



# INDIGENOUS STRATEGY

2022-25



UNIVERSITIES  
AUSTRALIA

Australia's universities acknowledge and celebrate the knowledge and culture of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

As the first inhabitants of this land, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples have been learning and teaching about the world and country for millennia.

Australia's universities acknowledge the continuing role of stewardship of knowledge and culture that rests with Indigenous peoples across the land.

# CONTENTS

JOINT STATEMENT	6
PREAMBLE	9
VALUES	13
PURPOSE	16
UNIVERSITY COMMITMENTS	18
FOCUS AREAS	
STUDENT SUCCESS	21
STAFF SUCCESS	29
UNIVERSITY RESPONSIBILITY FOR INDIGENOUS ADVANCEMENT	37
RACISM AND CULTURAL SAFETY	45
RECOGNISING THE VALUE INDIGENOUS PEOPLE AND KNOWLEDGES BRING TO THE UNIVERSITY AND EMBEDDING INDIGENOUS VALUE SYSTEMS AND KNOWLEDGES INTO UNIVERSITY STRUCTURES	53
UNIVERSITIES AUSTRALIA'S ROLE	59
REPORTING	61

## JOINT STATEMENT

UA CHAIR AND CEO TOGETHER WITH THE DVC/PVC  
INDIGENOUS COMMITTEE CHAIR AND NATSIHEC PRESIDENT

Universities Australia launched the first whole-of-sector strategy to support the advancement of Indigenous peoples in and through Australia's universities in 2017.

The strategy recognised the need to do more to engage and work with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, and their communities, to extend opportunity. Universities committed to working toward better outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people: as students and graduates, academic and professional staff.

Much was achieved under the first strategy. Universities have worked resolutely to deliver real results, individually and as a sector. Of course, there is more work to be done.

In 2022, UA is launching the second phase of the sector's commitment, guided by a revised and refined strategy. The 2022-25 Indigenous Strategy builds upon its predecessor, shifting gears from aspiration to implementation.

There is new emphasis on supporting students through to degree completion and successful post-study outcomes. As universities recruit more Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff, efforts will intensify to support staff through career development and pathways, including to senior executive roles.

The new strategy takes a systematic approach to measuring universities' efforts, in order to identify both successes and areas where more work is needed. Sharing good practice will help universities to develop more effective and better targeted ways to support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, staff and communities.

The new strategy is explicit about addressing racism as a major barrier to advancement. Universities will call out and take action on racism against Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

Australia's universities have again come together to make a strong commitment to fairness and social justice for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. We remain committed to overcoming a history of marginalisation and the continuing disadvantage that results from it.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and knowledge are assets to universities and the nation. Their genuine inclusion in our teaching and research broadens, deepens and improves what we do, giving our Australian universities a unique place on the world stage.

We are proud to launch UA's 2022-25 Indigenous Strategy as a joint commitment to Indigenous advancement, in and through universities.



## PREAMBLE

Supporting the advancement of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in and through university is the objective of the Universities Australia Indigenous Strategy.

The Strategy is an ongoing commitment by the university sector, revisited at three yearly intervals, each building on the successes of the last. The Indigenous Strategy is about celebrating and highlighting our achievements whilst also challenging us to break down the barriers Indigenous people face.

Reporting on the barriers many Indigenous people experience, the Productivity Commission's 2020 Overcoming Indigenous Disadvantage Report (OID report) found that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples are often disproportionately affected by structural barriers.<sup>1</sup> Regarding barriers to successful post-secondary education and training for Indigenous people, the OID reported on the following key factors:

- previous academic achievement;
- accessibility issues, including remoteness;
- racism and cultural insensitivity;
- lack of culturally appropriate services; and
- caring and other community responsibilities.<sup>2</sup>

The report also found that approaches which appear to be successful in improving outcomes for Indigenous people include:

- addressing racism and discrimination through structural changes, and building knowledge and education;
- enabling Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples to share in decision-making on things that affect them;
- addressing laws, policies, and practices that operate to the detriment of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples; and
- ensuring access to effective culturally safe services, at the right time and suited to the local context.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Productivity Commission 2020 Overcoming Indigenous Disadvantage report, p. xxiii.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid, p. 4.82 – 4.83.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid, p. xxiii.



CQUniversity – Kleo Brilliant (Bachelor of Paramedic Science Student), Recheal Daley & Susan Domic (Bachelor of Social Work student)

These findings, together with the findings of UA's own Indigenous Strategy Annual Surveys and consultations with Indigenous leaders in universities, inform our second Strategy.

Supporting Indigenous advancement in universities under the Indigenous Strategy reflects the obligations and principles outlined in Article 14 of The United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP), which states:

1. *Indigenous peoples have the right to establish and control their educational systems and institutions providing education in their own languages, in a manner appropriate to their cultural methods of teaching and learning.*
2. *Indigenous individuals, particularly children, have the right to all levels and forms of education of the State without discrimination.*
3. *States shall, in conjunction with indigenous peoples, take effective measures, in order for indigenous individuals, particularly children, including those living outside their communities, to have access, when possible, to an education in their own culture and provided in their own language.*



## VALUES

Western Sydney University –Yaama Boys Aboriginal Dance Performance taking part in a Western Sydney University event at the Ngara Ngura building, Liverpool City campus  
Photo credit : Western Sydney University, Sally Tsoutas.

This Indigenous Strategy informs UA members' work and seeks to advance the following values:

- Commitment to the advancement of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and cultures in and through universities.
- Respect, collaboration and empowerment of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, and acknowledgement of their sovereignty as First Peoples.
- Zero-tolerance of racism.
- Truth-telling about our shared history as an essential step forward in addressing racism and improving the safety and advancing the prosperity of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in and through universities.
- Commitment to cultural safety for Indigenous students and staff and all Indigenous people.
- Respect for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples' unique knowledge and knowledge systems which are foundational to Australia's intellectual, social and cultural capital.
- Accountability to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples for the use of Indigenous knowledge and cultures in higher education and research.
- True partnership between universities and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities both within and outside the university as essential to delivering the best outcomes. Such partnerships should give voice to Indigenous people in decision making that affects them
- Equality of opportunity and outcome as a central objective of policy and practice.
- Recognition that universities manage the resources and processes required to achieve the aims set out in this Strategy.
- Commitment to the aims of this Strategy, and to resourcing universities' efforts to achieve them.



University of Wollongong – Social Work Graduate from Bomaderry, Shaeley Aldridge finished her last semester pregnant with twins and doing placement.

As home to the world's oldest living continuous cultures, Australia is in a unique position – and has unique potential to learn from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander societies.

To further this aim, universities and their staff and students should:

- be open to and capable of challenging preconceived ideas about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, communities and histories;
- recognise and have empathy for the historic discrimination endured by Indigenous people and be sensitive to the traumatic histories of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and communities; and
- understand the ongoing impact of colonialism and the dominant culture on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.



## PURPOSE

Queensland University of Technology –  
Lavena Wills, Bachelor of Clinical Exercise Physiology

In 2017, UA launched the first Indigenous Strategy: the first whole of sector commitment to advancement of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in and through universities, as students, graduates, researchers and staff.

This first Strategy set targets and commitments across all areas of university activity – access and success for students, graduate outcomes, transitions to higher degrees by research, employment in academic and professional jobs, Indigenous knowledge in higher education and research, and Indigenous matters in whole of university policies and governance.

The new Strategy will build on the success of the first Strategy and adopt more ambitious objectives and commitments.<sup>4</sup> UA now seeks – in partnership with Indigenous university leaders – to move beyond aspiration to implementation, ensuring that commitment to principles translates consistently into concrete actions and outcomes. This requires a sharper focus on universities' commitment and responsibility, both at an institutional level and across the sector, to ensure those responsible are delivering on the commitments, and that indicators and evidence show how they deliver and whether they have reached their goals.

The Indigenous Strategy will remain focussed on equal opportunity and self-determination for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. At the same time, the revised Strategy aims to foreground the value and benefits that Indigenous advancement brings to everyone: Indigenous participation and success at all levels within the university is a strength and a benefit not only for Indigenous people, but for universities themselves, for non-Indigenous students, researchers and staff, and for the nation as a whole.

We note that there is a one-year gap in Strategies. This is a result of the global pandemic limiting work output generally and, in particular, limiting the ability to conduct face-to-face consultations with Indigenous leaders in universities, which has been critical in the successful development of the Indigenous Strategy 2022-2025.

<sup>4</sup> We note that there is a one-year gap in Strategies. This is a result of the global pandemic limiting work output generally and, in particular, limiting the ability to conduct face-to-face consultations with Indigenous leaders in universities, which has been critical in the successful development of the Indigenous Strategy 2022-2025.

## UNIVERSITY COMMITMENTS

James Cook University –  
Indigenous and Research Centre (IERC) on the  
Bebegu Yumba campus in Douglas, Townsville

Universities are supporting the advancement of Indigenous people in various ways.

Under the first iteration of the Indigenous Strategy, universities implemented a number of initiatives aimed to:

- increase the numbers of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples participating in higher education as students, as graduates and as academic and research staff;
- increase the engagement of non-Indigenous people with Indigenous knowledge, culture and educational approaches; and
- improve the university environment for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

Much was achieved under the first Strategy. Indigenous enrolments more than doubled, and Indigenous higher education, research and employment were included as priority areas in core university policy documents. Cross-cultural training programs were delivered more widely to staff and students, and moves were made to recognise the additional workload of Indigenous staff in planning and in performance assessments. There were strong gains in senior Indigenous leadership positions in universities (PVCs Indigenous or equivalent) and in ensuring all students encounter and engage with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural content in their course of study.

Maintaining and building on these gains is the aim of the Indigenous Strategy for 2022 – 2025.

### Focus areas

The revised Strategy will emphasise some key focus areas which are vital to advancement for both students and staff. This focus is not intended to come at the expense of other important areas where universities will continue and increase their efforts. Indeed, the designated focus areas are likely to show the interconnected nature of the relevant issues and the need for a holistic approach to Indigenous advancement.

For students, the focus will shift to success, in particular improving completion rates. Access to university has improved greatly, but completion rates continue to lag.

For staff, the focus will be on opportunity, career development and leadership structures, including opportunity to develop academic research careers and to move into senior positions.

Both of these are areas where the sector needs to move with greater determination from access to success. The new Strategy seeks to build on improvements in Indigenous access and participation at university to smooth, widen and diversify pathways to successful outcomes.



FOCUS AREA

**STUDENT SUCCESS**

Student success is defined here as a university experience that fosters the successful completion of a degree that sets up students for favourable outcomes.

Access has been a focus of universities as expressed in the first iteration of the UA Indigenous Strategy (2017-2020), and significant gains have been made in improving access to university for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students.

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. As a proportion of all domestic enrolments, Indigenous students increased from 1.3 per cent in 2008 to 2.0 per cent in 2019. However, despite these improvements, in 2019 Indigenous student enrolments remain significantly below population parity (3.1 per cent), therefore student access to a university education will remain a priority.



Edith Cowan University – Chloe Barber, Bachelor of Science (Nursing), Logan MacGregor, Master of Teaching (Secondary), Kellie McDiarmid, Bachelor of Science (Nursing)

Student support services are key to supporting student success. For Indigenous students, these have largely been delivered by on-campus Indigenous centres. Whilst these centres are integral to student support, the student support load needs to be shared more equitably across campus, for example student support provided by faculties.

Indigenous higher education attainment is growing, in line with increases in participation. 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.

Completion rates have improved somewhat in recent years, but the gap is far larger than it is for enrolments. In 2019, nine-year completion rates for Indigenous students were 47 per cent, significantly below 74 per cent for non-Indigenous students. As a result, historic increases in access aren't translating into equivalent growth in attainment. Under this Strategy, universities will work to translate historic growth in Indigenous access more consistently into success and degree attainment.

Pathway programs for Indigenous students support a level playing field for Indigenous students applying to university. Similarly, institutions should develop and/or refine initiatives to improve pathways for their Indigenous students into postgraduate study, academic employment and other work.



University of New England student and proud Biripai woman, Caitlin Davey's research field and PhD are grounded in her strong sense of empathy and the goal of empowering Indigenous Australians. Caitlin is currently studying a Doctor of Philosophy with UNE, which she is doing in the field of Criminology and incorporating areas of Social Psychology and Indigenous Studies."

For many years, universities have opted to support Indigenous student retention and success activities primarily through the Commonwealth's Indigenous Student Success Program (ISSP) and its predecessor schemes (i.e. Indigenous Support Program, Commonwealth Scholarship Program and Indigenous Tutorial Assistance Scheme). These programs were/are intended to be supplementary funding streams to support the improvement of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander student outcomes.

[...] Significant shifts in retention and success rates nationally can only be achieved through a proper commitment on behalf of universities to deploy resources towards the effort beyond specialist funding streams like ISSP. The use of ISSP alone represents a minimal commitment to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

The emergence of senior Indigenous leadership positions across the sector will be a key enabler in highlighting this need. However, this must be high on the agenda for all university leaders/directors/managers within our respective institutions.

PROFESSOR BRADEN HILL  
PRO VICE-CHANCELLOR EQUITY AND INDIGENOUS  
EDITH COWAN UNIVERSITY

## STUDENT SUCCESS COMMITMENTS

- Universities have recruitment strategies for Indigenous students.
- Universities acknowledge the significant role Indigenous student support services play in success and resource these services appropriately.
- Whilst Indigenous Centres play a central role, there is a need to share responsibility across the institution and universities should have in place resourced mechanisms for student support across their institution.
- Universities target the improvement of completion rates of Indigenous students through the development of an institutional working group to determine the nature of the issues at the institutional level and to implement strategies to improve Indigenous student completion rates at their university. These strategies should include undergraduate, postgraduate, mature age, and remote area students.
- Universities support through specific initiatives pathways for Indigenous students into university, and similar support programs for students to transition into higher degrees by research (HDRs), academic employment, and other employment opportunities.



Western Sydney University – Matilda Harry is a proud Wiradjuri woman. Matilda is currently undertaking doctoral research through the Graduate Research School. Her thesis is entitled 'Maarang Gulbanha - Mentoring Indigenous high school graduates towards excellence, leadership and community nationhood'.



Western Sydney University – Luke Hodge is a proud and grateful 21-year-old Dunghutti young man who lives and resides on Dharawal land. Luke studies a Bachelor of Communication (Screen Media). He is a firm believer that stories are germane to the continuity and passing of knowledge.

### DVC Committee action

The following actions by the DVC International Committee support the above commitments for universities.

DVC International will support efforts to increase Indigenous students' participation in international mobility experiences, through:

- exploring best practice across the sector and options to support Indigenous students' access to engage in online global internships;
- progressing conversations with the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade to advocate for expanding target destination countries for New Colombo Plan-supported mobility experiences; and
- ensuring DFAT maintains a positive perspective and prioritises New Colombo Plan mobility plans that include Indigenous/First Nations content or experiences.

DVC International will identify and share best practices to support international students to more comprehensively engage with Indigenous communities and practices.

DVC International will document and share with the sector their approaches and best practice with respect to international students' engagement with Indigenous culture and communities.

## CASE STUDY

### Macquarie University First year student success program

Macquarie University has a targeted program aimed at increasing the retention and success of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander first year students. This is achieved by building a greater sense of belonging and community with a First Year Student Engagement Officer (FYSEO) leading the program and appointing First Year Advisors (FYA) to act as mentors and tutors.

Prior to the University's Orientation program, a cultural camp is held over two nights. Approximately 40-50 commencing students attend and engage in academic, social and cultural workshops and activities with current Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff, students and local community members.



The University of Newcastle – Kieran Shipp.

To prepare for each semester, individual and discipline group enrolment sessions are conducted to assist students in completing their enrolment (60-70 enrolment sessions).

Once students commence Semester 1, all students are allocated 50 hours with a FYA providing the student with both mentorship and tutoring.

The FYSEO coordinates workshops each semester including:

- Census date and beyond – What is census date, why is it important to me and what are my academic responsibilities post census date.
- How to get through tough times – Discusses student wellbeing, applying for special consideration and the availability of services and programs to make it through the tough times.
- Exam Preparation - Offered in conjunction with the Library Learning and Skills Teams, prepares students with study skills and tips when preparing for exams.

The FYSEO tracks academic progression through systems as well as personalised contact. Students are also advised on social, cultural and academic workshops and activities held by Walanga Muru and across the University.

In the first year of this program being implemented, the retention rate of First Year Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students increased from 69% to 91%. Overall engagement has increased and the 2020 QILT data showed that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander student overall satisfaction ranked the highest out of all the cohorts identified at Macquarie University. The heightened sense of belonging and community has also resulted in students progressing more confidently into second year and beyond.



FOCUS AREA  
**STAFF SUCCESS**

The University of Melbourne – Members of the academic procession join Dr Larry L. Kimura, Associate Professor of Hawaiian Language at Ka Haka 'Ula O Ke'elikolani College of Hawaiian Language at the University of Hawaii Hilo, after his presentation of the 2019 Narrm Oration. Photo Peter Casamento.

Staff success is defined here as a state where Indigenous staff recruitment, retention, workloads, promotion pathways, pipeline development, and professional development are all appropriately supported, so that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples have effective opportunities to gain employment at universities and to develop their careers.

These success factors can be addressed by outlining specific actions in a university workforce strategy, which most universities have already. However, there are benefits to be realised from enhanced coordination, particularly regarding Indigenous-specific workforce strategy documents. Indigenous-specific workforce strategies are useful repositories for policies outlining how universities will attract staff, and the necessary conditions for keeping those staff. They should include consideration of Indigenous staff targets and affirmative staff measures.

Universities should also ensure the unique skills Indigenous staff possess are recognised formally in the workplace including in promotion opportunities and in workload management. Universities should understand the significant amount of extra work that Indigenous staff have to manage. They are often required to work outside the normal duties of their role, ranging from providing input or advice on university matters with an Indigenous angle, supporting Indigenous students and staff, helping to manage relationships with Indigenous communities, or advising on protocols and campus artwork. This needs to be recognised and supported.

In keeping with the theme of supporting success, this Strategy is particularly concerned with addressing issues of career development of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff.

Since 2005, the total number of Indigenous staff has doubled from 771 to 1,571 in 2020. The number of Indigenous academic staff has also increased over the same period, from 282 to 527. There has been similar growth in professional positions held by Indigenous people from 489 in 2005 to 1044 in 2020. In total, however, just 1.3 per cent of Australian university staff – both academic and non-academic – were from an Indigenous background in 2019, substantially below the working-age population parity figure of 3.1 per cent.

Indigenous academic staff were employed in lower proportions at the levels of senior lecturer and above, compared to non-Indigenous staff. In 2019, 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 24.9 per cent of Indigenous staff were employed above the senior lecturer level (Level D and above) compared to 29.5 per cent for non-Indigenous.

The issues are well known, and good advice is available on effective strategies to address them.

The National Indigenous Higher Education Workforce Strategy (NIHEWS) objectives, developed as an aid to universities in developing their own Indigenous employment strategies, provide a pathway for staff success. These objectives are:

- Enhance employment pathways for existing Indigenous employees.
- Increase new employment opportunities for Indigenous people.
- Develop a working environment appropriate to the needs of Indigenous people.
- Community engagement and outreach.
- Effective implementation of the NIHEWS.

Further, the NATSIHEC Accelerating Indigenous Higher Education report includes a focus on academic workforce, with recommendations including:

- inter-cultural capacity building initiatives for staff and students;
- measures of funding and accountability through workforce strategies at all levels;
- professional development for all Indigenous academics, including senior executives; and
- workforce modelling, including future supply pools from undergraduate students and the professional sector.<sup>5</sup>

Building on this evidence base and consultation with Indigenous leaders in universities, this iteration of the Strategy includes some stronger and more specific commitments in the areas of staffing and career development.

Universities need to employ more Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff, and then work to support them to advance in their careers.

In particular, universities should commit to further developing pathways through higher degrees by research (HDRs) and into academic work. Universities commit to fostering Aboriginal and Torres

<sup>5</sup> NATSIHEC 2016 Accelerating Indigenous Higher Education p. 91-92.



Strait Islander academic staff and supporting them to become leading researchers and teachers in their academic disciplines.

As part of staff support, every university should have a PVC Indigenous (or equivalent). This is the same commitment required of universities in receipt of ISSP funding. This position should be appropriately supported with the right structure of support staff and resourcing. In addition, to assist the Vice-Chancellor in championing the initiatives contained in this Indigenous Strategy, DVC/PVCs Indigenous (or equivalent) should have a direct line of communication to the Vice-Chancellor.

Career development, support and mentoring will extend to supporting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff – both academic and professional – to aspire to and be employed in senior roles within universities.

Further, universities will support senior Indigenous staff to be competitive for the most senior executive roles in the university.

With the exception of targeted recruitment of Indigenous people into senior positions, Indigenous employment across the sector is often pursued from an equity or diversity position.

I'd argue that this approach has hindered the sector's ability to maximise success in this area by resulting in a level of urgency and investment significantly less than is required for success. In addition, these drivers run the risk of haphazard placement of Indigenous people across the organisation as well as an employment basis that can lack a degree of dignity for the recipient/incumbent.

While Indigenous employment is an equity, diversity, social justice issue within our universities, it should, above all, be seen as a necessary capability piece; a talent piece necessary for the achievement of the organisation's increasingly ambitious Indigenous strategic objectives.

By taking a capability approach rather than a diversity etc. approach, not only are we more likely to see a greater sense of internal urgency, engagement and investment, we're also employing Indigenous people on a more dignified basis and with a greater degree of cultural safety.

**PROFESSOR MICHAEL McDANIEL**  
PRO VICE-CHANCELLOR INDIGENOUS LEADERSHIP AND ENGAGEMENT  
UNIVERSITY OF TECHNOLOGY SYDNEY

## STAFF SUCCESS COMMITMENTS

- Universities have workforce strategies that include initiatives for attracting and retaining Indigenous staff.
- Universities have Indigenous staff targets that consider factors such as the number of Indigenous students at the university and the ratio of the university's local Indigenous population to the broader population.
- Universities have an Indigenous senior leadership position (PVC or higher) that is appropriately placed within the university's structure and is appropriately resourced (support staff and position funding).
- Workloads of Indigenous staff are recognised and commensurately supported.
- Universities have documented promotion pathways that recognise the uniquely broad experience and expertise Indigenous staff possess.
- Universities have professional development activities for Indigenous staff.

### DVC Committee action

DVCs (Corporate) develop Indigenous employment guidelines, drawing on successful elements of institutional strategies across the sector.

## CASE STUDY

### Charles Sturt University Academic Promotions Review to include and recognise First Nations skills, knowledges, value and additional workloads.

Charles Sturt University commenced a review of its Academic Promotions process in 2020 with a view to streamline and simplify the process, but also to acknowledge the different challenges faced by equity groups, particularly First Nations Academic staff.

The review process has resulted in a simpler academic promotions process and in the First Nations space, now implementing the following:

- First Nations staff applying for promotion are now able to select if they wish to seek cultural adjustment to the academic promotions committee. If so, the promotions committee is amended to allow the Pro Vice-Chancellor First Nations Engagement or a professor who is a First Nations person to be chair, with voting rights; including an additional First Nations academic at the same or a level above the applicant and if practical an Elder of a First Nations community.
- The advisory staff to promotions committees must also include a member of the Division of People and Culture Equity and Diversity team, to advise on aspects of applications and unconscious bias.

The impact of this means that in the consideration of all First Nations applications, the decision makers are required to keep the following aspects in mind:

- First Nations staff have an invisible workload that may impact on their academic achievements;
- they may feel isolated;
- they may give time to mentoring/supporting other First Nations staff/students;
- they may be asked to provide advice on reconciliation and First Nations cultural matters to inform the area or participate in a range of committees; and
- they may often mediate between other staff and First Nations communities, and they are likely to value collective outcomes and emphasise communal achievements, rather than claiming as their own.

Assessors are asked to consider:

- what impact these things have had on their workload and outcomes;
- how the applicant has contributed to relationships between the area and Communities;
- how the area has used the expertise of the applicant and what effect this has on their productivity; and
- additional roles they have played as a First Nations person in Communities and internally and whether or not they should be receiving credit for the collective outcomes of partnerships they have assisted to establish with First Nations Communities.

Overall, the outcome is to create a culturally safe experience for applicants with an acknowledgement of all that First Nations academic staff often contribute to the sector on top of their intended workload. With this work, it is anticipated more First Nations academic staff will be encouraged to apply for promotion.



## UNIVERSITY RESPONSIBILITY FOR INDIGENOUS ADVANCEMENT

Universities play a key role in supporting Indigenous advancement not just within campus walls but as leaders in the community.

With access to an unparalleled evidence-base, universities are well-placed to model ethical and evidence-based practice, including when it comes to supporting Indigenous people.

Building on the good work of the sector under the first iteration of the Indigenous Strategy (2017-2020), a number of initiatives have been identified aimed at bolstering the success of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in the sector.

It is vital that Vice-Chancellors and their senior management groups actively champion the Indigenous Strategy in their institution, in whole of sector governance bodies and other forums. Indigenous views should be represented at top level university forums such as meetings of the Council and senior executive.

Advancing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in universities requires resourcing. Investment needs to reflect the imbalance that needs redressing and the proportion of the population being supported.<sup>6</sup>

As part of their role in serving the broader community, universities have established and are continuing to develop relationships with local Indigenous communities. These connections should have a view to reciprocal exchange and be pursuant to advancing Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander peoples.

Practical ways in which university administration can support Indigenous advancement include having a procurement policy requiring that a minimum percentage of university procurement employ Indigenous organisations as suppliers.

Other initiatives include implementing KPIs for all staff that require them to demonstrate action toward Indigenous advancement. It is important to ensure strong and meaningful KPIs for staff in leadership positions – from the university executive to Deans and Associate Deans in the faculties as well as key professional staff.

<sup>6</sup> In 2020 the Indigenous working age population comprised 3.1% of the total working age population.

Universities should also consider, where appropriate, Indigenous names for university buildings and other infrastructure in order to acknowledge First Peoples and make a public statement of commitment to working in partnership with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. This should be done in collaboration with local people and using local cultural protocols.

The Strategy builds in opportunities and mechanisms to share good practice among UA members. In addition to informal sharing of good practice through Plenary, Board and Committee meetings, as well as UA's regular meetings with NATSIHEC and other Indigenous higher education stakeholders, this Strategy sets up formal mechanisms and timeframes for sharing good practice and positive stories through all five DVC Committee meetings, and for publication of this information on the UA website.

The Strategy includes reporting requirements to assist every university – and the sector as a whole – to track achievement against commitment.

Parties to the Indigenous Strategy will have the opportunity to report on progress in a number of ways. At a whole-of-sector level, the annual survey under the Strategy will report against each of the commitment areas each year to track progress. At an institutional level, the Strategy encourages member universities to strengthen their own accountability measures to ensure further success. This Strategy helps enshrine institutional-level accountability by expressing our shared commitment and in some areas providing overarching whole of sector strategies and mechanisms. Moreover, this revised Strategy maintains the commitment that all whole-of-institution policy documents must deal with Indigenous matters. This will assist continued improvement in reporting and reflection on universities' commitments and efforts.

## UNIVERSITY RESPONSIBILITY FOR INDIGENOUS ADVANCEMENT COMMITMENTS

- Vice Chancellors actively champion the Strategy.
- The DVC/PVC Indigenous (or equivalent) has a direct line of engagement to the Vice-Chancellor.
- Universities ensure Indigenous views are represented either directly or through a governance mechanism to the Council or Senate and to the senior executive.
- Initiatives aimed at advancing Indigenous people are appropriately resourced.
- Universities have a demonstrated connection to Indigenous communities that supports Indigenous advancement.
- Universities have an Indigenous procurement policy.
- Universities consider Indigenous cultural representation in the built environment, for example names of buildings or other aspects of the physical environment.
- Universities implement KPIs for staff – especially staff in leadership positions both academic and professional - that require them to demonstrate action toward Indigenous advancement.

### DVC Committee actions

The DVC Corporate Committee supports the above commitments by developing model Indigenous procurement guidelines.

The following actions by all DVC Committees support the above commitments for universities:

- DVC Committees liaise with the DVC/PVC (Indigenous) Committee on matters relating to Indigenous advancement.
- DVC Committees report regularly to the UA Directorate on their specific commitments under the Strategy.
- DVC Committees share good practice on Indigenous advancement and make relevant materials available to the UA Directorate.

## CASE STUDY

### University of Technology Sydney (UTS) Indigenous Policy

Since 2011, UTS has adopted a whole-of-university approach to – and responsibility for – Indigenous advancement.

The foundation of this approach is the university's [Indigenous Policy](#), which applies to all staff and students at UTS. Underpinned by the fundamental principle of Indigenous self-determination, and developed under Indigenous leadership, the Indigenous Policy governs the direction of Indigenous strategic endeavour at UTS.

All areas of UTS share responsibility for implementing the Indigenous Policy and progressing its objectives, with the university providing additional financial resourcing to support Indigenous education, research and employment initiatives.

At UTS, Indigenous business is core business, central to our institutional identity. It forms one of the three fundamental pillars of the [UTS 2027 strategic vision](#). To support this aim, Indigenous objectives have been woven into the broader UTS 2027 [strategic initiatives](#), which is in turn supported by the UTS Corporate Plan that sets targets for Indigenous student participation, success and retention, as well as Indigenous employment.

In addition to the UTS 2027 Strategy and the UTS Corporate Plan, the [Indigenous Education and Research Strategy](#) and [Wingara Indigenous Employment Strategy](#) set out a more extensive range of well-defined, measurable, and university-wide ambitious Indigenous targets.

For each initiative, these strategies assign formal accountability for achievement to senior executives and senior managers, and also specify implementation responsibility (ie. those who will undertake the daily activities required to progress the strategies). These accountabilities are included in workplans and assessed by way of the university's performance management system.

Faculty deans are further required to develop comprehensive, multi-year, faculty-specific Indigenous action plans that sets out how the faculty will achieve and contribute to Indigenous targets during the relevant strategic period. These plans include separate sections in relation to Indigenous student outcomes, Indigenous Graduate Attributes, Indigenous research and research students, and Indigenous employment.

Faculties as well as university divisions are also required to have separate and comprehensive Indigenous employment plans, which not only identify future Indigenous employment opportunities, but outline the measures the faculty or division will take to ensure these are achieved.

The extent to which Indigenous initiatives are holistically and authentically embedded into core university strategies and processes is an indication of the support for Indigenous advancement at the highest levels. The success of the whole-of-university approach to Indigenous advancement is also borne out by the results in the biennial Voice staff survey, which measures staff engagement and satisfaction in a range of areas, with sector-wide comparison data available.

Since 2016, UTS has included questions designed to measure institution-wide awareness, engagement, and support for Indigenous initiatives. In the latest survey conducted, these questions have elicited the highest positive results of all questions contained in the survey, with 93% of respondents expressing support for the Indigenous Policy and related initiatives, and 90% believing UTS is committed to supporting the success of Indigenous students and staff.



## RACISM AND CULTURAL SAFETY

RMIT University – Cathy Doe, Senior Advisor, Indigenous Access and Engagement at Ngarara Willim Centre, supports Israel Carter, first year Masters of Design, Innovation and Technology student

Universities should be safe places, free from discrimination and actions which harm others.

There are formal requirements such as the basic human rights expressed in the United Nations International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination and in Australia, the [Racial Discrimination Act 1975](#) which makes racist practices unlawful.<sup>7</sup>

Whilst most universities have policy to combat racism, unfortunately it is still a widely reported problem. According to a 2018 report by the National Tertiary Education Union, “75 per cent of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander members and staff employed in the Australian higher education sector experience racism and discrimination in the workplace”.<sup>8</sup>

Zero tolerance to racism means not only condemning racist behaviour but also actively seeking to eliminate racist behaviour. Universities should develop institutional Indigenous-specific anti-racism strategies. These should be led by an anti-racism statement and contain actions pursuant to eliminating discriminatory race-based practices.

Shared traditions, beliefs and practices, or ‘culture’, shape our perspective of the world around us. Much of this we take for granted, particularly where our culture is reflected in workplaces and other environments. However, Indigenous worldviews are unlikely to be reflected, understood or appreciated in many environments.

7 [it is] unlawful for a person to do any act involving a distinction, exclusion, restriction or preference based on race, colour, descent or national or ethnic origin which has the purpose or effect of nullifying or impairing the recognition, enjoyment or exercise, on an equal footing, of any human right or fundamental freedom in the political, economic, social, cultural or any other field of public life.

8 NTEU 2018 I’m still not racist, but..., p.4.

The Overcoming Indigenous Disadvantage 2020 Report notes that whilst Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures are diverse, each with their own distinct norms, lore, languages and identity, some of the strengths they each provide include:

- child-rearing practices that encourage independence, and that build children’s capacities to self-judge and take risks from an early age;
- strong connections with family and kin, and cultural and spiritual practices that support resilience;
- a strong belief that it is the responsibility of family to provide care and support;
- respect for the leadership of Elders, their role in decision-making and the value of spending time with them;
- an acceptance of differences and diversity, which helps build a sense of belonging and community; and
- connection with, and caring for, Country, which is considered as caring for oneself and one’s community and is also associated with the management of land.<sup>9</sup>

One of the ways in which anti-racism can be promoted is by challenging prejudiced thinking, and one of the ways this can be done is through cultural safety training. Here, non-Indigenous staff and students can learn for themselves the impact of white Australia on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, past and present. It is also an opportunity to learn something about Indigenous ways of thinking and being, which can be a powerful tool in dispelling myths and misunderstanding. This builds on commitments under the first Strategy for senior staff to undertake such training.

Related to this, the cultural load on Indigenous staff and students should be recognised and supported. In cultures that highlight kin-based connections and responsibility, employers should support this reality through such measures as leave entitlements that reflect circumstances, including cultural, community and family obligations.

9 Productivity Commission 2020 Overcoming Indigenous Disadvantage report p. 3.2.



Australia's universities have a responsibility to be the beacons of light in delivering social justice agendas across its many curriculums and courses.

Perhaps the most important to dramatically enhance a paradigmatic shift is the uptake of cultural safety for First Nations students and staff within its walls and online in our new Covid teaching spaces. This is because racism (personal, institutionally and systemically) continues to play a significant role in the lives of every First Nation Australian.

Sadly, this racism is also played out in our universities, and many of us who work there know this. We also know that racism causes harm to our physical, social and emotional well-being. It is one of the main reasons why our students do not complete their degrees, and our staff leave their workplaces.

This is an ethical dilemma that we can all take part to change. So that universities become the sites and places where Indigenous/First Nations staff and students can actively participate and be proud to excel in an environment that celebrates their cultural identities, knowledges, histories and ways of knowing, being and doing.

We today have the opportunity work with and educate through cultural safety strategies to make Universities a site for valuing the human rights of all Australians, and particularly their First.

PROFESSOR JUANITA SHERWOOD  
PRO VICE-CHANCELLOR FIRST NATIONS ENGAGEMENT  
CHARLES STURT UNIVERSITY

## RACISM AND CULTURAL SAFETY COMMITMENTS

- Universities develop and implement an Indigenous-specific anti-racism strategy.
- Cultural safety training provided to all staff, which includes addressing impacts of dominant culture on Indigenous people and addresses more subtle forms of racism.
- Universities formally recognise the cultural load of Indigenous staff and students and make appropriate adjustments, including in relevant HR policies and practices.

### DVC Committee action

The DVC/PVC Indigenous Committee supports the above commitments by developing Indigenous-specific cultural competence best practice principles.

## CASE STUDY

### The University of Newcastle Cultural Capability Framework (2020-2025)

The Cultural Capability Framework (CCF) creates a structure for all staff at the University of Newcastle to reflect on their practices and provides a roadmap to identify areas of action necessary to enable the best possible outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, staff, and the wider community. The CCF was co-designed with key internal and external stakeholders including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Elders, staff, students, governing bodies, and community members. The CCF was based on the principles of best practice to achieve cultural capability as identified in the Review of Higher Education Access and Outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People (Behrendt Report) and the Universities Australia Framework/Guiding Principles.

The first component of the Cultural Capability Training is completed online at the users' own pace, allowing time for reflection, questioning and further research. During the second phase, face-to-face sessions are facilitated by Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander staff members who have extensive teaching experience and appropriate qualifications and utilise traditional Aboriginal pedagogies ensuring that the mode of delivery aligns with the content covered. The third component of the CCF training requires staff to participate in an On-Country experience which is delivered by local cultural practitioners. The On-Country experience allows staff to be immersed in local culture and stories whilst strengthening relationships between the university and the local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community.

The University of Newcastle has committed to providing Cultural Capability Training to all fixed-term and ongoing staff by 2025. The professional learning component of the CCF has been systematically scheduled with the first sessions beginning in Semester 1, 2021.

The intention of Cultural Capability Training is that staff will participate in the sequence, develop their cultural knowledge, strengthen relationships, and reflect on their practices resulting in a change of behaviour moving towards cultural responsiveness. The CCF is the guiding document to support staff in doing so. The CCF is adaptable and can be applied to any area, level, or role within the University. The framework can be used for strategic planning, performance development, teaching and learning and as a reflection tool to measure progress.



CQUniversity – Yuibera woman, Mayson Armstrong, Bachelor of Accounting/Bachelor of Business student



FOCUS AREA

**RECOGNISING THE VALUE  
INDIGENOUS PEOPLE AND  
KNOWLEDGES BRING TO THE  
UNIVERSITY AND EMBEDDING  
INDIGENOUS VALUE SYSTEMS  
AND KNOWLEDGES INTO  
UNIVERSITY STRUCTURES**

The valuing and embedding of Indigenous knowledges and values systems is where Australian universities can grow their understanding and mark themselves as unique, to better reflect the history and nature of our country and to become more hospitable institutions of learning for people from all backgrounds.

Developing an understanding of the world that draws from both Western and Indigenous knowledge is important not just for universities as institutions but also in the practice of contemporary research and higher education.

To ensure success, Indigenous people should lead efforts to develop, implement, monitor and evaluate the embedding of Indigenous value systems and knowledges into university structures and into research. This includes embedding these knowledges into curricula, and formal strategies that ensure that students take with them a strong foundational understanding of Indigenous values and knowledges. In this implementation, the intellectual property rights of Indigenous knowledges must be appropriately acknowledged and recompensed.<sup>10</sup>

For university structures, it is integral to continue efforts to ensure Indigenous voices are represented in key institutional bodies and processes, such as the Academic Board or Senate.

The incorporation of Indigenous values and knowledges is also important for students and staff to see themselves reflected, and as valued and included parts of the university and academe. Elders in residence can play a key role in guiding university efforts together with Indigenous staff.

Non-Indigenous people can learn for themselves more about the country and its history including the continuing contribution of Indigenous people. This also includes international students who can not only enrich their experience but also take this understanding back to their home countries.

Importantly, these efforts must be undertaken in collaboration with Indigenous people, and to do so, universities should appropriately structure and support the offices of DVC/PVC Indigenous and other Indigenous leaders within the university.

<sup>10</sup> IP Australia is currently developing protocols for recognition of Indigenous Knowledges intellectual property. See [https://www.ipaustralia.gov.au/sites/default/files/ik\\_consultation\\_2021.pdf](https://www.ipaustralia.gov.au/sites/default/files/ik_consultation_2021.pdf)

Aboriginal knowledges are the oldest known to humanity. Those knowledges are the ancient and continuing foundation for the continent we now call Australia.

In moving forward from what has been identified as gaps in Aboriginal education, we need to value in a respectful and reciprocal way free from our shared colonial past.

PRO VICE-CHANCELLOR INDIGENOUS

## RECOGNISING THE VALUE INDIGENOUS PEOPLE AND KNOWLEDGES BRING TO THE UNIVERSITY AND EMBEDDING INDIGENOUS VALUE SYSTEMS AND KNOWLEDGES INTO UNIVERSITY STRUCTURES COMMITMENTS

- Universities have Indigenous content in curricula that is meaningful, appropriately developed and appropriately resourced.
- Universities ensure students graduate with an awareness of Indigenous values and knowledges.
- That the benefits of Indigenous-led research be recognised and promoted by universities.
- That there be robust ethics processes in Indigenous research, with the AIATSIS guidelines taken as a minimum.
- That the value of Indigenous leadership be recognised by being appropriately structured and supported (staff and resources).
- That the role of Elders be appropriately recognised and valued.

### DVC Committee actions

The DVC Academic Committee supports the above commitments through incorporating Indigenous knowledges into curricula.

The DVC Research Committee supports the above commitments by fostering Indigenous graduate research and higher degree by research (HDR) candidate pathways, recognising the availability of additional completion funds from the Research Training Program for supporting Indigenous candidates.

## CASE STUDY

### University of Queensland Pursuing ethical and responsible research

The University of Queensland (UQ) Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Research and Innovation Strategy sets a course for the University to pursue ethical and responsible research that contributes to cultural, social, environmental, and economic benefits for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and communities.

Through this strategy, UQ acknowledges the need for continuing improvement and investment to position the University as a national and international leader in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander research and innovation, and to support career progression for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander researchers. UQ's vision is to leverage research as a tool of empowerment for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, communities, and organisations. UQ will achieve this through nurturing a respectful and supportive university environment alongside providing a broad and robust program of research and innovation.

This strategy joins the UQ Reconciliation Action Plan (RAP) and the UQ Indigenous Employment Strategy as pillars of UQ's commitment to equity and inclusion. In line with the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Research and Innovation Strategy, the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies Unit (ATSISU), led by its Academic Director Professor Tracey Bunda, conducts cutting-edge research with Indigenous people and communities.

UQ's Indigenous Engagement Division is led by Professor Bronwyn Fredericks, the Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Indigenous Engagement) [PVCIE], who oversees the implementation of the University's Indigenous Strategy, inclusive of the RAP and Indigenous Employment Strategy. Collectively, the PVCIE and ATSISU remain committed to growing the opportunities for Indigenous people so that they may lead and conduct their own research through employment and collaboration. They do so by providing research student training, mentoring and support, employment pathways and professional development for Indigenous researchers at UQ.

The PVCIE and ATSISU collaborate with staff, scholars and students across disciplines, faculties, schools, and administrative and executive offices to further advance Indigenous research opportunities. The ATSISU provides a challenging, rigorous and collegiate environment for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander research scholars and students, empowering them to develop their ideas, skills, and expertise. Applying the latest in Indigenist and transdisciplinary methodologies, both the PVCIE and ATSISU are driven by a strong commitment to promote, support and deliver ethical and empowering research. Both divisions provide advice on ethical collaborations with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and communities so that UQ may continue to develop research programs and projects that create positive and lasting outcomes.

In addition to supporting research staff and students, both the PVCIE and Academic Director of the ATSISU are actively engaged in their own research projects. Professor Bronwyn Fredericks is leading a research project funded by the APPRISE Centre of Research Excellence which seeks to map the health system's responses to the challenges posed by COVID-19 in Indigenous communities in urban Brisbane. Professor Tracey Bunda is a Chief Investigator on a major Australian Research Council project that is investigating the histories of Queensland Aboriginal women who trained as nurses or midwives from the 1890s-1950s. Both projects (and the numerous others undertaken by the academic staff and HDR students situated within and associated with the ATSISU) exemplify UQ's commitment to creating change through acknowledging past and present challenges, celebrating Indigenous achievements and contributions and developing the evidence-based research needed to empower Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and improve outcomes within the University and wider society. As peak body for the sector, Universities Australia will continue its role in representing and advocating on behalf of members.

Regarding Indigenous matters, the UA Directorate will continue its advocacy role, for example to expand Commonwealth supported places to all Indigenous students, not just those from regional and remote areas. In addition, UA will play a key role in sharing good practice amongst its members.

With advice from the DVC/PVC Indigenous Committee, UA will oversee the continuing development and implementation of the Indigenous Strategy and further the initiatives contained therein. This includes the development of a cultural competence guiding policy and Indigenous-specific anti-racism principles.



## UNIVERSITIES AUSTRALIA'S ROLE

## UNIVERSITIES AUSTRALIA'S COMMITMENTS

- Continued advocacy to government on issues relevant to participation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in higher education and research.
- Including Indigenous matters and perspectives in advocacy and policy development.
- Overseeing the Strategy and its implementation.
- Sharing good practice.
- Developing an Indigenous specific anti-racism statement.
- Advocacy by the Lead VC Indigenous to university leaders.

## REPORTING

The key document in reporting against the Indigenous Strategy will be the Indigenous Strategy Annual Report, which is published on the UA website. The annual survey questions will directly link to Strategy commitments and be repeated each year to track progress over time.

The other monitoring and reporting mechanisms for the Strategy are:

- UA Directorate and DVC/PVC (Indigenous) Committee oversight of the Indigenous Strategy;
- annual joint Board meeting between the UA Board and the NATSIHEC Executive;
- twice-yearly session at UA Plenary where the Chair of the DVC/PVC (Indigenous) Committee, the National President of NATSIHEC and another PVC Indigenous are represented;
- bi-annual reporting by other DVC Committees to the UA Directorate; and
- regular meetings between the UA Directorate and NATSIHEC, including attendance at NATSIHEC Caucus meetings.

These are integral to ensure we share our successes and build on each other's progress.



### **Cover artwork by Warlpiri artist, from Yuendumu (NT), Madeleine Napangardi Dixon**

This 'majardi Jukurrpa' (hairstring skirt/tassel Dreaming) comes from Mina Mina. Mina Mina is an extremely important ceremonial site for Napangardi and Napanangka women that is located approximately 600kms west of Yuendumu, just east of Lake Mackay and the WA border. The area has a 'marluri' (salt lake or claypan) that is usually dry, without water. There are also a number of 'mulju' (soakages), sandhills, and a large stand of 'kurrkara' (desert oaks). The Mina Mina Jukurrpa is an important source of Warlpiri ritual knowledge and social organization, particularly relating to the different roles performed by men and women.

The Mina Mina Jukurrpa (of which this 'majardi' Jukurrpa is a part) contains important information about the different roles that men and women play in Warlpiri culture, particularly in the context of ritual performance. It alludes to an earlier time in which their ritual and social roles were reversed, in which women controlled the sacred objects and weapons that are now exclusively "owned" by men.





Cover artwork by Warlpiri artist, from Yuendumu (NT), Madeleine Napangardi Dixon.

© Universities Australia 2022. First published 8 March 2022.



**UNIVERSITIES**  
AUSTRALIA