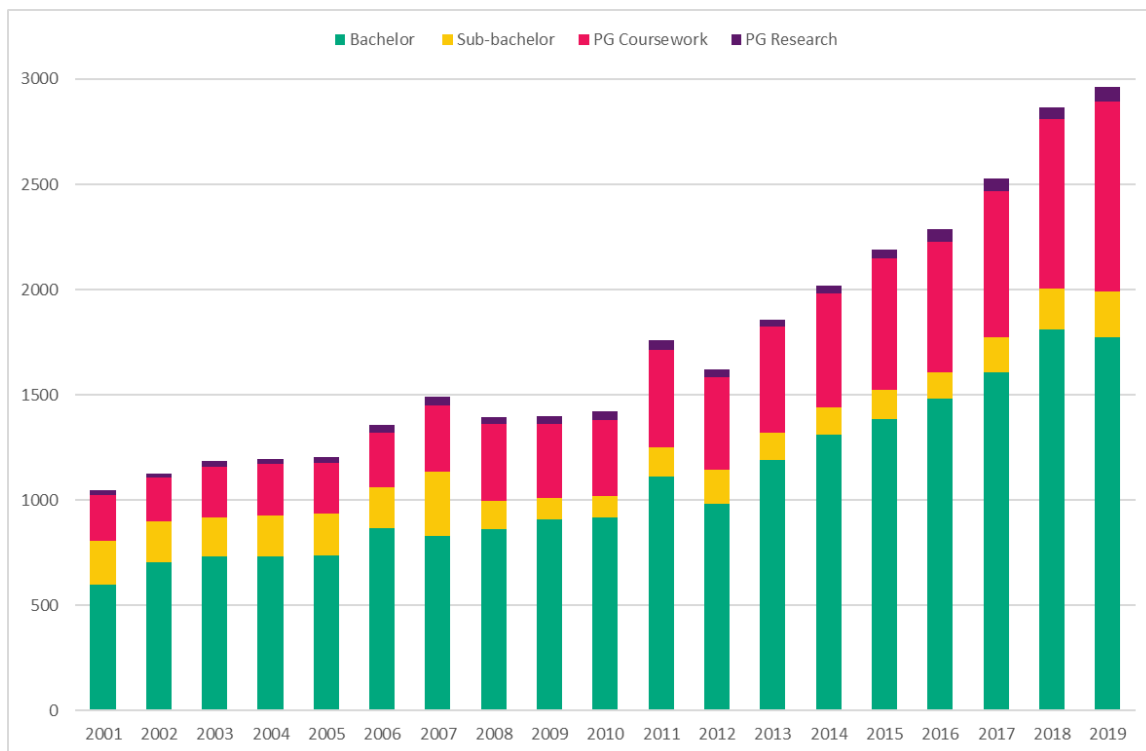
Course level	2008	2019	Growth (per cent)
Postgraduate research	393	686	74.6
Postgraduate coursework	1,138	2,769	143.3
Bachelor	6,352	14,424	127.1
Sub-bachelor	686	1,059	54.4
Enabling	871	2,012	131.0
Non-award	50	83	66.0
<b>All courses</b>	<b>9,490</b>	<b>21,033</b>	<b>121.6</b>

Source: Department of Education, Skills and Employment 2020, *Visual analytics – Enrolment time-series*.

## INDIGENOUS STUDENT COMPLETIONS, RETENTION AND SUCCESS

Since 2008, award course completions by Indigenous students have continued to grow year-on-year, consistent with the growth in Indigenous student enrolments. Indigenous Bachelor award course completions grew by 106.4 per cent – from 860 degrees awarded to Indigenous students in 2008 to 1,775 in 2019. Postgraduate research course completions rose 121.2 per cent – from 33 in 2008 to 73 in 2019 – and postgraduate coursework completions rose 146.7 per cent – from 364 to 898 (Figure 10).

**Figure 10: Number of award course completions by Indigenous students, by course level.**

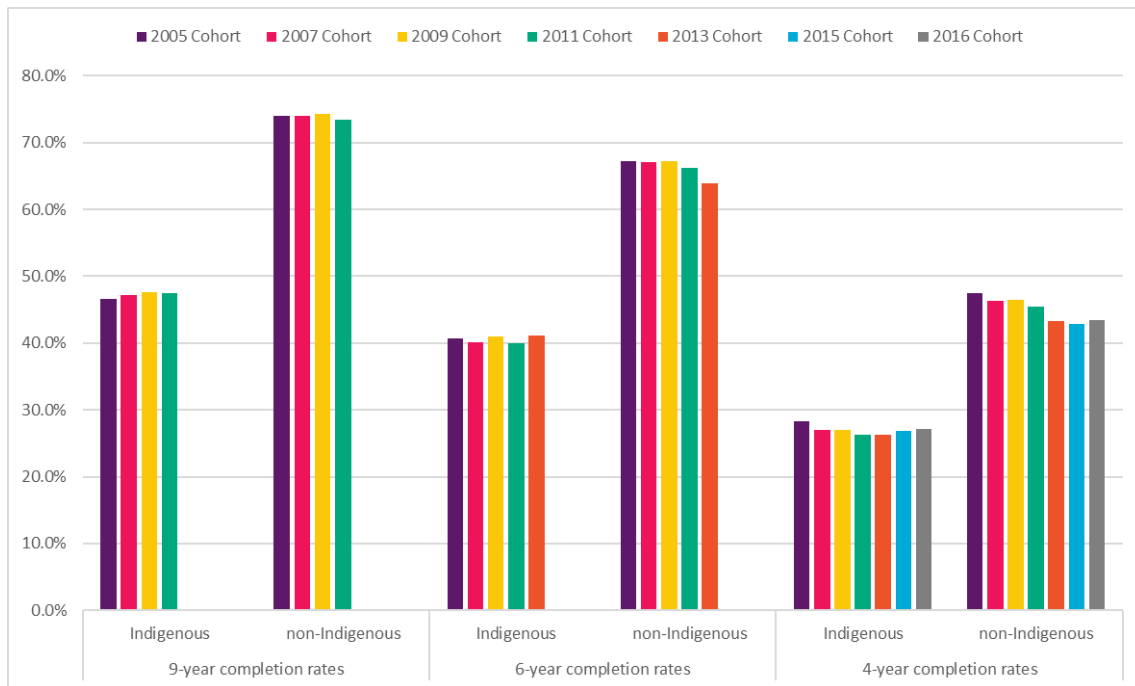


Source: Department of Education, Skills and Employment 2020, *Visual analytics – Award course completions time series*.



However, as Figure 11 shows, Bachelor degree completion rates for Indigenous students remained low compared to non-Indigenous students. Nine-year completion rates for Indigenous students remains around 47 per cent, significantly below 74 per cent for non-Indigenous students (as Indigenous students typically take longer to complete their degrees nine-year rates provide the most accurate picture from the data options).

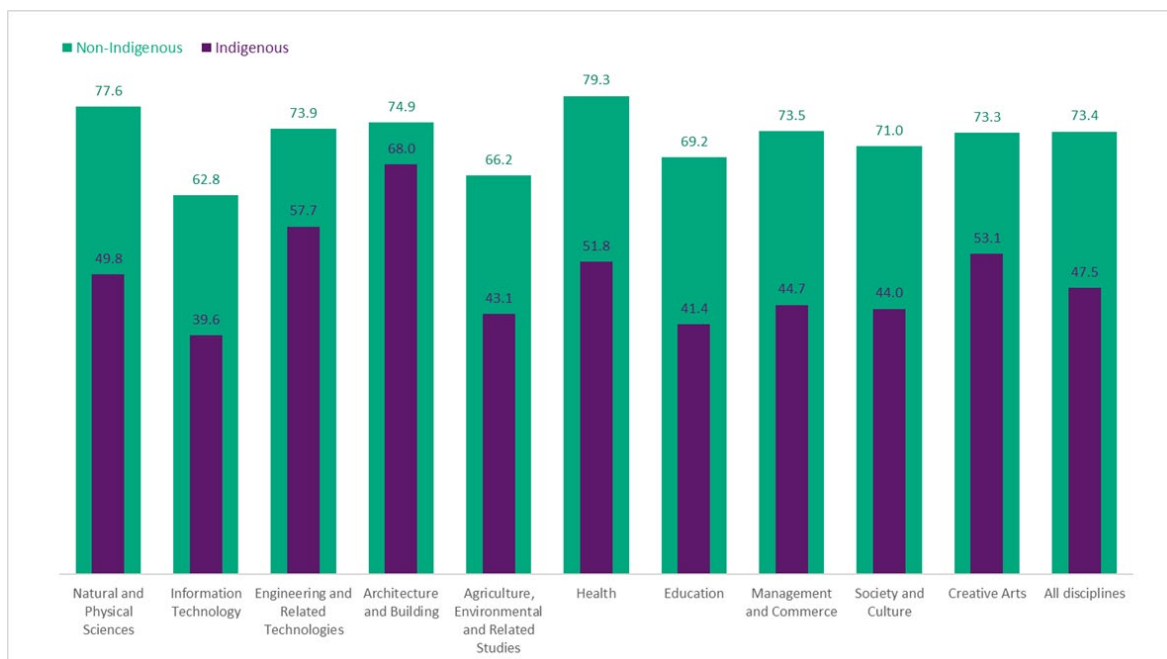
**Figure 11: Completion rates – nine, six and four years – of commencing Indigenous and non-Indigenous Bachelor degree students.**



Source: Department of Education, Skills and Employment 2020, *Completion Rates of Higher Education Students – Cohort Analysis, 2005–2019*.

Figure 12 shows nine-year completion rates by discipline and Indigenous status for the 2011 student cohort. Architecture and Building fared best both in absolute terms and in the ratio between Indigenous and non-Indigenous students with 68 per cent of Indigenous students completing compared with 74.9 per cent of non-Indigenous students. Fairing worst in absolute terms was Information Technology with just 39.6 per cent of Indigenous students completing compared with 62.8 per cent of non-Indigenous students. The biggest completion gap was in Health and in Education where the gap was 27.8 percentage points (79.3 per cent / 51.8 per cent and 69.2 per cent / 41.4 per cent).

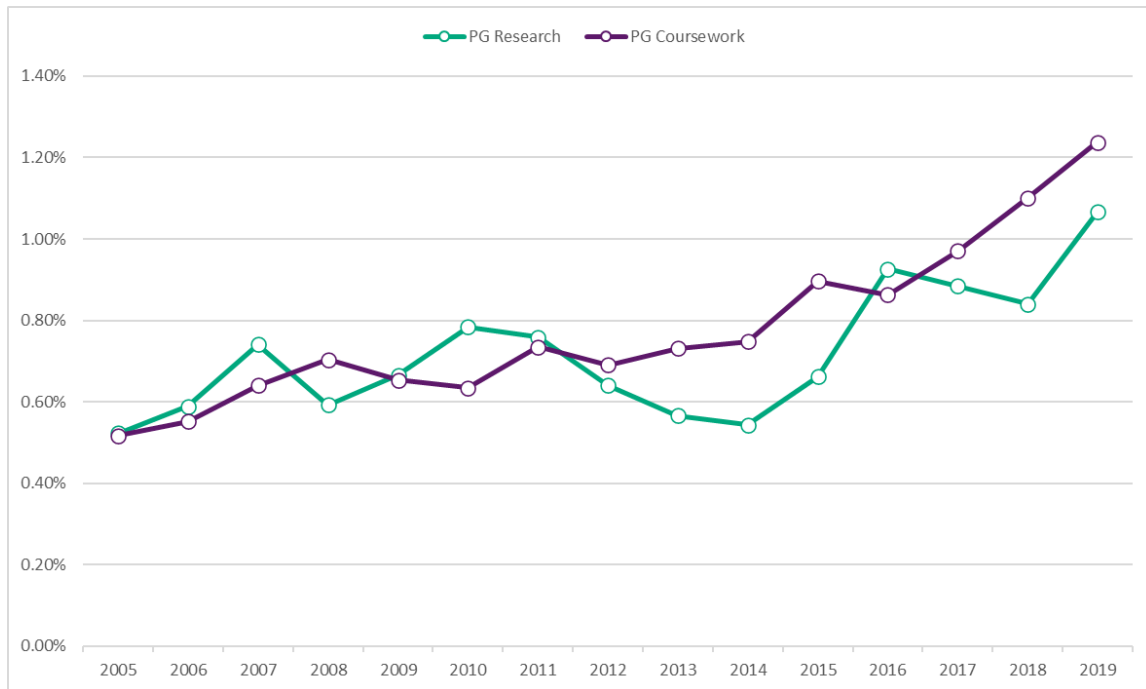
**Figure 12: Nine-year completion rates for commencing domestic undergraduate students, by disciplines and Indigenous status, for 2011 cohort.**



Source: Department of Education, Skills and Employment 2020, Unreleased Cohort completion analysis , 2011–2020.

Despite the growth in postgraduate enrolments, Indigenous postgraduate student award completions remain low (Figure 13). In 2019, Indigenous students comprised just over one per cent of domestic postgraduate coursework completions (1.24 per cent or 898 completions) and domestic postgraduate research award completions (1.07 per cent or 73 completions).

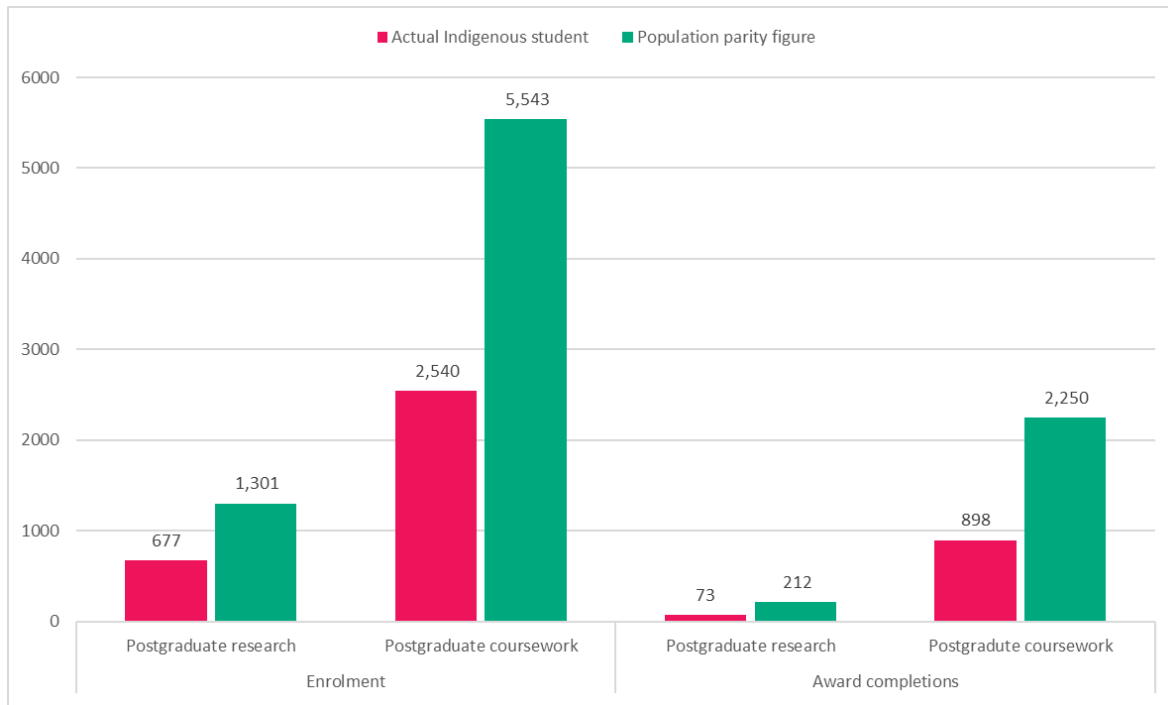
**Figure 13: Share of Indigenous postgraduate award completions, 2005 to 2019.**



Source: Department of Education, Skills and Employment 2020, *Visual Analytics – Award Course Completions Time Series*.

To reach population parity of 3.1 per cent, Figure 14 shows the sector would have needed to enrol an additional 624 Indigenous postgraduate research students and an additional 3,003 postgraduate coursework students in 2019, and graduate an additional 139 postgraduate research students and an additional 1,352 postgraduate coursework students from Indigenous backgrounds in 2019.

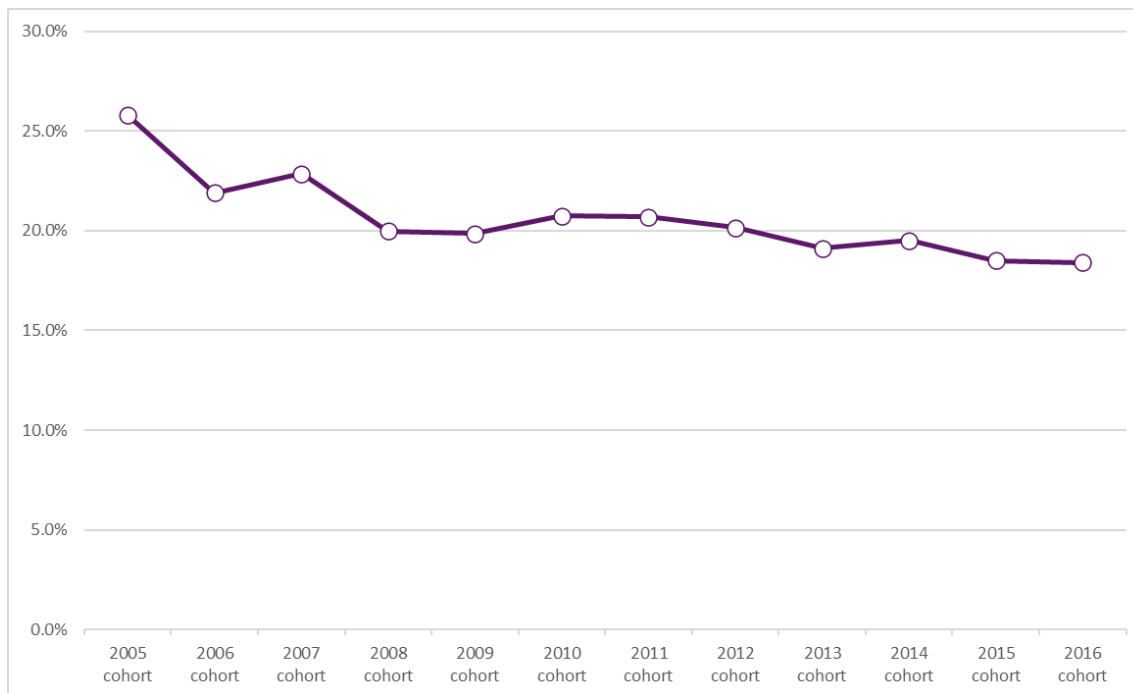
**Figure 14: Indigenous postgraduate student, actual and population parity figures, 2019.**



Source: Universities Australia estimates based on 2019 actual Indigenous enrolments and award course completions compared to if Indigenous enrolments and award completions are at 3.1 per cent population parity.

Since 2005, the proportion of Indigenous students who leave their studies and do not return has declined. Of the Indigenous students who started university in 2005, 25.8 per cent had left their studies four years later. For Indigenous students who started university in 2016, the attrition rate had fallen to 18.4 per cent (Figure 15).

**Figure 15: Share of Indigenous students commencing a Bachelor degree that never return – after four years.**



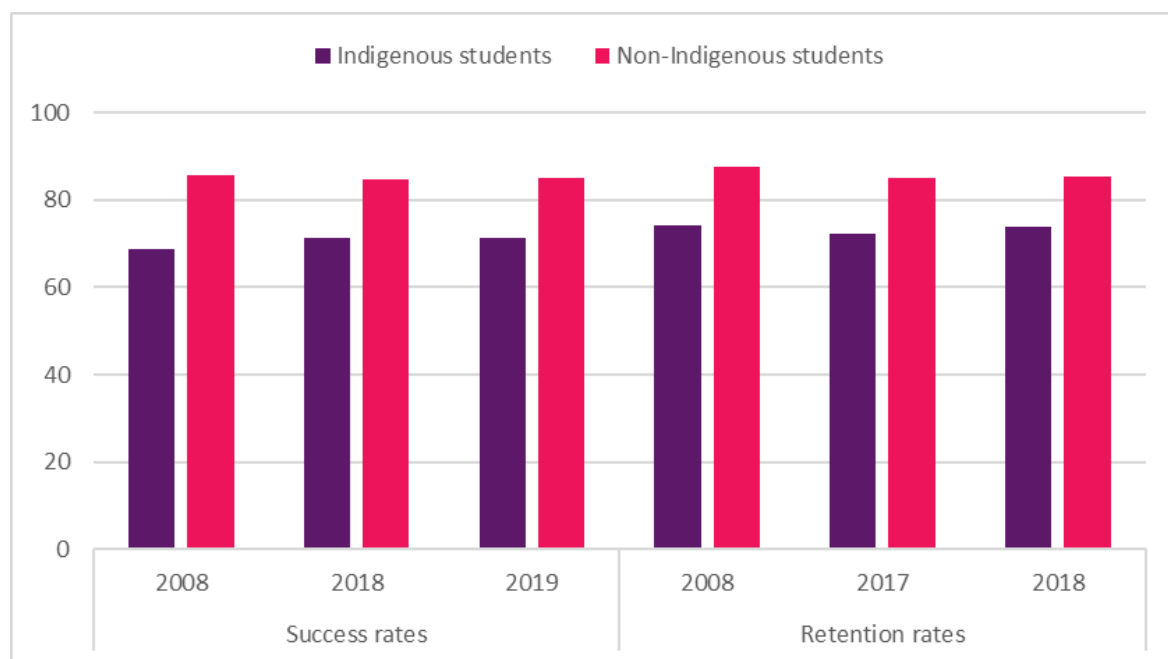
Source: Department of Education, Skills and Employment 2019, *Completion Rates of Higher Education Students – Cohort Analysis, 2005–2018*.

Over the last decade there has been a persistent and significant gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous retention and success rates.

Success rates calculate the proportion of units that students pass in any given year. Success rates for Indigenous students have consistently been in the 68 to 72 per cent range since 2008, with non-Indigenous students in the 83 to 86 per cent range (Figure 16).

Retention rates calculate the proportion of students who return to study after their first year. Similarly, retention rates for Indigenous students have remained in the 72 to 76 per cent range since 2008, with non-Indigenous students typically remaining in the 85 to 88 per cent range.

**Figure 16: Retention and success rates of domestic Bachelor degree students, Indigenous vs non-Indigenous, per cent.**



Source: Department of Education, Skills and Employment 2020, *Visual Analytics—Attrition, retention and success rates*.

Note: Adjusted retention rate for year (x) is the number of students who commenced a bachelor course in year (x) and did not complete in year (x), and continued in year (x + 1) (retained students), as a proportion of all students who commenced a bachelor course in year (x) and did not complete in year (x). If a student moves from one institution to another in the following year, he or she would be counted as retained in the adjusted retention rate calculation. Success rate for year(x) is the proportion of actual student load (EFTSL) for units of study that are passed divided by all units of study attempted (passed + failed + withdrawn).

## ONLINE LEARNING DURING THE PANDEMIC

In March 2020 the Director General of the World Health Organisation declared COVID-19 a global pandemic. In response, Australia undertook initiatives to limit the spread of the disease, centred around limiting person-to-person contact (social distancing, quarantining, and border restrictions). For universities, this meant the suspension of on-campus activities including face-to-face teaching, and a swift transition to the provision of online learning to all students.

### STUDENT AND STAFF FEEDBACK PROCESS

Overall, 35 (90 per cent) universities reported seeking feedback from students regarding online learning during the pandemic. Of these, 32 (82 per cent) stated that they sought specific feedback from Indigenous students. Three universities sought university-wide feedback only, and the remainder did not seek formal feedback.

Less than half of Universities Australia member universities (19) reported having obtained feedback from Indigenous staff regarding online learning during the pandemic. Of those who obtained feedback, nine sought this through a university-wide mechanism, and just seven sought feedback from Indigenous staff specifically (three did not specify).

For the Indigenous student feedback, the avenue for collection was predominantly via the Indigenous Centres and/or Indigenous support officers. The most popular methods of collection were online surveys and phone calls.

### ACCESS CONCERNS

This year's survey revealed a range of issues and responses regarding Indigenous students' capacity to access online education during the pandemic. The following is a breakdown of the major themes identified in survey responses.

#### STUDY EQUIPMENT AND SPACE

Access to equipment required for study was identified by 25 universities (64 per cent) as a barrier to Indigenous students' accessing online learning during the pandemic. This included not having access or only having limited access to computers, webcams, printers and software.

Internet access was also identified explicitly by 25 universities (64 per cent), some of whom did not identify equipment access as an issue. Issues identified as impacting on studies were:

- unstable internet connection;
- insufficient bandwidth for platforms that required high upload/download capacity e.g. lectures and tutorials; and
- affordability, particularly where students resorted to using mobile phone data.

The last two issues above were reported as particularly impacting students who returned to remote communities due to suspension of on-campus teaching.

The impact of the pandemic also highlighted that a significant proportion of Indigenous students rely on study spaces on campus including Indigenous Centres, and other places suitable for study such as public libraries.

These access issues were reported as affecting students' ability to complete assignments and exams, engage with lectures and tutorials, and access course materials and support services.

For those that did have access to the appropriate equipment and study space for online learning, reliance on this as the sole study environment revealed restrictions imposed by caring arrangements (including children undergoing home-schooling as a result of the pandemic), sharing a study space including equipment, and the cultural responsibilities that occur within the home environment.

## ISOLATION

Twenty-three (59 per cent) universities reported that restricted social interaction, including restricted access to family and country, resulted in feelings of isolation for students. This isolation was reported as having a negative effect on the mental and spiritual health of students with a subsequent negative impact on their studies.

The survey also found that the experience of isolation varied for different year cohorts. An example provided distinguished between first-year and second-year students. Here, first-year students reported feeling isolated as they had not yet been able to build significant support structures at university. Whereas the second-year students reported experiencing isolation resulting from loss of connections with the student cohort with whom they had built strong relationships in first-year, including study groups.

## NAVIGATING THE NEW LEARNING ENVIRONMENT

Student concerns over navigating the new (online) learning environment were identified by 22 universities (56 per cent). Here difficulties included the time and effort it took to find information and resources online, learning new software, and reports of 'computer burn-out' including disruption to work/life balance due to increased time spent online.

Several Indigenous students reported reduced quality in their learning experience, stating that it was easier for them to learn face-to-face. Concerns were also raised that the engagement of non-Indigenous students with Indigenous content was diminished as classroom discussion was hampered by online delivery.

There was mixed feedback regarding accessing support services. Some universities reported an increase in student applications whilst others reported a decline. Most support services requests were for assistance in navigating the new online learning environment, for example learning new software applications.

Other concerns raised included reports by some universities that their support networks through their Indigenous Centres were skewed toward undergraduate students, which in some cases left postgraduate students feeling unsupported.

Not surprisingly, those universities already active in the online learning space fared better than those that were not. Moreover, those universities with greater budgetary capacities appeared better able to facilitate a swift transition to online learning.

## OTHER

Other impacts cited in the survey responses include:

- loss of student income due to business closures, particularly for those working in the hospitality sector;
- increased media exposure to political and social issues such as Black Lives Matter created additional stressors for students with limited capacity to separate or switch off from or to discuss with others in person; and



- further disruption for students travelling for cultural business, including sorry business, who were required to quarantine due to their travel.

Finally, a number of universities were complimented on their ability to provide support and there were reports of acknowledgement by students that they understood and appreciated the fact that staff had put significant energy into supporting students under very difficult circumstances.

## **SUPPORT FOR INDIGENOUS STUDENTS**

Thirty-five (87 per cent) member universities indicated that they provided support for accessing online learning to Indigenous students during the pandemic. The other four respondents offered support across the university with no differentiation for Indigenous students.

Of those providing specific support to Indigenous students, 13 indicated that the main form of support was through their on-campus Indigenous Centre, with 18 reporting a combination of university-wide initiatives and Indigenous Centre support.

Mentoring and tutoring was the most cited form of online support (80 per cent). This was followed by general communication (51 per cent), which included phone calls to students to check on their wellbeing. On this, one Indigenous staff member reported they felt that telephone calls and the occasional Zoom conversation did not allow for the support that was needed. The next most reported support was the provision of equipment, care packs and funds/grants (49 per cent).

## **CASE STUDY**

### **MURDOCH UNIVERSITY'S KULBARDI *RELATIONSHIPS-FIRST STRATEGY***

#### **Application of a 'relationships-first' strategy in the rapid transition to online learning for Indigenous university students during COVID-19.**

Although the formal support functions of Kulbardi Centre are essential, we do not view them as the sole determinants of Indigenous student success. Student support is inherently relational, which means that support functions are most effectively delivered within the context of genuine and trusting relationships amongst students and staff at the Kulbardi Centre. Given that the majority of the formal and informal relationships that underpin the Centre's philosophy of effective student support were catalysed and fostered on the physical campus, the university mandate to rapidly transition all services and classes online, in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, posed a significant challenge. Kulbardi staff set a challenge to be able to develop and maintain these types of relationships within an online context.

As the transition to online learning happened rapidly, staff at the centre held a meeting to action how we would best support students and continue to foster a sense of belonging. We knew that students would need access to technology and then made an active decision to keep the centre open so that students could still access our printing and computers. We then made the decision to increase our outreach to students. All staff, regardless of whether they were student facing were given a cohort of students to contact on a weekly basis. Staff conducted check-ins with students and then met weekly to discuss issues students were having and create solutions to common issues.

[The Indigenous Tutorial Assistance Scheme] ITAS is another crucial component to student success. It was imperative that this could continue in an online format. All ITAS tutors were given training in blackboard collaborate so that they could conduct tutoring with students in an online environment.

In order to create a sense of belonging within the centre, Kulbardi staff created videos on our social media page and conducted online 'cup of tea' sessions. Each week students would join and chat with staff about how they were coping and sharing strategies with each other about how they had coped during isolation.

As staff were conducting weekly check-ins, with students they were able to monitor the progress with students in real time. Students who didn't want a check-in would let staff know. A survey was also conducted where students praised the staff for their support during the pandemic. Although progress rates declined during the pandemic, retention rates stayed the same.

Testimonial examples:

"I was really impressed with how Kulbardi responded to the COVID-19 crisis. I feel as if there really isn't anything they could have done better."

"Considering the circumstances, the Kulbardi centre handled the situation in the best possible way."

"I found the increase in outgoing communication from Kulbardi with information pertaining to the COVID-19 crisis was particularly well done."

"Ensuring that students without access to technology had the ability to access technology (keeping the computer labs open), creating a Facebook page for students to continue engaging, being in constant contact with students (sms, calls, emails), ensuring students received information regarding COVID 19".

## **PATHWAYS INTO HIGHER EDUCATION FOR INDIGENOUS STUDENTS**

### **PERCEPTION OF BARRIERS TO HIGHER EDUCATION FOR INDIGENOUS STUDENTS**

Indigenous people experience unique barriers to accessing and succeeding in higher education. As part of the survey member universities were asked to present their understandings of what they thought these barriers included. The following are the main areas identified by respondents.

#### **FINANCIAL BARRIERS**

Thirty universities (90 per cent) identified financial barriers as an issue for both prospective and enrolled students. A university education requires significant financial commitment and for many this cost is a barrier to enrolment or completion. For enrolled students, one example of financial strain was scholarships that are not activated until after the university census date, well into the first term.

#### **RE/LOCATION BARRIERS**

Twenty-six (67 per cent) universities identified re/location as a barrier for students. Along with the financial strain of relocating with its large upfront costs, students who live at a significant distance from campus cited access to reliable transport as a barrier. Another factor for those living some distance from campus were pressures to stay in one's home community to be able to meet kinship obligations.

#### **FAMILY/CULTURAL RESPONSIBILITIES**

Twenty-six (67 per cent) universities reported having students for whom time spent attending to family/cultural responsibilities impacted upon their learning. Included in this were cases where these responsibilities exceeded allowances made by universities for such leave. Impacts included dropping out or taking longer to complete their studies.

#### **FIRST IN FAMILY**

Nineteen (49 per cent) universities stated they felt that potential pathways into higher education for Indigenous students are impacted by a lack of example in their immediate lives of the value of a university education.

Many Indigenous students are the first in their families to go to university, which can make the prospect of going to university a daunting experience. Moreover, limited access to knowledge sources and understanding of expectations can render potential students mystified as to what is required and under-prepared for university life if and when they commence study. Another factor reported is that a lack of Indigenous presence in universities can be a bar to students; it can be seen as a place that Indigenous people don't belong.

Concerns were also reported that where Indigenous students had tried university study and had a negative experience, this could dissuade other Indigenous people from study.

## YEAR 12 COMPLETION/LACK OF SUPPORT

Eighteen (46 per cent) universities identified that pathways into higher education were impacted by low Year 12 completion rates and the lack of, or lack of awareness of, alternative pathways and support. Indigenous students were reported as experiencing a lack of support and knowledge sharing due to the low expectations of them, inexperience of high school staff, and the limited attention paid to Indigenous student aspirations during schooling.

## UNIVERSITY ENVIRONMENT

Fourteen (36 per cent) universities cited the university environment as a barrier to Indigenous student participation. Reasons included Indigenous students experiencing alienation due to differences between their own social and cultural norms and the socio-cultural values reflected and expressed in university e.g. teaching styles, course content and support mechanisms. Moreover, there was the burden students felt navigating and living in these two worlds. Other reasons cited were that some Indigenous people having a distrust of public institutions, including universities and concerns about racism including institutional racism.

## DIFFERING PRIORITIES/ASPIRATIONS

Ten (26 per cent) universities stated that for some Indigenous students, finding employment was more attractive than attending university. Contributing factors cited included the financial cost/benefit particularly given that on average Indigenous students take longer to complete their degree than non-Indigenous students, and that the completion rate for Indigenous students is so low.

Also, for some Indigenous students, conversations about attending university may not be ones that regularly occur in the home. If this is not nurtured through secondary education, potential Indigenous students may be more likely to pursue employment or other forms of training.

## INCARCERATION

At 30 June 2020, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people made up 29 per cent of all prisoners, despite comprising just 3.1 per cent of the total working age population. Incarceration has been linked to lower literacy rates, which is a significant hurdle to participation in higher education. This factor was raised by only one university as a barrier, however given the significance of the issue, it is reported here.

## SUPPORT AND PROMOTION OF HIGHER EDUCATION

All 39 member universities are participating in some capacity in initiatives that encourage Indigenous students to participate in higher education. Breaking this figure down:

- 29 (74 per cent) engage with schools and in outreach including maintaining regular contact with potential students and their parents;
- 24 (62 per cent) cited collaboration with the wider Indigenous community including businesses;
- 22 (56 per cent) provide camps and/or on-campus experiences;
- 20 (51 per cent) are providing alternative access options; and
- 11 (28 per cent) are providing cultural safe places, scholarships, and mentoring.

Regarding COVID-19 impacts, a number of universities reported limits on their ability to be active in schools and communities in efforts to target prospective students.

## CASE STUDY

### UNIVERSITY OF TECHNOLOGY SYDNEY – GALUWA ONLINE ENRICHMENT HUB

The Galuwa Experience Hub (The Hub) is an online portal for prospective high school students (year 9 -12) who would otherwise be attending an on-campus Galuwa to engage with online material from Jumbunna and diverse faculties about coming and studying at University of Technology Sydney (UTS). We hope that The Hub will not only be used in the interim while social distancing is in place but as a platform that we can utilise in partnership with our face-to-face programs.

It provides an opportunity to reach students who wouldn't otherwise consider studying in certain faculties and also reach those who wouldn't be able to come to Sydney for an on-campus experience. The hub also provides a place for parents and teachers to gain access to additional resources to help with their studies or lessons.

In early 2020 we saw an increasing spread of a global pandemic referred to as COVID-19. As a result, the university moved swiftly to remote learning for all students, with academic and professional staff moving to working from home arrangements where practicable. Measures and processes were established to enable Jumbunna to continue to provide a quality university experience for Indigenous students as well as to continue to extend educational engagement with prospective Indigenous high school students. This meant moving an entire on campus aspiration building program to an online format. This required a whole of university approach that included various divisions, all faculties across UTS and industry partners.

With restrictions coming in to place across the nation, it became apparent that on-campus or school engagement activities would not be possible for 2020. In early April, Jumbunna employed an additional resource (Project Manager) to work with faculties and key organisational units like the Information Technology Department (ITD) and Marketing and Communications Unit (MCU) to develop a project plan. The project plan was approved by the Director, of MCU late April, In May, ITD allocated a dedicated web specialist and a project manager to build the portal. Over the next two months, the Jumbunna Project Manager worked with faculties to:

- build interactive workshops and webinars that provided insights into studying at UTS;
- develop interactive workshops of example career outcomes with industry representatives; and
- create an online one-on-one chat function outside of the scheduled online events.

Participants had the option to submit set pieces of work as part of the Galuwa enrichment experience that could be assessed as part of the application process for admission to UTS. The Hub will continue to evolve each year and will complement the Galuwa on-campus experience into the future. The approximate timeframe for the project was three months with the first Galuwa enrichment experience commencing July 2020.

Jumbunna worked alongside the UTS Marketing and Communications Unit and Information Technology Division for creative services including website development. This enabled Jumbunna to monitor traffic through the site by using website analytics which provides data on

which landing pages had the most visits. This also helped determine which areas may need more interesting information or activities. Students undertook a post experience survey which some feedback is outlined below.

The Hub has enabled a greater reach than our face-to-face Galuwa as we were able to attract participants from across the nation. A number of channels were used to reach prospective students, but the most effective was the use of social media. This enabled Jumbunna to reach a range of age demographics which saw mature age participants for the first time in the history of a Galuwa enrichment experience.

Jumbunna saw 143 prospective students participate across the seven enrichment experiences. Of the participants, 11 students applied via the Jumbunna pathways program. As a result of the hosting the programs, Jumbunna saw 11 applications to study in 2021.

One parent eagerly wrote back to us during the FEIT Galuwa, stating that “[the Galuwa program] lit a fire in him” as well as that she was grateful that we did not cancel it due to COVID-19.

One of our students said this about the Galuwa program: “I really enjoyed the 2020 Virtual Galuwa Program, it was interesting and engaging and I look forward to it next year hopefully face to face.” He also stated that he “would like to hear from structural engineers, people who built buildings and bridges in Sydney, so it is more relatable”.

Galuwa students were very interested to hear from our UTS students about what they thought about university. The SPROUTS that we worked with had excellent engagement skills with the Galuwa students, which opens up opportunities to co-design workshops with our UTS students.

Webinar and online conference technology that we had access to during this time was key to what made this work. Particularly since Zoom is not an unfamiliar program for schools to access. This helped the transition from face-to-face to online.

We discovered through the course of this year, a more creative way of gaining student feedback about the programs. We are working to implement a dynamic survey in pre and post Galuwa to gather more hard data about what works and what needs improving.

A teacher has provided feedback that the webinars were unlikely to have high attendance as the students were “zoomed out”. This was evident with the last online Galuwa with the FASS faculty, which generated plenty of interest in the program, however there were no attendees.

Teachers were interested in downloadable academic workshops that they could do with their students in their own classrooms on their own time. This is something that Jumbunna were incredibly keen to trial during the start of this year. Students being “zoomed out” has opened the workshop door for Jumbunna, which will give us an opportunity to create accessible learning modules for schools to complete prior to engaging in face-to-face or online outreach. These modules will be hosted on the Galuwa portal for schools to access.

## INDIGENOUS PARTICIPATION BY FIELD OF EDUCATION

According to DESE data (Figure 17), Indigenous students are more likely than non-Indigenous students to enrol in courses in society and culture (32 per cent), health (20.8 per cent) and education (12 per cent) and less likely to enrol in management and commerce (10.1 per cent), natural and physical sciences (5.5 per cent) and engineering (2.5 per cent).

**Figure 17: Enrolments by broad disciplines, 2019.**



Source: Department of Education, Skills and Employment 2020, *Selected Higher Education Statistics – 2019 Student data*, Section 6: Indigenous students.

From the survey responses, most universities responded that society and culture and health were the most popular courses for Indigenous students. The next most popular were education and nursing, then law and social work. The least well subscribed areas were business, engineering and economics.

## SUPPORT AND PROMOTION BY FIELD OF EDUCATION

Initiatives cited as supporting and promoting Indigenous participation by field of education, particularly in those fields under-subscribed, include:

- 19 (49 per cent) mentioned specialised camps and/or on campus experiences;
- 18 (46 per cent) mentioned collaboration initiatives including internships;
- 17 (44 per cent) mentioned pathways via pre-degree programs;
- 13 (33 per cent) mentioned scholarships; and
- 10 (26 per cent) cited the Indigenising of the course and mentoring and tutoring offered.



## CASE STUDY

### **ENROLLING AND GRADUATING INDIGENOUS SCIENCE TECHNOLOGY ENGINEERING MATHEMATICS AND MEDICINE PROFESSIONALS (STEMM) – The UNIVERSITY OF WESTERN AUSTRALIA**

#### **Intended Outcome**

A long-standing priority of The University of Western Australia's (UWA) Indigenous education strategy is for Indigenous people, particularly young people to have access to, and graduate from science, engineering, medicine, and dentistry to build an Indigenous professional workforce in these fields. UWA has traditionally prioritised Indigenous school leavers and this is reflected in our Indigenous student cohort, which includes a high proportion of Indigenous students who are under 25 years of age (69 per cent in 2018).

UWA's general approach is to set a priority area of study and focus recruitment and support activities to build a cohort of Indigenous students in those courses, which provides peer support and role models for other intending students. With UWA moving to a postgraduate course model for medicine (MD) and dentistry (DMD) after 2012, undergraduate science degrees have been critical entry pathways for Indigenous enrolments in the MD, DMD and engineering. UWA's approach is to provide multiple contact points, experiences and programs to inspire, engage and build enrolments in science and beyond to professional degrees.

The overall intended outcome of UWA's STEMM strategies for Indigenous students is to increase Indigenous access and success across STEMM courses and build the Indigenous professional STEMM workforce. This is achieved by engaging Indigenous youth, pre-tertiary preparation, promotion of positive role models, removing barriers to entry and increasing leadership capacity.

#### **Description of strategy**

The UWA STEMM strategies are made up of a series of initiatives and programs that promote STEMM subjects and careers, and which build on each other to enable Indigenous students to create individual pathways to achieve their goals. These includes:

- STEMM based hands-on activities in all our Indigenous outreach programs for school students.
- An Indigenous science, health and engineering camp for Year 10 and 11 Indigenous students to encourage students to continue with STEMM subjects, and choose STEMM careers.
- Indigenous science and medicine students at UWA as role models and mentors in our outreach programs.
- STEMM subjects in our WACE revision seminars for Indigenous Year 11 and 12 ATAR students which provides specialist subject tuition and exam preparation.
- Indigenous access to all UWA degrees through Indigenous specific entry programs and assured pathways into postgraduate professional degrees Master of Professional Engineering, Doctor of Medicine, Doctor of Dental Medicine.



- A STEMM stream in the Aboriginal Orientation Course (AOC), to provide a pathway to science degrees for Indigenous students, and then to postgraduate degrees in medicine and dentistry.
- Celebrating and promoting achievements of our science, medicine, dentistry and engineering students and graduates.

### **Who was involved?**

The STEMM strategies and programs are delivered through a whole of university approach. The PVC Indigenous Education has overall leadership and responsibility for delivery of the STEMM strategies by the School of Indigenous Studies (SIS) and the Indigenous Student Services team. SIS works with secondary schools and communities throughout Western Australia and in partnership with other tertiary aspirations programs such as Follow the Dream and Future Footprints. SIS also works closely with Aspire UWA (education portfolio) and their partner schools throughout Western Australia, offering secondary outreach programs that Indigenous students also attend. The Deputy Vice-Chancellor Education and education portfolio also works closely with SIS to support entry pathways for Indigenous applicants, and provide a culturally inclusive campus for Indigenous students.

SIS is strongly supported by schools and faculties in science, engineering, medicine and dentistry. Science staff provide hands-on workshops and activities in outreach programs for Indigenous secondary students, offer alternate entry and assured places for Indigenous students in their degree courses and work with the SIS team to provide teaching and learning support to Indigenous students in their courses. The Centre for Aboriginal Medical and Dental Health located in the School of Medicine is a long term partner with SIS to recruit and support Indigenous students in medicine and dentistry.

### **How long did it take?**

UWA takes a long-term view to increasing the numbers of Indigenous students accessing and completing STEMM courses which has been a strategic priority area for more than 10 years.

Pivotal to increasing broader STEMM enrolments was the development of the Year 9 and 10 Indigenous science engineering club, in 2009 to engage Indigenous secondary students in science, encourage them to continue with STEMM subjects and pursue science at university. From 2012, this became the current Indigenous Science, Engineering and Health Careers Camp. Special entry to and assured places in science, medicine, dentistry and engineering and a science stream in the Aboriginal orientation course have been in place for many years, and adapted to changes in courses, entry requirements and student needs and aspirations over this time.

### **How is it monitored and measured?**

UWA has an evidence-based, mixed-methods approach to assessing performance against various equity indicators identified in the student data collection. Formative and summative data is used to evaluate programs and long-term student success is measured through longitudinal student participation and enrolment statistics. Qualitative data is also collected through individual program evaluation, impact surveys and focus groups. UWA continues to benchmark nationally to ensure our programs are innovative and responsive to the needs of participants and their communities.

The SIS Indigenous students services team surveys students at on-campus events and residential camps throughout the year. The anonymous surveys collect demographic data, activity feedback and information on students' university aspirations. This approach results in a very high survey return rate. Our strong relationships with schools particularly in regional area provides continuous feedback to SIS from school staff about the impact of programs.

### **Impact and outcomes**

The impact and outcomes of the strategies employed by UWA is demonstrated by the numbers of Indigenous students enrolled in and graduating from STEMM courses, the range of courses the students are completing, the numbers of graduates who entered through enabling programs, the number of regional and remote students and the impact the students having in both the Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities.

A summary of key recent outcomes is below.

- By field of education, UWA's has achieved a visible cohort of Indigenous students in natural and physical sciences. In 2018 at UWA, 67 Indigenous students were enrolled in natural and physical sciences, making up 28 per cent of all Indigenous students at UWA. This was the equal highest enrolment nationally in this field (with Western Sydney University) and the largest proportion nationally relative to cohort size (total Indigenous enrolment at each university).
- From 2017 to 2019, UWA had 61 Indigenous graduates from STEMM courses, 55 per cent of all UWA Indigenous graduates over the period. Of the Indigenous STEMM graduates from UWA each year approximately 60 per cent gained entry to UWA through the alternate entry pathways or the Aboriginal orientation course.
- Indigenous students at UWA are graduating from a wider range of STEMM courses, including the Bachelor of Science, with majors in physics; sports science, exercise and health; anatomy and human biology; environmental science; medical sciences; engineering science; psychology; and zoology. Indigenous students have also graduated from the Bachelor of Biomedical Sciences; Bachelor of Engineering (Civil); Master of Clinical Exercise Physiology; Master of Professional Engineering; Master of Clinical Research; Master of Forensic Science; and Master of Environmental Science.
- We have been successful in recruiting and graduating Indigenous students in medicine, and a smaller number in dentistry, including after these courses moved to postgraduate only courses (Doctor of Medicine and Doctor Dental Medicine) which extended the period of study.
- In 2019, we graduated three Indigenous Doctors of Dental Medicine (DMD) bringing a total of seven Indigenous Dentists from UWA. This is a significant contribution to the number of Indigenous dentists in Western Australia and nationally.
- In 2019, UWA graduated three Indigenous Doctors of Medicine (MD) achieving a total of 21 Indigenous medical graduates in the last four years (2016 to 2019), and an overall total of 55 Indigenous medical graduates from UWA.
- In terms of impact, we now have six Indigenous doctors from UWA practising in Broome in the far north of Western Australia, and Indigenous doctors working across Australia, as GPs and as specialists in obstetrics and gynaecology; paediatrics; psychiatry and cardiology.
- Increasing demand for the MD (Doctor of Medicine) is reflected in 12 Indigenous students commencing the MD in 2020, our largest intake. Key factors influencing this are regional

outreach programs, assured places in the MD and Indigenous students now seeing Indigenous doctors from, or working with their communities. Of the cohort, 10 students had completed bachelor's degree in science or biomedical science at UWA as a prerequisite. The majority of students are from regional or remote areas including Broome, Derby, One Arm Point, Warralong (Pilbara), Tennant Creek, Exmouth, Halls Creek and Albany.

### **Lessons Learnt**

What we have learnt over a number of years is that there are four core elements to achieving success in this area, and they are:

#### *A long term investment*

The key to developing successful strategies and outcomes is understanding the long-term investment in staffing and resources that is needed to make what sometimes looks like relatively small gains. This is crucial in Western Australia where the size of the state and spread of Indigenous communities across regional and remote areas increases program challenges and costs. The ongoing commitment of the Vice-Chancellor and university executive is important to appropriate resourcing.

#### *Indigenous leadership and partnerships*

Indigenous leadership and governance are essential and needs to be supported by strong and sustained partnerships with relevant STEM schools and faculties. Partnerships and programs must be robust and flexible enough to respond and adapt to changing university structures, leadership and staffing, course models and student requirements, as well as Indigenous community expectations and aspirations.

#### *Inspiring and engaging Indigenous students*

A critical component, especially in the outreach programs, is the involvement of Indigenous students from UWA as mentors, supervisors and speakers. These students are selected on their academic progress and leadership qualities, but in fact many of them scored poorly in their own ATAR or left school early. They show that university is 'real' and achievable for Indigenous secondary students particularly from regional/remote communities. Contacting students early and developing Indigenous peer support networks pre-university and after enrolment is important for Indigenous STEM students in academically competitive and often isolating courses.

#### *Entry pathways and support tailored to individual needs and applied to all courses*

Multiple pathways to study should include specialised entry and appropriate STEM enabling programs. In Western Australia, most Indigenous students do not have the requisite science background for entry/success in STEM courses. Scholarships and culturally appropriate support services are critical to student success and retention over extended study periods now required at UWA for the MD and DMD (seven years plus one if students do an enabling course first).

## INDIGENOUS STRATEGY AND UNIVERSITY POLICY

### NEW ACTIVITIES AND INITIATIVES

Thirty-six (92 per cent) universities acknowledged that the Universities Australia Indigenous Strategy has been incorporated and/or considered in strategic planning activities, and two universities acknowledged activities that pre-dated the Indigenous Strategy but were in line with actions. The initiatives most cited as being inspired by the Strategy were Indigenising curriculum, Indigenous research strategies, implementation of reconciliation action plans (RAPs), and cultural training.

### INDIGENOUS STAFF AND STUDENT ADVANCEMENT

Thirty-one universities (79 per cent) stated they had policy which addressed Indigenous student and staff advancement within their institutions. Two universities had policy that related to students or staff but not both, four respondents said they were in the process of developing such a policy, and two universities stated they had no such policy.

### INDIGENOUS STAFF POLICY INPUT

All universities obtained input from Indigenous staff to Indigenous-specific university policy. However, just seven (18 per cent) universities reported having formal mechanisms requiring Indigenous staff input to these policies. Moreover, only a quarter (10) of universities reported that they systematically consult with their Indigenous staff networks on matters of broader university policy.

### DEVOLVING INDIGENOUS POLICY

This survey question asked how policies and subsequent actions regarding Indigenous students and staff were devolved within universities. The responses found:

- 29 (74 per cent) universities described their processes as broad dissemination via faculties and senior managers;
- 19 (49 per cent) universities identified their PVC Indigenous as a focal point for driving Indigenous policy work;
- 15 (38 per cent) universities stated that their Vice-Chancellor championed Indigenous policy devolvement, which helped with broad dissemination; and
- Other initiatives included KPI targets requiring all staff to engage with Indigenous policy matters, and the use of Elders in residence.

Here, four (10 per cent) universities acknowledged that their limited Indigenous staff cohort, both professional and academic, meant that there was increased burden placed upon Indigenous staff particularly those in senior positions.

### CASE STUDY

#### THE UNIVERSITY OF NEWCASTLE INDIGENOUS EDUCATION AND RESEARCH FRAMEWORK

##### Intended outcome

To provide a framework for all stakeholders to deliver the university's commitment to Indigenous education and research. This framework aligns a number of strategies and action plans into four key pillars:

- cultural knowledge and understanding;
- participation and retention;
- research to influence change; and
- engagement and community collaboration for reconciliation.

#### **Who was involved?**

Initial consultation workshops were held in December 2019 with a range of stakeholders, this included Elders, students, staff and community members. The representation in the consultation group was broadly spread across the organisation to ensure that many diverse perspectives were considered. A particular focus the Office of Indigenous Strategy and Leadership took was to ensure that Indigenous voices were heard, it was a priority to have BATSIER (Board of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education and Research) and Nguraki (Elders) present for all consultation workshops.

#### **How long did it take?**

Beginning in December 2019 the Indigenous Education and Research Framework was finalised in December 2020 to be officially launched in January 2021. The members of the initial consultation groups were consistently involved in the development of the framework.

#### **How is it monitored/measured?**

Self-determination is a key principle and is emphasised by the Indigenous-led partnership structures at the university. BATSIER and Nguraki will lead the measurement, monitoring and eventual evaluation of the success of this framework. The framework is ultimately for Indigenous peoples – it is critical that they be the judge of its success. It is important to consider that creating a culturally responsive environment and upholding this framework is the responsibility of all people within the organisation.

Each of the priority areas within this framework, and the corresponding strategies, plans and implementation roadmaps, have their own goals, indicators and measures to guide the university in action.

Key measures include;

- Reconciliation Australia Barometer (bi-annual reporting)
- Universities Australia Indigenous Strategy (annual reporting)
- The University of Newcastle's Looking Ahead Strategic Plan 2020 - 2025 (quarterly reporting)
- World Indigenous Nations Higher Education Consortium (annual reporting)

#### **Impact and outcomes – qualitative and quantitative**

The Office of Indigenous Strategy and Leadership has ensured that baseline data has been captured to ensure the Indigenous Education and Research Framework has consistent measures to report against once officially implemented in January 2021.

### **Success stories**

When developing the Indigenous Education and Research Framework the two guiding bodies for development were BATSIER and Nguraki. Below are statements from Professor Uncle Bob Morgan (Chair of BATSIER) and Aunty Laurel Williams (Chair of Nguraki).

Professor Uncle Bob Morgan- “What do Aboriginal people seek from higher education and research? Fundamentally what Aboriginal people seek is to partner with the university so that Indigenous students, indeed all students, have access to education and research to inform a life lived in safety and with dignity. Furthermore, higher education should be structured so that Aboriginal students can maintain their cultural identity by embracing, through language and knowledge systems, the teachings embedded in country; to heed the lessons derived from timeless song-lines, oral traditions and cultures.”

Aunty Laurel Williams- “Aboriginal knowledge needs to be an aspect of every teaching and learning opportunity offered by The University of Newcastle. Every graduate should feel that they are equipped with a cultural tool useful for their interaction with all future professions.”

### **Lessons learnt**

The Office of Indigenous Strategy ensured that all stakeholders felt they were listened to. The team is mindful that the Indigenous community, and their expectations must be visible and followed through with the university. The Indigenous Education and Research Framework was officially launched in January 2021, with all corresponding frameworks and strategies to be effectively driven from that point. It has been important to involve the executive committee in the development of this framework also as they will be responsible for implementation within their business unit.

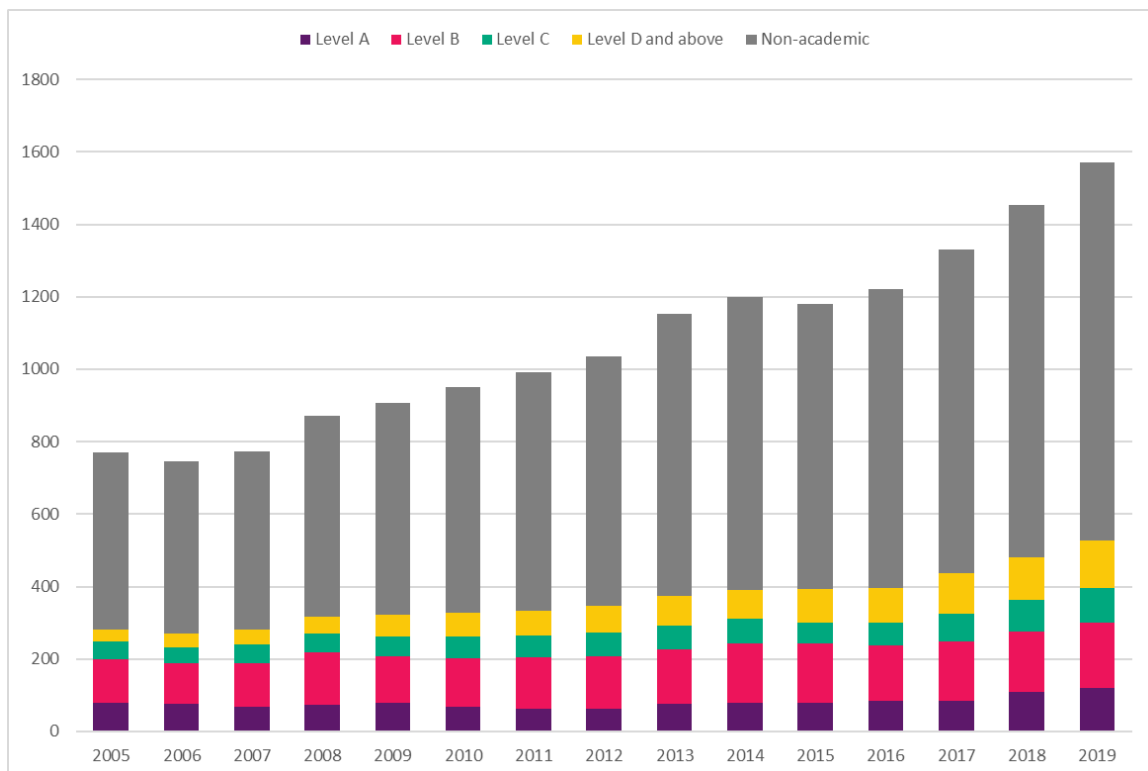
## WORKFORCE AND LEADERSHIP

### INDIGENOUS ACADEMIC AND NON-ACADEMIC WORKFORCE

In this section, data refers to staff headcount (rather than full-time equivalent (FTE)) and only includes full-time and fractional full-time staff.

Figure 18 shows the total number of Indigenous staff has doubled since 2005, from 771 staff to 1,571 staff in 2019. Of these, around one-third are academic staff. The number of academic staff who are Indigenous increased by 86.9 per cent over the period, from 282 in 2005 to 527 in 2019.

**Figure 18: Number of Indigenous staff by duties classification, 2005 to 2019.**

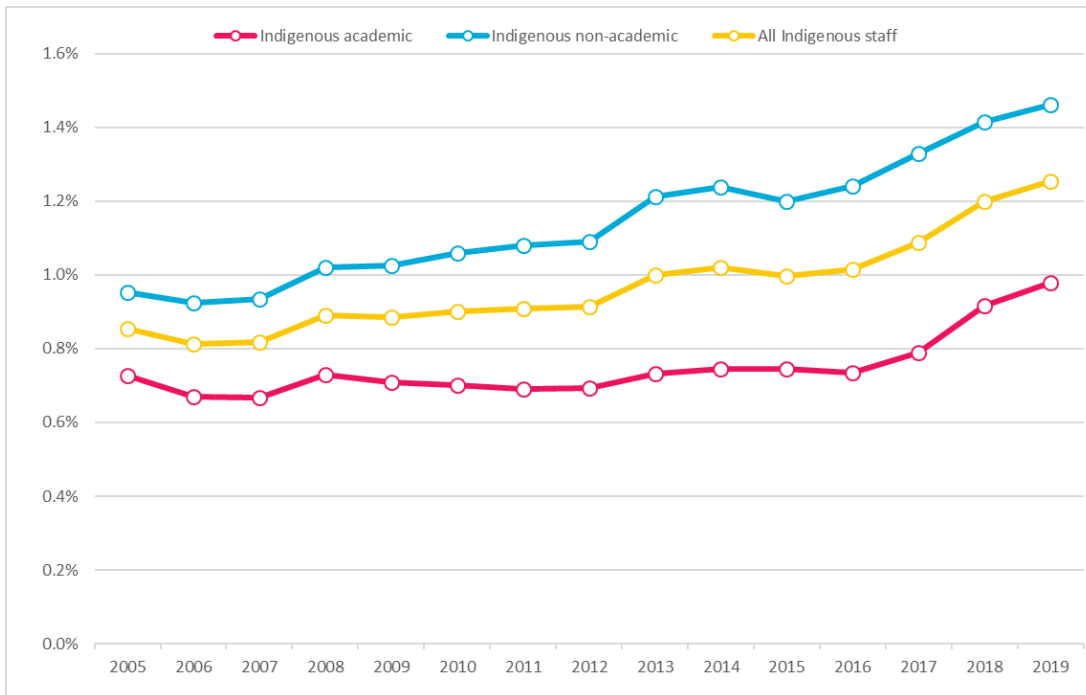


Source: Department of Education, Skills and Employment, Unpublished HEIMS data, various years.

Figure 19 shows that the Indigenous share of academic staff has increased from 0.73 per cent in 2005 to 0.98 per cent in 2019, with most of the increase occurring after 2016. There has been slightly greater growth in the proportion of non-academic positions held by Indigenous people over the same period. The share of non-academic Indigenous staff increased from less than one per cent in 2005 to 1.46 per cent in 2019.

In 2019, just 1.3 per cent of Australian university staff – both academic and non-academic – were Indigenous persons, significantly below the working-age population parity figure of 3.1 per cent.

**Figure 19: Share of Indigenous staff, 2005 to 2019.**



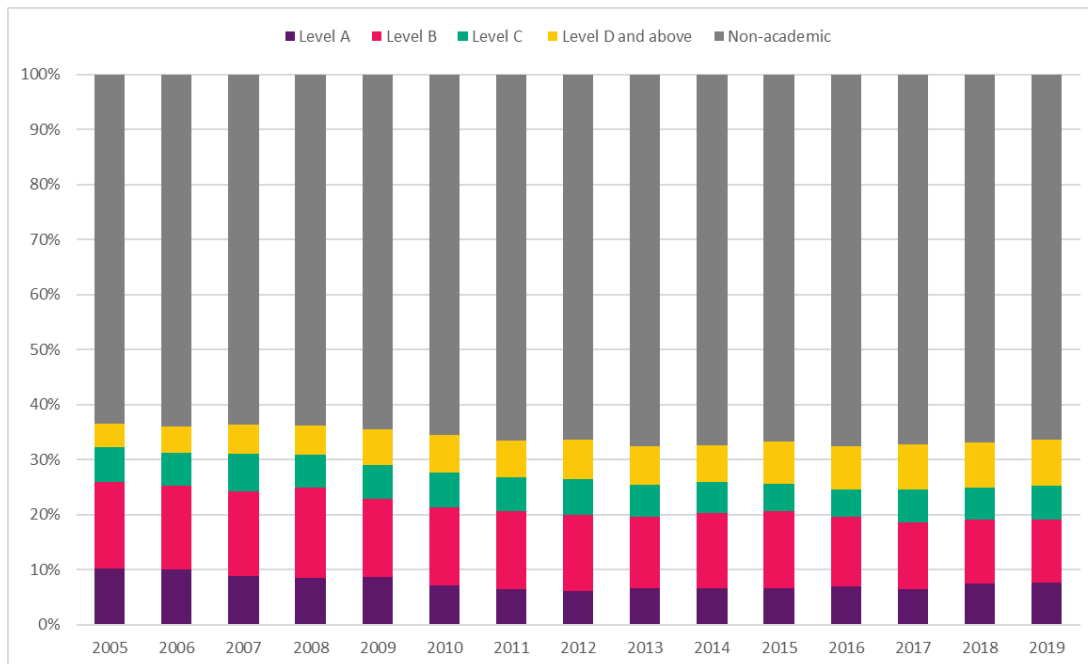
Source: Department of Education, Skills and Employment, Unpublished HEIMS data, various years.



Figure 20 shows the share of Indigenous staff in non-academic roles has increased from 63.4 per cent in 2005 to 66.5 per cent in 2019, while the share of Indigenous staff in academic Level A positions has declined from 10.1 per cent to 7.6 per cent over the same period.

In 2019, 8.3 per cent of Indigenous staff were employed in senior academic roles – Level D and above – increasing from 4.4 per cent in 2005.

**Figure 20: Proportion of Indigenous staff by duties classification.**



Source: Department of Education, Skills and Employment, Unpublished HEIMS data.

## COMPARISONS TO NON-INDIGENOUS STAFF

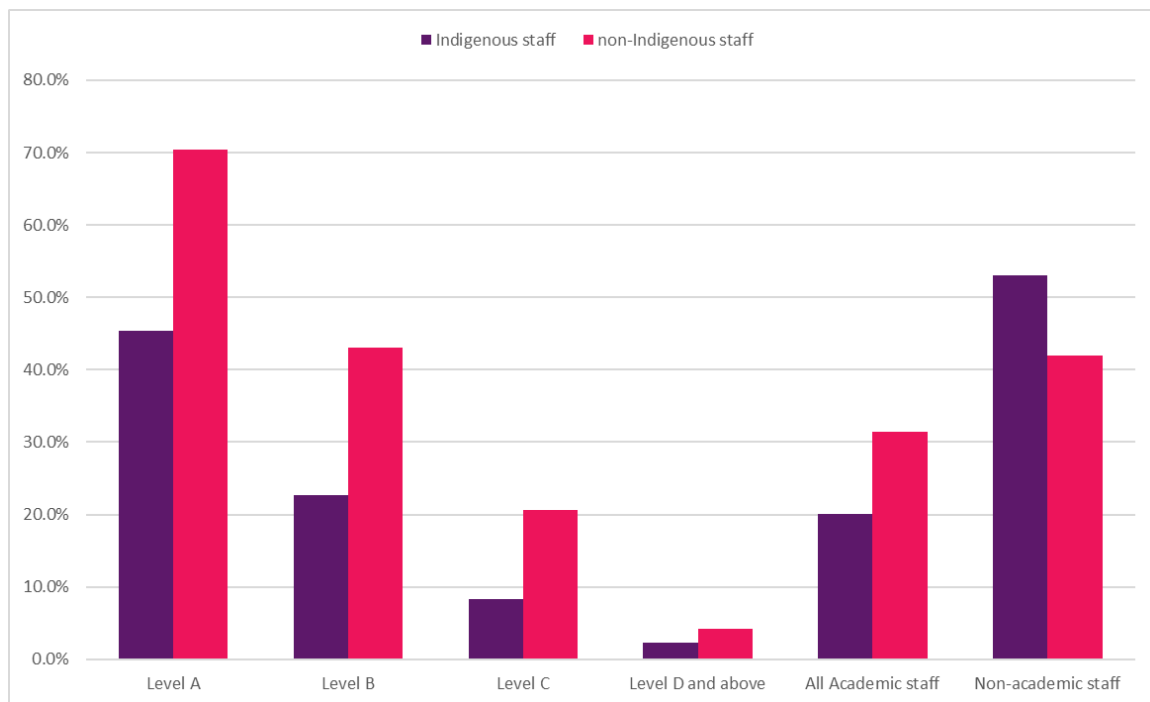
In 2019, a greater proportion of Indigenous staff were women, over 40 years old and in lower academic positions compared to non-Indigenous staff.

### AGE

Indigenous academic staff are more likely to be older than non-Indigenous academic staff. In 2019, only 20.1 per cent of Indigenous academic staff were aged under 40 years compared to 31.4 per cent of non-Indigenous academic staff. The share of Indigenous academic staff under 40 has declined since 2005 – from 32.3 per cent to 20.1 per cent in 2019 – while the share of non-Indigenous academic staff under 40 has increased over the same period.

The share of Indigenous staff aged under 40 is significantly lower than non-Indigenous staff for staff employed in academic Level A, Level B and Level C positions. In contrast, 53 per cent of Indigenous staff employed in non-academic roles were aged under 40 in 2019, compared to 42 per cent of non-Indigenous staff.

**Figure 21: Proportion of staff aged under 40 by duties classification, 2019.**

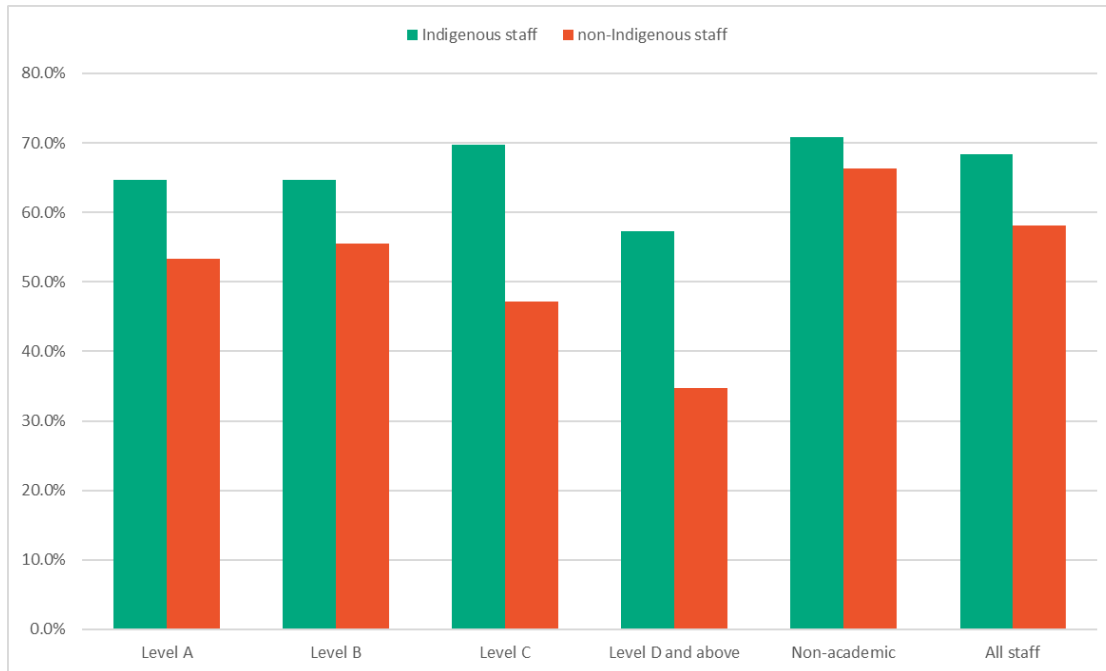


Source: Department of Education, Skills and Employment 2020, Unpublished HEIMS data.

## GENDER

Indigenous staff are more likely to be female compared to non-Indigenous staff, particularly in senior academic positions – at Level C and Level D and above. In 2019, 68.4 per cent of all Indigenous staff were female compared to 58 per cent of non-Indigenous staff.

**Figure 22: Share of female staff by duties classification, 2019.**



Source: Department of Education, Skills and Employment 2020, Unpublished HEIMS data.

## ACADEMIC FUNCTIONS

Indigenous academic staff are more likely to be employed in teaching and research or teaching-only positions and less likely to be employed in research-only functions. However, like non-Indigenous academics, the share of staff employed in teaching and research functions has declined over time, with more staff being employed in teaching-only or research-only roles.

In 2019, just over half of Indigenous academic staff were employed in teaching and research functions (57.2 per cent), declining from 80.6 per cent in 2005. The proportion of Indigenous academic staff employed in teaching-only increased from 5.6 per cent in 2005 to 14.9 per cent in 2019. This compares to only 11.3 per cent of non-Indigenous academic staff employed in teaching-only function. Research-only Indigenous staff increased from 13.9 per cent to 27.9 per cent. This compares to 33.5 per cent of non-Indigenous staff in research-only function in 2019. However, a similar proportion of Indigenous and non-Indigenous staff were employed in teaching and research functions.

**Figure 23: Share of staff by academic functions, 2005, 2010 and 2019.**



Source: Department of Education, Skills and Employment, Unpublished HEIMS data, various years.

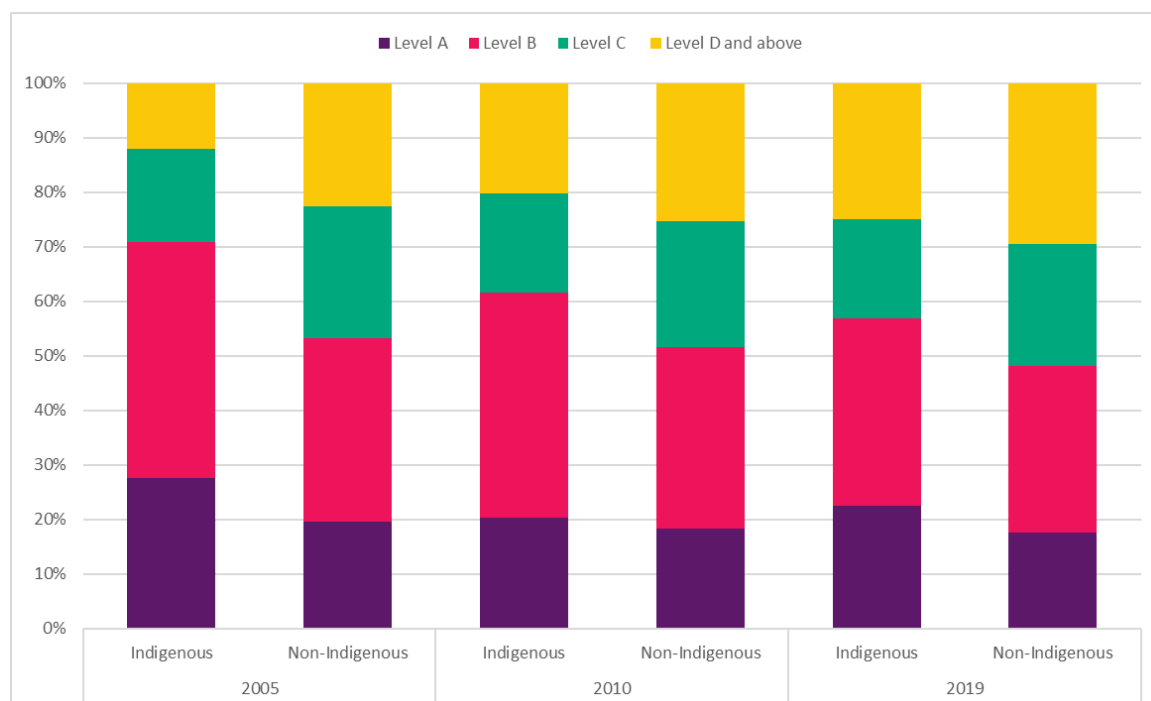
## DUTIES CLASSIFICATION

In 2019, a greater proportion of Indigenous academic staff were employed at more junior academic ranks compared to non-Indigenous staff. This includes levels below lecturer (Level A) – 22.6 per cent compared to 17.6 per cent for non-Indigenous staff – and lecturer (Level B) – 34.3 per cent compared to 30.6 per cent for non-Indigenous staff.

Indigenous academic staff were employed in lower proportions at levels of senior lecturer and above, compared to non-Indigenous staff. 18.2 per cent of Indigenous staff were employed at the level of senior lecturer (Level C), compared to 22.3 per cent for non-Indigenous – and above senior lecturer (Level D and above) – 24.9 per cent, compared to 29.5 per cent for non-Indigenous.

Nonetheless, the share of Indigenous staff in senior academic roles – Level D and above – has doubled since 2005, from 12.1 per cent to 24.9 per cent in 2019.

**Figure 24: Share of staff by academic duties classification, 2005, 2010 and 2019.**



Source: Department of Education, Skills and Employment, Unpublished HEIMS data, various years.

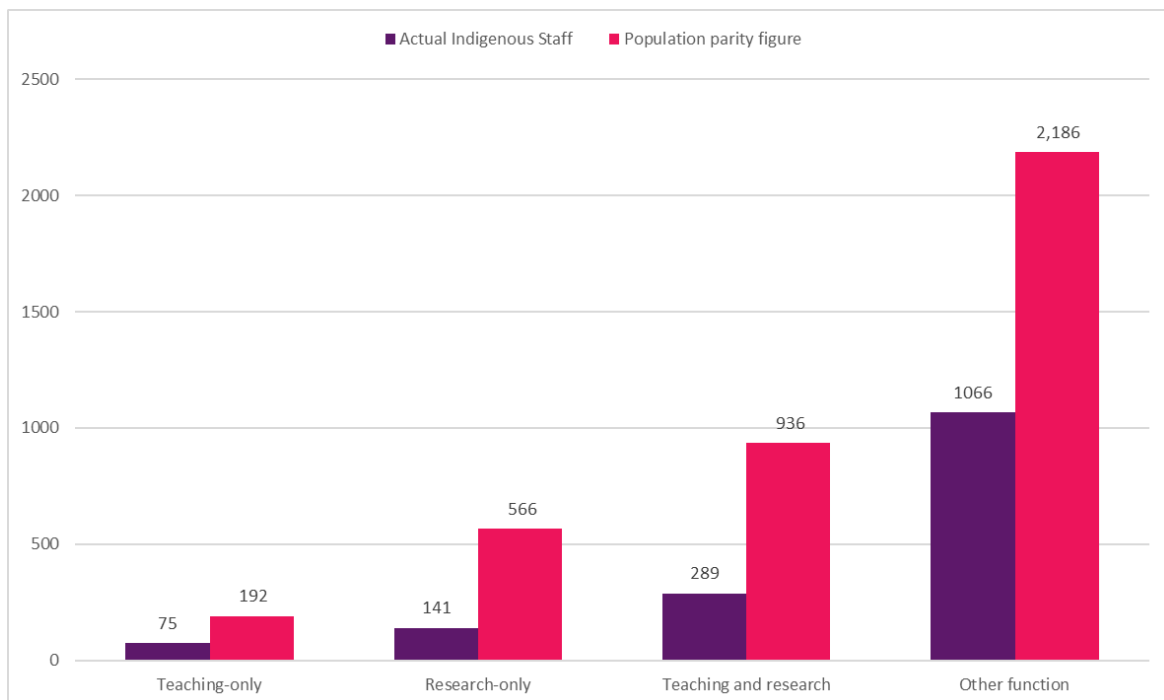
## POPULATION PARITY

In 2019, 505 Indigenous staff were employed in a teaching or research role in Australian universities, representing 0.92 per cent of all staff employed in teaching or research roles.

To reach population parity (3.1 per cent), an additional 1189 Indigenous academic staff would need to be employed (Figure 25).

In terms of types of roles, the sector would have needed to employ an extra 117 Indigenous staff in teaching-only roles, 425 in research-only roles, and 647 in roles that combined teaching and research in 2019.

**Figure 25: Indigenous staff, actual vs population parity figures, 2019.**



Source: Universities Australia estimates based on 2019 actual Indigenous staff numbers compared to if Indigenous staff numbers are at 3.1 per cent population parity.

## RESEARCH LANDSCAPE AND THE PIPELINE OF INDIGENOUS ACADEMICS AND RESEARCHERS

One of the ways universities are increasing the numbers and capacity of Indigenous academics and researchers is by building a pipeline of high performing undergraduate students, postgraduate students and alumni.

Indigenous postgraduate student enrolments has doubled since 2005 – from 334 students to 677 students in 2019. Moreover, the share of Indigenous postgraduate research students grew from 0.84 per cent in 2005 to 1.61 per cent in 2019.

However, to reach population parity of 3.1 per cent, the sector would have needed to enrol an additional 624 Indigenous postgraduate research students and graduate an additional 139 postgraduate research students in 2019.

## LEADERSHIP PATHWAYS FOR INDIGENOUS STAFF

Universities reported a variety of arrangements for Indigenous staff leadership pathways including mentoring, positions for Indigenous persons only, staff network forums, and professional development initiatives. Most universities referenced their workforce strategy as containing such initiatives.

Two universities also mentioned having specific initiatives for Indigenous women.

Concerningly, some universities reported having no such initiatives in place.

## SENIOR AND LEADERSHIP POSITIONS

In 2020, 26 (67 per cent) universities had a Pro Vice-Chancellor Indigenous or equivalent or higher. Included in this number is one Deputy Vice-Chancellor, a Provost, and one Vice President First Nations (in 2021 there are now two Deputy Vice-Chancellors who are Indigenous). One university also has a Chancellor who is Indigenous.

A matter reiterated here was the overburdening of Indigenous staff, particularly senior staff, who have all or the majority of Indigenous-related matters contained within their portfolio of responsibilities (whether formally or informally). Moreover, this overreliance on Indigenous senior staff with Indigenous business was expressed as being career limiting to those roles that are Indigenous-specific, with a ceiling at the Pro Vice-Chancellor Indigenous level.

## INDIGENOUS REPRESENTATION ON EXECUTIVE AND COUNCILS

The following responses were received regarding Indigenous staff representation on executive and council.

Twenty-four (62 per cent) universities reported having representation on either Executive or Council and four (10 per cent) universities said they had representation on both executive and council.

Regular reporting of executive and board to Indigenous staff was mentioned by several universities as a method of ensuring Indigenous views are considered (however this does not qualify as representation on executive and/or council). Similarly, a number of members mentioned academic boards and various other committees as having Indigenous representation at their universities.

## INDIGENOUS KNOWLEDGE IN UNIVERSITIES

### INDIGENOUS COURSE CONTENT

Eighteen (46 per cent) universities responded that Indigenous viewpoints are considered and incorporated when designing education at their institution. Of these:

- 6 (15 per cent) reported having processes for Indigenous content in both Indigenous and non-Indigenous courses;
- 12 (31 per cent) reported having Indigenous content only in Indigenous courses;
- 13 (33 per cent) described general Indigenous engagement as the process for embedding Indigenous views; and
- 13 described specific activities for the embedding of Indigenous views.

Specific activities include:

- co-design and co-creation approach articulated in a teaching and learning plan;
- a template for Indigenisation of curriculum requiring course developers to indicate how they are meeting the university's requirements, with an accompanying community of practice group to share plans and deliver professional development; and
- Indigenous content, pedagogies and methodologies are incorporated into non-Indigenous specific courses using an Indigenous advisory group, consisting of Indigenous academics, Elders and traditional knowledge holders.

### CASE STUDY

#### **REACCREDITATION – BACHELOR OF NURSING/MIDWIFERY DEGREE, VICTORIA UNIVERSITY**

##### **Intended outcome**

This initiative was intended to build upon the Victoria University (VU) College of Health and Biomedicine plan and the Bathelmun Yalingwa Strategy to create culturally safe curriculum and spaces for Aboriginal people to access and participate in the nursing and midwifery degree programs at VU.

##### **Who was involved?**

- College of Health and Biomedicine - Dean, Director of Teaching and Learning, Senior Lecturer Nursing, Senior Manager Operations, Administrative Team Leader.
- Connected Learning – Associate Director Improving Teaching and Learning.
- Academic Quality and Standards Department – Director
- External Consultant – Nursing & Aged Care Consulting Service and Associate Professor Nursing and Health from Flinders University.
- Moondani Balluk – Director, Academic/Researcher, Academic Teaching Scholar.



### **How long did it take?**

Moondani Balluk has been involved in the Nursing and Midwifery Program Advisory Committee since 2012 where we advocated for greater inclusion of Aboriginal content and engagement with Aboriginal community. We worked closely with the Bachelor of Health Science Course Convenor in 2016 where an Aboriginal major was successfully included. The Director Moondani Balluk and the Dean College of Health and Biomedicine agreed on a number of activities for inclusion into the College Plan that would work towards creating a culturally safe curriculum and spaces for Aboriginal people. In April 2020 Moondani Balluk was invited to participate in the reaccreditation of the Bachelor of Nursing. In June 2020 Moondani Balluk were invited to participate in the curriculum submission for the ANMAC on RN and NMBA accreditation boards, specifically to update and rewrite our Aboriginal Health and Wellbeing unit so that it met the requirements. In August 2020 Moondani Balluk staff made suggestions on the embedding of content in the second and third years of the new degree.

### **How is it monitored/measured?**

The Aboriginal academic staff on Moondani Balluk have been included as members of the Nursing and Midwifery Course Advisory Group. Success is measured when the challenges of embedded Aboriginal content are met by the college academic staff without intervention by Moondani Balluk Aboriginal staff. We have yet to reach this point.

### **Impact and outcomes – qualitative and quantitative**

We don't as yet have final quantitative data on the number of units where Aboriginal content will be embedded. We have created a series of case studies based on a first year case study that enables academic staff in the College to present reflective, strengths-based, self-determining models of health delivery to and for Aboriginal people and communities. This is a work in progress that will be developed further through our presence and participation in the course advisory group.

### **Success stories**

Our success story thus far has been the agreement to the Moondani Balluk suggestions on how to include Aboriginal content across the new degree program and the continued relationship with academic staff who are sharing and requesting feedback on their unit redesigns with Moondani Balluk.

### **Lessons learnt**

Our major lesson learnt is that external accreditation bodies can have an impact on course design and the inclusion of Aboriginal curriculum. Without the specific reaccreditation components related to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people that is contained in the curriculum document, Moondani Balluk may not have been invited to participate. The inclusion of specific Aboriginal activities and actions in the College of Health and Biomedicine Plan will assist with further access and participation, however the agreements reached in the reaccreditation process enabled a quicker outcome. The timeline listed above is testament to the challenges of embedding Aboriginal content.

Moving forward from our achievements in this process, our plan is to establish a model for the implementation of the Universities Australia Good Practice Principles for Course Accreditation and Review of Indigenous Curriculum.

## INDIGENOUS-SPECIFIC GRADUATE ATTRIBUTES

Nineteen (49 per cent) universities reported they had Indigenous-specific graduate attributes. Three (eight per cent) had graduate attributes that covered global issues and included Indigenous people. Two (five per cent) universities said they are currently reviewing their practices, and eleven (28 per cent) universities responded that they did not have Indigenous-specific graduate attributes (the remainder did not specify).

## CASE STUDY

### EMBEDDING THE INDIGENISATION OF THE CURRICULUM FRAMEWORK – UNIVERSITY OF CANBERRA

This framework provides a guide to faculties to strengthen the cultural capabilities of staff and students by embedding cultural competency education across all courses.

The focus of the framework is on rethinking personal perspectives, and including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspectives, content, and pedagogies into courses and programs to support the implementation of the Indigenous graduate attribute. This framework is divided into three focus areas: perspectives, content and pedagogies.

The university expects students to develop skills, knowledge and attributes relevant to their profession and discipline, that are both specific and generic and developed throughout their coursework. This is achieved through the design of high-quality curriculum, with engaging experiential learning experiences and assessment aimed at preparing global citizens and future leaders that value life-long learning.

Included in University of Canberra's graduate attributes is one specifically designed to develop culturally competent graduates who are able to understand and engage with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and places in culturally respectful ways.

University of Canberra (UC) graduates are able to demonstrate Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander ways of knowing, being and doing. UC graduates can:

- use local Indigenous histories and traditional ecological knowledge to develop and augment understanding of their discipline;
- communicate and engage with Indigenous Australians in ethical and culturally respectful ways; and
- apply their knowledge to working with Indigenous Australians in socially just ways.

## INDIGENOUS RESEARCH STRATEGY

Just 14 (36 per cent) universities have an Indigenous research strategy. Eighteen (46 per cent) responded that their research strategy was under development, and seven (18 per cent) reported having overarching (not Indigenous-specific) strategies. It is noted that the agreement under the Universities Australia Indigenous Strategy was that all universities would have an Indigenous Research Strategy by 2018.

## UNIVERSITIES AUSTRALIA ACTIVITIES

### UNIVERSITIES AUSTRALIA BOARD AND PLENARY

Universities Australia and NATSIHEC have held annual joint Board meetings for the past four years. These joint meetings – held at the start of each year – ensure leadership oversight of progress made under the Universities Australia Indigenous Strategy. They also identify key areas of focus for the year between key Indigenous and non-Indigenous leaders across the sector.

The Universities Australia Plenary has appointed three Indigenous observers to attend two Plenary meetings per year. The observer role is intended to give Indigenous leaders exposure to sector policy discussion at the highest level. This exposure may assist with advancement into senior university roles.

The Universities Australia directorate also maintains an ongoing dialogue with NATSIHEC representatives, and regularly attends NATSIHEC meetings to discuss progress under the Strategy and other issues relevant to Indigenous higher education. The Universities Australia directorate is also in regular contact with the NATSIHEC executive.

### DEPUTY VICE-CHANCELLOR COMMITTEES

The four main Deputy Vice-Chancellor (DVC) portfolio committees each have a responsibility to advance particular objectives of the Strategy. These are:

- DVC Academic – develop agreed sector-wide principles for ensuring that all university course accreditation processes formally involve Indigenous consultation and input;
- DVC Corporate – development of employment strategies for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff, focusing on how to involve and promote staff who may not have progressed through traditional academic pathways;
- DVC Research – development of ways to increase the numbers of, and support for, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander higher degree by research students; and
- DVC International – development of a sectoral strategy to increase international mobility and exchanges for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students.

At the end of 2020, only the DVC Academic committee had completed their objective. All committees will review their activities in 2021.

### DVC/PVC (INDIGENOUS) COMMITTEE

A DVC/PVC (Indigenous) Committee has been established comprising leading Indigenous staff from member universities. The Committee's role will be to advise the Universities Australia directorate on all matters relevant to Indigenous inclusion and advancement in Australian universities. In particular, the Committee has responsibility for monitoring the progress of the Universities Australia Indigenous Strategy and overseeing its further evolution and development. The Committee will also support the other DVC Committees with their commitments under the Indigenous Strategy. The Committee held its inaugural meeting in February 2021.

## JOINT UNIVERSITIES AUSTRALIA AND NATSIHEC COMMUNICATIONS CAMPAIGN

In 2019, Universities Australia and NATSIHEC agreed to a campaign to encourage more Indigenous students to enrol in university. Following a postponement due to COVID-19, the Indigenous *OpportUNITY* campaign was rolled out to coincide with NAIDOC week in 2020. The campaign features a series of short social media videos and a website for potential students on university pathways.

The [www.indigenousoportunity.edu.au](http://www.indigenousoportunity.edu.au) website features a comprehensive list of links to relevant university websites, information on how to apply to further study and the stories about the four Indigenous students and graduates. The campaign launch involved a comprehensive media and social media strategy.

## ADVOCACY

COVID-19 affected Universities Australia's ability to advocate for the sector at forums used in previous years that did not occur in 2020, such as the National Higher Education Employment Coordination Forum and the Universities Australia Marketing Communications and Development Conference.

An event that did go ahead in February 2020 was the Universities Australia Conference, which included the session *Leadership models of Indigenous higher education - now and into the future*. The session explored Indigenous leadership models across the university sector. Part of this conversation included examining the landscape of senior Indigenous positions across the sector and how the sector is working to support and inspire future generations of leaders. The session was chaired by Professor Simon Maddocks, then Vice-Chancellor of Charles Darwin University and Dr Leanne Holt, President of NATSIHEC. Speakers were Professor Braden Hill, Pro Vice-Chancellor, Edith Cowan University, Professor Tom Calma, Chancellor, University of Canberra, and Professor Bronwyn Fredericks, Pro Vice-Chancellor, The University of Queensland.

## PUBLIC SUBMISSIONS

Public submissions that addressed Indigenous issues made by Universities Australia in 2020 were to:

- The House of Representatives Standing Committee on Indigenous affairs - Pathways and Participation Opportunities for Indigenous Australians in Employment and Business; and
- Senate Education and Employment Committee inquiry – Higher Education Support Amendment (Job-Ready Graduates and Supporting Regional and Remote Students) Bill 2020 regarding Indigenous demand-driven places.

## PARTNERSHIP WITH CAREERTRACKERS

CareerTrackers is a national non-profit organisation that supports Indigenous university students to intern with organisations to develop their workplace skills and to create employment networks.

In 2019, Universities Australia became an official CareerTrackers partner, with interns undertaking paid work experience with the organisation over the course of their studies. Our first CareerTrackers intern commenced with Universities Australia in November 2019, working in Universities Australia's strategic communications team. In 2020, Universities Australia welcomed its second CareerTrackers intern, working in the academic policy team on the Indigenous strategy annual survey and report.