

UNIVERSITIES AUSTRALIA

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# UNIVERSITIES AUSTRALIA INDIGENOUS STRATEGY FIRST ANNUAL REPORT



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# 1 FOREWORD

All progress builds on the work of the past.

As we deliver this first annual report on advances made under the UA Indigenous Strategy 2017-2020, we pay tribute to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in our universities who have worked hard - often in partnership with non-Indigenous allies - to build the foundations for today's achievements.

Major strides have been made.

Over the past decade, the number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people pursuing a university education in Australia has more than doubled.

In 2017 – the first year of the UA Indigenous Strategy – a record 19,237 Indigenous students were at university, right across the country.

This is a game-changing legacy for our nation.

Thousands more Indigenous graduates now make their way each year into leadership and the professions, bringing their vision, talent and cultural connectedness to every sector of our society and its institutions.

This leadership will shape our country's future for the better.

At the same time, a growing number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are pursuing careers in teaching, research and leadership roles in universities themselves.

This is another powerful development. Through outstanding Indigenous scholarship, our country's first cultures, languages and knowledges are further celebrated, curated, and safeguarded.

This knowledge is also being shared with wider public audiences.

This enables all Australians to learn more about our country's vast history, and the sophisticated Indigenous knowledge systems essential to our self-knowledge.

Through this visible leadership by Indigenous academics and researchers, trailblazers and role models are planting the seeds of aspiration and inspiration in the next generations of young Indigenous students.

This is crucial if we are to tackle our biggest shared challenge - the urgent need to expand the Indigenous workforce within our universities, and to build Indigenous excellence into every aspect of university operations.

Along with other Vice-Chancellors across the country, and our leadership teams, we are determined to make further big strides forward.

We must continue to make progress under the UA Indigenous Strategy.

Strong personal relationships and trust between Indigenous and non-Indigenous leaders in our universities are fundamental to further progress.

We thank the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Higher Education Consortium, its leadership and executive, for the genuine partnership we have forged as we continue to work together to deliver on these shared responsibilities.

Strong progress has been made - but much work remains.

The energy and attention of every single leader in our university sector must be part of this work - from our Vice-Chancellors, Deputy Vice-Chancellors, Provosts, Directors of Finance and Human Resources, our PVCs and DVCs Indigenous, our Indigenous student support centres, and every member of our university communities.

We look forward to working with you all as we build the next layer of progress on the strong foundations of those who have come before.



Catriona Jackson

Chief Executive, Universities Australia



Professor Simon Maddocks

Lead Vice-Chancellor – Indigenous

## 2 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

### OVERVIEW

The UA Indigenous Strategy 2017-20 (the UA strategy) is a sector-wide initiative. It brings all member universities together to achieve common goals to advance Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander participation and success in higher education.

Through the UA strategy, our 39 member universities committed to make further gains in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander participation, retention and success in universities. The formal adoption of the strategy by the UA Plenary in February 2017 was the vehicle for this express commitment by each university and its leadership.

The actions pledged under the strategy seek to:

- improve enrolments and performance in students, academics/researchers and 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 people.

UA, as the sector's peak body, also committed to actions to support universities advance Indigenous higher education, including seeking annual feedback from universities on their progress towards meeting the commitments made under the strategy, and releasing a de-identified report of findings.

This is the first annual report following the launch of the UA Strategy in March 2017. In 2018, UA requested all members complete and submit an open-ended and qualitative survey, intended to collect a base-line level of information to benchmark future work. At the time of writing, 38 members had completed the survey (the remainder is currently being finalised). Future years present an opportunity to achieve greater efficiencies in this information-sharing process for both universities and UA.

### PURPOSE

The purpose of this report is to outline key initiatives by universities to improve Indigenous higher education participation and success and deepen relationships and knowledge in institutions. The report draws on 2017 sector-wide statistics – published in October 2018 – and qualitative information provided by universities in survey responses.

This report does not seek to rank achievements nor function as a report card by institution. Rather, survey responses identified strategies being implemented and issues experienced across the sector to contextualise the current environment and enable universities to learn from each other's strategies or approaches. The summaries extracted from survey responses and highlighted in this report are primarily for descriptive purposes of *current or good practice* – which is distinct from *best practice*.

The UA strategy, developed in close consultation with NATSIHEC and PM&C, contains actions that are important to advance Indigenous higher education. Given the breadth of work and initiatives underway, it does not set out to cover every single element of Indigenous higher education and research. Topics that may appear to be not expressly referenced in the UA strategy have nonetheless been included in this report due to the broad and valuable information collected from universities as part of the recent survey and to add to information about the current environment.

## FINDINGS

It is important to acknowledge the detailed and comprehensive information provided by many universities as part of this important process of reflection and evaluation. All surveys were summarised by a policy member of the UA Directorate staff and as outlined above, will be used to benchmark our collective progress in future years. UA expresses its sincere thanks to the many people in universities – among them many senior Indigenous staff and leadership figures – who spent significant time, care and effort to gather information from across their university and to write the detailed survey responses conveying the significant efforts underway.

There has been positive progress in several areas, particularly in undergraduate participation growth in the last decade, more opportunities for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff, and greater collaboration between universities and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Elders and communities. However, there is still significant work to be done – and we will continue to encourage this work to be undertaken by the whole of the sector.

### University actions

Action	Progress
<b>Maintain growth in Indigenous enrolments at 50-100 per cent above non-Indigenous growth</b>	Sector-wide enrolment figures have been positive at around triple the rate of annual growth of non-Indigenous students in recent years – and on track to meet one of the key targets of the UA strategy. In 2017, the first year of the strategy, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander enrolments grew by 8.3 per cent – almost four times higher than the growth in overall student numbers of 2.1 per cent. Applications data shows Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women are almost twice as likely apply for undergraduate courses compared to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander men.
<b>Aim to achieve equal completion rates by field of study by 2028.</b>	Sector-wide course completions have continued to increase year-on-year (78 per cent for undergraduate awards and 89 per cent for postgraduate awards between 2008 and 2017) but there is still much work to be done. While Indigenous students typically take longer to graduate, the nine-year completion rate for Indigenous students remains around 47 per cent, well below the 74 per cent for non-Indigenous students.
<b>Include Indigenous higher education, research and employment as priority areas in core policy documents, including institutional strategic and business plans</b>	Survey responses demonstrated universities increasingly reflect Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander participation, culture and research as key areas of focus in their strategic documents and business plans – in varying levels of measurability and detail. It is important that the university sector lead the way to implement and embed this engagement deeply throughout our operations and activities. Around two-thirds of universities have a Reconciliation Action Plan, which can be an effective way of embedding the numerous Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander strategies into a united overarching model.



Action	Progress
<b>Have Indigenous Research Strategies in place by 2018</b>	Survey responses demonstrated the majority of universities were in the process of developing a formal Indigenous Research Strategy at the time the survey was issued (in early 2018). Many universities also stated they were seeking to 'grow their own' talent. For context, to achieve population parity in 2017, the sector would have needed to enrol an additional 792 Indigenous postgraduate research students and graduate an additional 153 Indigenous postgraduate research students.
<b>Ensure that implementation of these plans and policies is devolved through the university's faculties, schools and units</b>	Primary responsibility for driving Indigenous higher education outcomes in each university rests variously with Directors of Indigenous Centres or Units, Pro Vice-Chancellors (Indigenous), Deputy Vice-Chancellors (Academic) and other senior executives. At the time of the survey, 19 out of 39 universities had filled Indigenous senior executive positions. A majority of the remaining universities were undertaking recruitment processes in a bid to fill similar roles. Whilst surveys reported positive signs of collaboration across university faculties, schools and units, and diversification of responsibility, much of the heavy lifting continues to be done by the Indigenous centres or units of universities.
<b>Ensure that additional workload expected of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff is recognised in workload planning and in performance assessments and promotions processes</b>	Survey responses indicated there is still a need for greater distinction between workload planning and cultural leave. The former requires mechanisms and processes that actively manage the additional workload required of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff. One strategy to address this is a greater emphasis on the development of non-Indigenous staff to be capable of performing some culturally-appropriate activities. There is scope and opportunity for further improvement in this – which is also a key factor in a university's ability to recruit and retain Indigenous staff. Universities generally indicated that the additional workload required of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff is recognised in performance review and promotion opportunities.

Action	Progress
<b>Build robust, respectful and collaborative partnerships between themselves and the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities that they serve</b>	Universities increasingly build and maintain crucial relationships with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, other educational agencies/bodies, private organisations and not-for-profit bodies to collaborate on opportunities to enhance Indigenous higher education and broader society. These relationships are not always formalised – which can present a risk to the ability of some institutions to maintain and deepen these vital relationships if a key staff member leaves the institution. Universities are also increasingly establishing governance mechanisms to enhance the involvement of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people – whether university professionals or community Elders – in decision making processes (a requirement under the Government's ISSP).
<b>Take a community leadership role in promoting Indigenous higher education and building opportunities for wider community engagement in it</b>	Universities are increasingly raising the profile of Indigenous culture in their institutions. This is most commonly visible through hosting and promoting events that celebrate or highlight Indigenous matters and local Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander customs/knowledge. Universities that demonstrated a stronger connection to their local Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander community generally reported higher numbers of Indigenous events and levels of external participation.
<b>Have current executive staff and all new senior staff complete cross-cultural training programs from 2018</b>	Survey responses did not demonstrate formal Indigenous cultural training for senior executives as being mandatory. However, almost all universities provide specific online and/or face-to-face Indigenous cultural training for staff. Whilst almost always provided as part of induction, most of this training is not mandatory. Universities are also making conscious efforts to create welcoming environments for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders – including through physical places and facilities and through the engagement of cultural advisers. Even so, discrimination experienced by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people continues to occur across society.
<b>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</b>	The majority of universities did not currently have a formal Indigenous graduate attribute at the time of the survey collection. However, there are current positive examples of processes that seek to ensure Indigenous curriculum is embedded into mainstream subjects.

## Universities Australia actions

Action	Progress
<b>Regularly include Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander observers at Plenary meetings of Vice-Chancellors</b>	In 2017 the UA Plenary appointed two Indigenous Pro Vice-Chancellor observers for two years to attend bi-annual Plenary meetings of Vice-Chancellors. Future years will focus on a consistent induction process for observers.
<b>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</b>	Since 2017, the UA Board of Directors and NATSIHEC executive have scheduled annual joint-board meetings. These annual meetings allow for open and detailed dialogue on the sectors progress under the UA Strategy and to identify key areas of focus for the year. The NATSIHEC leadership has also been invited to be involved in a discussion at the next UA Plenary on progress under the UA Strategy.
<b>Maintain formal ongoing dialogue with NATSIHEC and other Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander university leaders</b>	The UA Directorate continues to engage in regular contact with NATSIHEC (including presentations at NATSIHEC meetings), Commonwealth agencies and other stakeholders.
<b>Develop, through the four Deputy Vice-Chancellor Committees, agreed sector-wide initiatives which will be implemented in common across all member universities</b>	The four Deputy Vice-Chancellor (DVC) Committees progress against their respective projects under the strategy has been mixed. Whilst there are examples of positive efforts being made by working groups - this process presents an opportunity to direct further efforts in the development of the respective projects.
<b>Include Indigenous higher education issues in all relevant submissions it makes and advocacy work it undertakes</b>	UA has proactively engaged in public commentary on the impact of the funding freeze on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander enrolments. UA has also called for sensible Indigenous policy and funding settings, informed through consultation with UA and NATSIHEC, in its Pre-Budget Submission to Government. A concentrated effort will be made to ensure that the impact of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander higher education outcomes are considered in all relevant UA submissions. UA has also included Indigenous content in its communications, advocacy and media work throughout the year.
<b>Increase the profile of Indigenous higher education in public events such as the Universities Australia Higher Education Conference</b>	UA has a strong commitment to ensure engaging and practical sessions in all its public forums, with Indigenous focused sessions held at UA's annual Higher Education Conference and UA Marketing Communications and Development Conference.

Action	Progress
<b>Continue to advocate for increased Government investment in specific Indigenous higher education initiatives and for related outreach and participation programmes</b>	The UA Directorate most recently provided a formal submission to Government on the 2018 post-implementation review of the Indigenous Student Success Program (ISSP). It also continues to engage with PM&C as appropriate to discuss the program and its policy objectives.
<b>Develop, by 2018, a platform or mechanism to identify and share good practices</b>	Further work is required to actively collect and promote the sharing of good practice across the sector, however a proposed multi-faceted mechanism is outlined in this report.
<b>Obtain annual feedback from universities on their progress towards meeting the commitments they have made in this strategy, and publicly releasing annual reports.</b>	UA will continue to gather annual feedback from universities and believes there are lessons gleaned from the inaugural process that can deliver greater efficiencies in this process in future years.

## NEXT STEPS

Whilst signs of progress in some key areas of the UA Strategy are promising, it will be important to stay apprised of a broad spectrum of matters in universities relevant to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. This report also identifies some next steps and areas of immediate focus, such as the collection of good practice/news stories that can be accessible to the whole sector, and strategies to ameliorate current workload expectations of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff.

UA looks forward to continuing to work closely with its members, NATISHEC, PM&C and other Government agencies in the pursuit of progress under the UA Strategy as well as broader Indigenous higher education advancement.

### 3 INDIGENOUS ENROLMENT, SUCCESS, ATTRITION AND COMPLETION

The UA Strategy commits universities to:

- maintain growth in Indigenous enrolments at 50-100 per cent above non-Indigenous growth; and
- aim to achieve equal completion rates by field of study by 2028.

These actions have been developed based on the foundational principles that parity of opportunity is a central objective of policy and practice and that universities manage resources needed to achieve Indigenous higher education success and are committed to utilise these resources effectively.

This section of the report will outline participation and outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students at universities – which has historically been poor. The latter part of this section will focus on sector and Government initiatives that aim to advance Indigenous higher education and describe current practices.

## SECTOR-WIDE STUDENT STATISTICS

### POPULATION OF ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER AUSTRALIANS

It is useful to update the current population statistics for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples as we share information on sectoral progress on actions in the UA Strategy. According to statistics from the Australian Bureau of Statistics as at 30 June 2016:

**3.1 per cent** of Australia's working age population—aged 15 to 64 years old—identified as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander. Estimated Indigenous working age population has increased by 20.5 per cent, from 406,600 in 2011 to 490,000 in 2016.

*Of the states and territories, the share of working age Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians to all working age population is highest in Northern Territory (28.4 per cent or 49,700 people), followed by Tasmania (5.3 per cent or 17,200 people) and Queensland (4.2 per cent or 133,100 people). The share of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples is lowest at Australian Capital Territory (1.8 per cent or 4,900 people) and at Victoria (0.9 per cent or 35,200 people).*

*In 2016, the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population is younger than the non-Indigenous population, with larger proportions of young people and smaller proportions of older people. This is reflective of higher fertility rates as well as higher mortality rates for Indigenous than non-Indigenous population. The median age of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population was 23.0 years, compared to 37.8 years for the Non-Indigenous population.<sup>1</sup>*

Population parity – whilst an obvious and useful measure at times – was not the express basis for framing the key growth target in the UA strategy. This, in part, acknowledged the distinct population differences in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and demographics throughout

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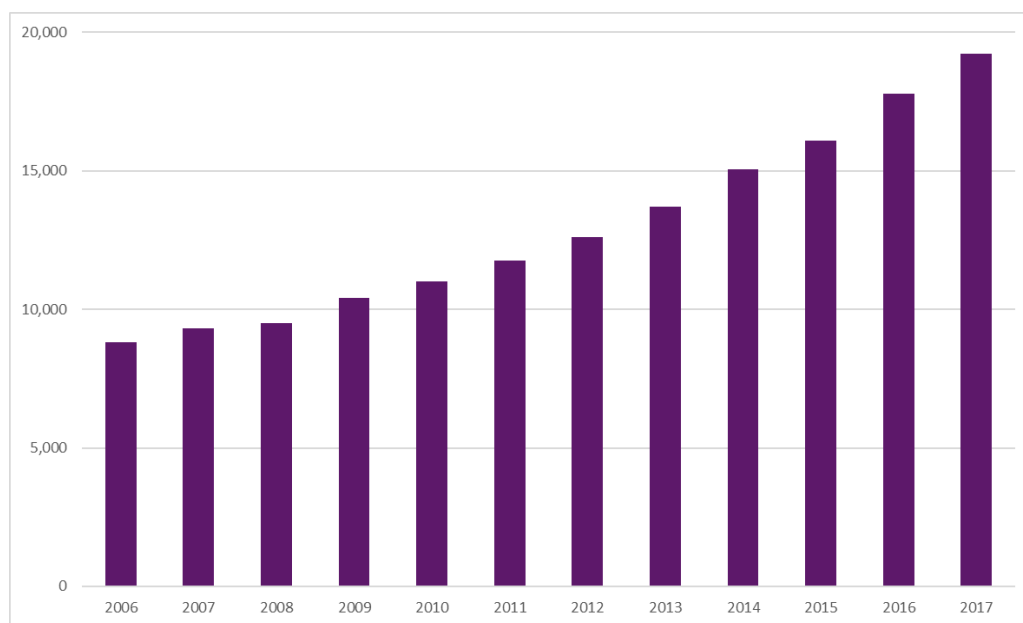
<sup>1</sup> Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) 2018, *Estimates of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians, June 2016*, Cat. No. 3238.0.55.001 <<http://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/mf/3238.0.55.001>>.

Australia. However, the Government's Indigenous Student Success Program (ISSP) does set 3 per cent Indigenous workforce targets – meaning the sector is familiar with population parity targets.

## INDIGENOUS STUDENT ENROLMENTS

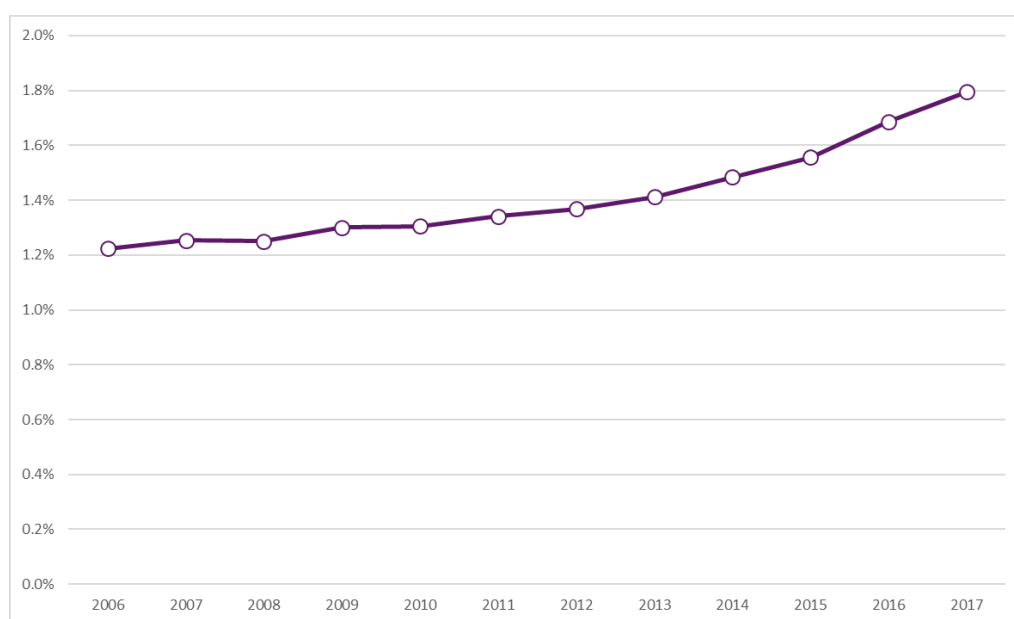
Figure 1 shows Indigenous student enrolments have more than doubled (102.7 per cent) since 2008, from 9,490 students in 2008 to 19,237 students in 2017. Despite this growth, the share of Indigenous student enrolments increased more modestly – up from 1.3 per cent in 2008 to 1.8 per cent in 2017 (Figure 2). It remains below population parity of 3.1 per cent.

**Figure 1: Indigenous student enrolments, 2006 to 2017**



Source: DET 2018, *Selected Higher Education Statistics – 2017 Student Data*

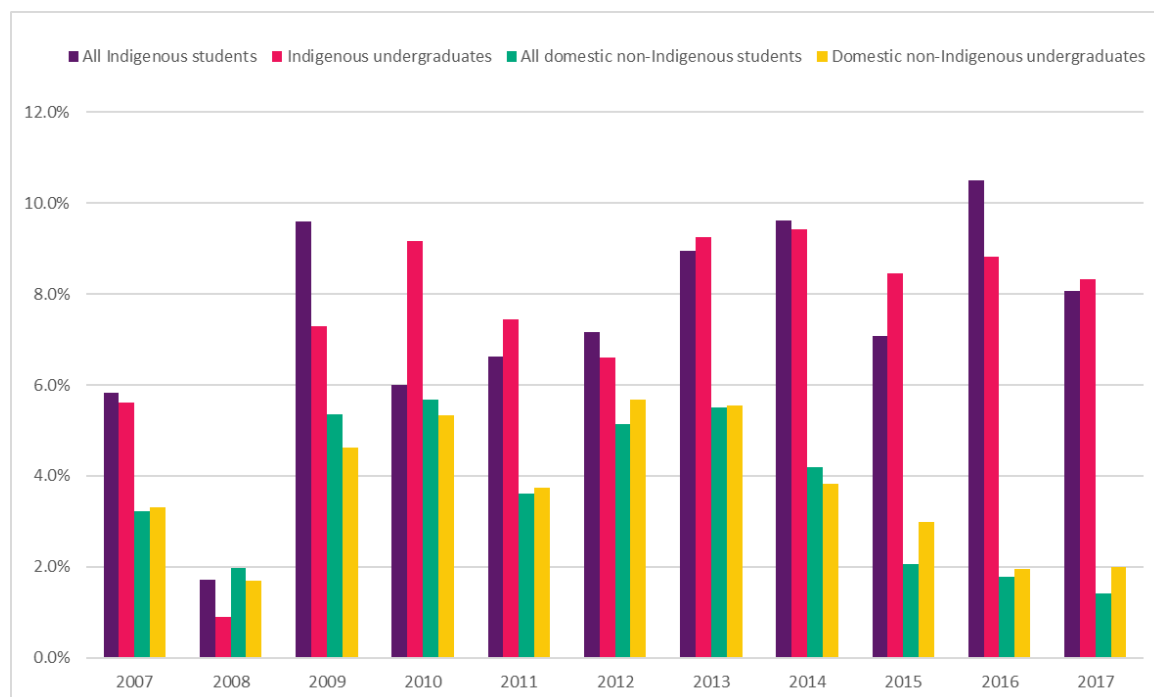
**Figure 2: Share of Indigenous student enrolments, 2006 to 2017**



Source: DET 2018, *Selected Higher Education Statistics – 2017 Student Data*

Indigenous student enrolments are on track to hit one of the key UA targets—enrolments at 50 per cent above the growth rate for non-Indigenous enrolments, or preferably at twice the rate. Figure 3 shows annual growth in Indigenous student enrolments almost tripled the rate of growth in non-Indigenous student enrolments in recent years.

**Figure 3: Annual growth in Indigenous student enrolments, 2007 to 2017**



Source: DET 2018, *Selected Higher Education Statistics – 2017 Student data*

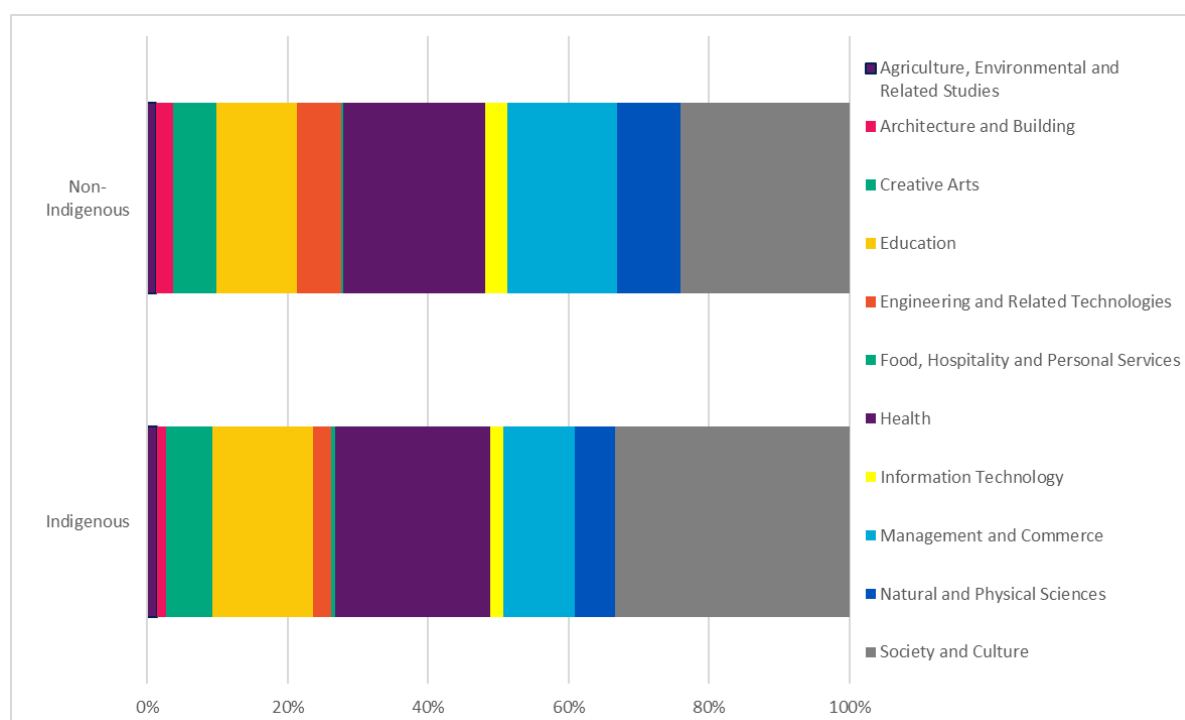
Thus, sector-wide performance in enrolments is positive. However, as highlighted by institutions throughout survey responses, the demographics of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities throughout Australia are markedly different and this has a direct impact on the strategies and success in recruitment. Institutional level performance data indicates a broader range of positive increases and strong success, with some indicating relatively more modest growth and results.

It is important to stress that growth in enrolments, whilst generally positive and a necessary step in the right direction, cannot be considered in isolation. Strong growth (where relevant or possible) in enrolments should coincide with enhancements in success, retention and completions. Survey responses relayed individual examples of relatively modest enrolment growth over the past decade but strong success and completion improvements, as well as a demonstrated commitment to advance engagement with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.

## Field of education

Compared to non-Indigenous students, Indigenous students are more likely to enrol in courses related to Society and Culture (33 per cent), Health (22 per cent) and Education (14 per cent) and less likely to enrol in Management and Commerce (10 per cent), Natural and Physical Sciences (6 per cent) and Engineering (3 per cent). Some universities acknowledged these trends in their survey responses and conveyed that an understanding of these trends informed their support strategies. Some universities also indicated outreach and recruitment strategies were targeted to attract students into considering the traditionally less popular courses.

**Figure 4: Enrolments by broad disciplines, 2017**



Source: DET 2018, *Unpublished HEIMS data*

## Course level

Indigenous student enrolments have more than doubled between 2008 and 2017, with enrolment in Bachelor degree courses increasing 113 per cent, from 6,352 in 2008 to 13,528 in 2017. Indigenous enrolments in enabling courses have doubled, from 871 in 2008 to 1,749 in 2017. Enrolment data between 2015 and 2017 shows much of this growth has come in the last few years.

Survey responses overwhelmingly indicated that, as you would expect, those students that complete an enabling course and go onto a Bachelor level course are more likely to succeed in that degree. Enabling courses are viewed as a key strategy to increase Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander student participation and see that translate into bachelor-level success.

**Table 1: Indigenous enrolments, by course level, 2008 and 2017**

Course level	2008	2017	Growth
Postgraduate research	393	590	50%
Postgraduate coursework	1,138	2,372	108%
Bachelor	6,352	13,528	113%
Sub-bachelor	686	901	31%
Enabling	871	1,749	101%
Non-award	50	97	94%
<b>All courses</b>	<b>9,490</b>	<b>19,237</b>	<b>103%</b>

Source: DET 2018, *Visual analytics – Enrolment time-series*

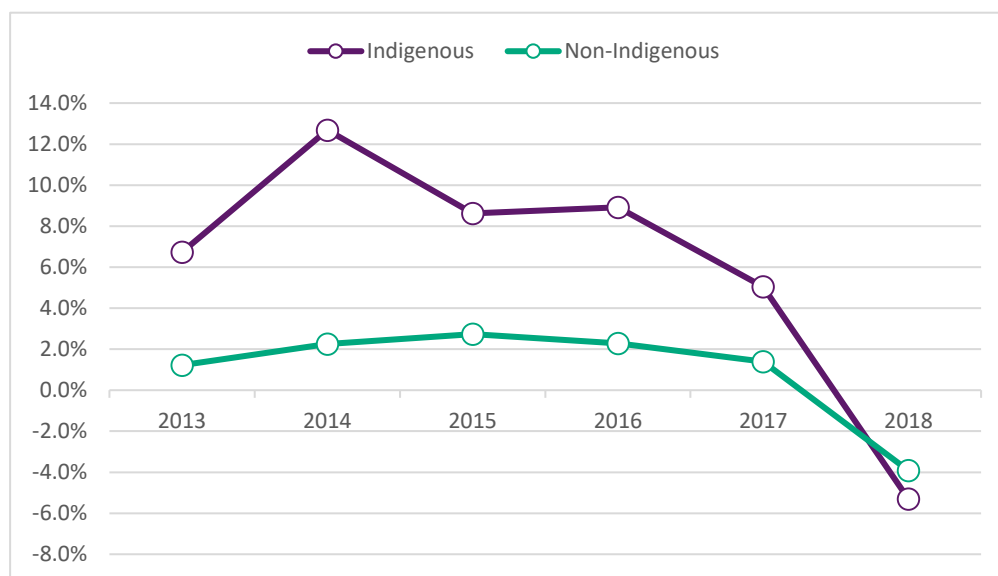
Indigenous student postgraduate research enrolments grew by a much more modest 50 per cent over the period, from 393 in 2008 to 590 in 2017.



## INDIGENOUS UNDERGRADUATE APPLICATIONS

Figure 5 shows Indigenous undergraduate applications declined 5.3 per cent in 2018—from 7,252 applications in 2017 to 6,867 applications in 2018—the first drop in demand since the series begin in 2009. The decline in Indigenous applications is also greater than the fall in demand from non-Indigenous students (-5.3 per cent compared to -3.9 per cent). Whilst the final 2018 enrolment figures (not yet published by Government) may deliver a somewhat different outcome, UA has expressed concern about the freeze on the demand driven system (DDS) and its potential impact on the continued growth in opportunities for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students.

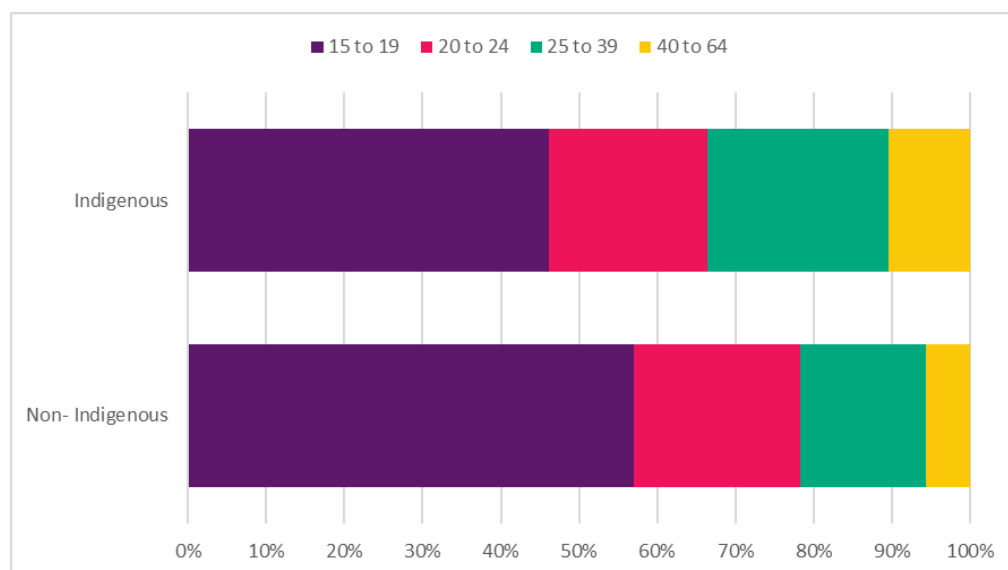
**Figure 5: Annual growth in undergraduate applications, 2013 to 2018**



Source: DET 2018, *Undergraduate Applications Offers and Acceptances*, unpublished data

Figure 6 shows Indigenous applicants for undergraduate courses are more likely to be older than non-Indigenous applicants. In 2018, one-third of Indigenous applicants are aged 25 or older, compared to 22 per cent for non-Indigenous applicants.

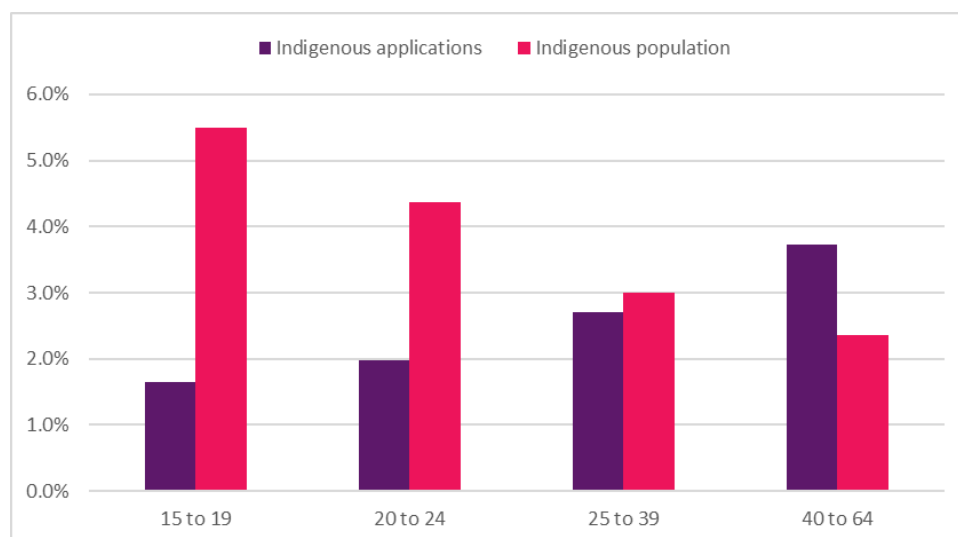
**Figure 6: Share of undergraduate applications, by age, 2018**



Source: DET 2018, *Undergraduate Applications Offers and Acceptances*, unpublished data

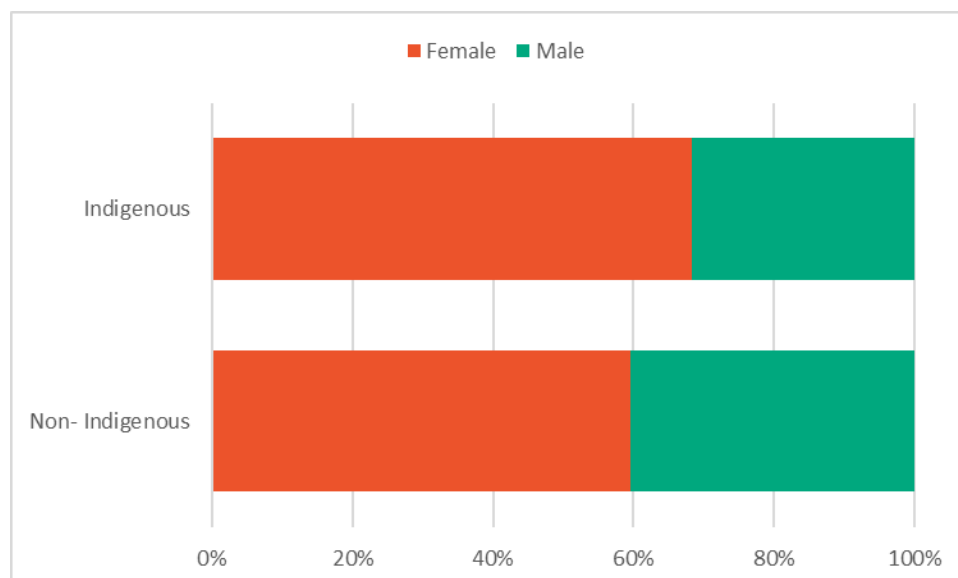
The share of Indigenous undergraduate applications at younger age cohorts remains significantly below the share of young Indigenous population. Figure 7 shows that while Indigenous applications are 1.6 per cent of all undergraduate applications for applicants aged 15 to 19, this share is significantly lower than the share of Indigenous population for this age cohort (5.5 per cent) in 2016.

**Figure 7: Share of Indigenous applications compared to share of Indigenous population, by age, 2016**



Source: DET 2018, *Undergraduate Applications Offers and Acceptances*, unpublished data and ABS 2018, *Estimates of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians, June 2016*, Cat. No. 3238.0.55.001

**Figure 8: Share of undergraduate applications, by gender, 2018**



Source: DET 2018, *Undergraduate Applications Offers and Acceptances*, unpublished data

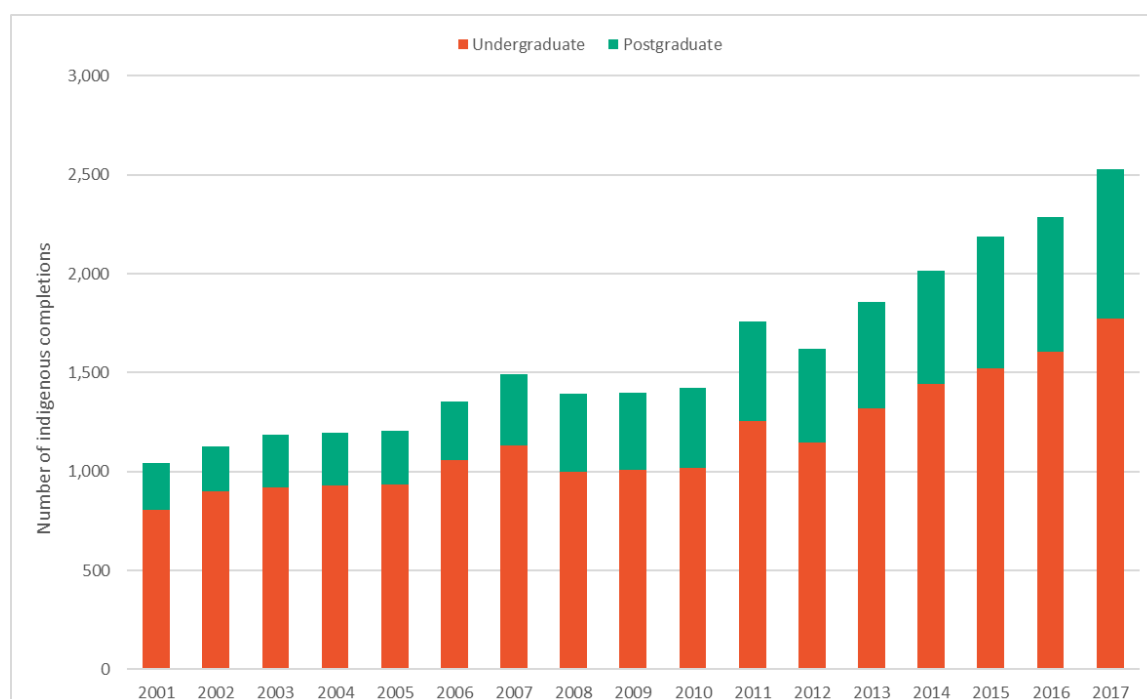
Indigenous undergraduate applicants are also more likely to be female compared to non-Indigenous applicants. In 2018, 68 per cent of Indigenous undergraduate applicants were female compared to just 59 per cent for non-Indigenous applicants (Figure 8).

Both the ABS and applications data help to inform our sector-wide work to advance the participation and success of Aboriginal and Torres Strait islander peoples and communities. This includes identifying potential opportunities to better engage with certain demographics or age groups – such as young men – as well as continuing to target strategies for those demographics or age groups that have relatively strong representation.

## INDIGENOUS AWARD COURSE COMPLETION AND COMPLETION RATES

Since 2008, Indigenous award course completions have continued to increase year-on-year, consistent with the growth in Indigenous enrolments. Indigenous undergraduate award course completions increased 78 per cent, from 996 awards in 2008 to 1,774 awards in 2017; while postgraduate award course completions rose 89 per cent, from 399 in 2008 to 753 in 2017 (Figure 9).

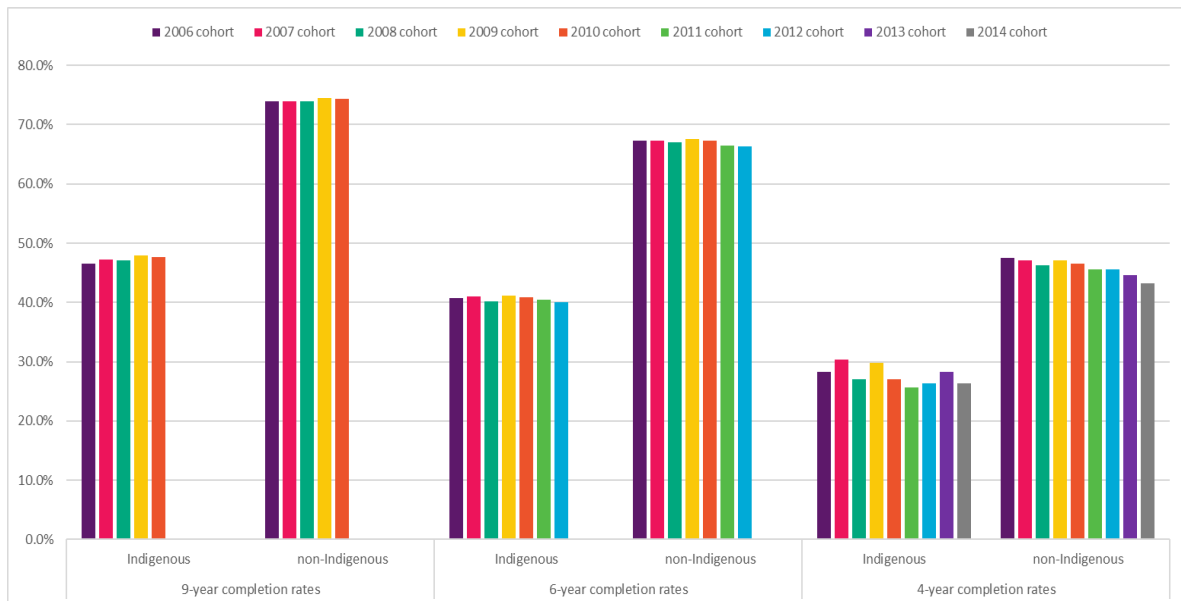
**Figure 9: Number of Indigenous award course completions, by course level**



Source: DET 2018, *Selected Higher Education Statistics – 2017 Student Data*

Nonetheless, Bachelor degree completion rates for Indigenous students remained poor compared to non-Indigenous students. While Indigenous students typically can take longer to graduate, nine-year completion rates for Indigenous students remains around 47 per cent, significantly below 74 per cent for non-Indigenous students. Significant improvement in success and completion rates must continue to be a priority for institutions and the sector as a whole. Strategies currently being implemented throughout the sector to make further gains will be discussed in further detail below.

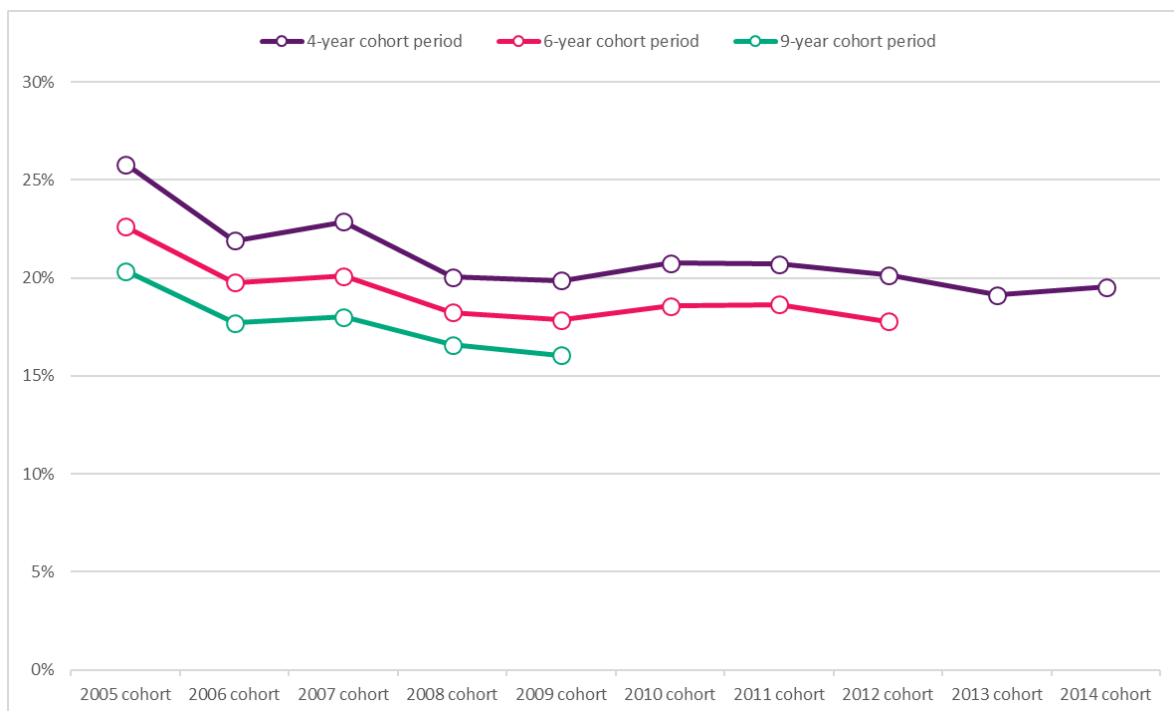
**Figure 10: Completion rates—9, 6 and 4 years—of commencing Indigenous and non-Indigenous Bachelor degree students**



Source: DET 2018, *Completion Rates of Higher Education Students – Cohort Analysis, 2005–2017*

On a positive note, the proportion of commencing Indigenous Bachelor degree students that did not ever return after the first year of study has declined since 2005. Figure 11 shows —after 9 years—20 per cent of Indigenous students for the 2005 cohort never return, declining to 16 per cent for the Indigenous student cohort started in 2009.

**Figure 11: Share of Indigenous commencing Bachelor degree students that never return—after 9, 6 and 4 years**



Source: DET 2018, *Completion Rates of Higher Education Students – Cohort Analysis, 2005–2017*

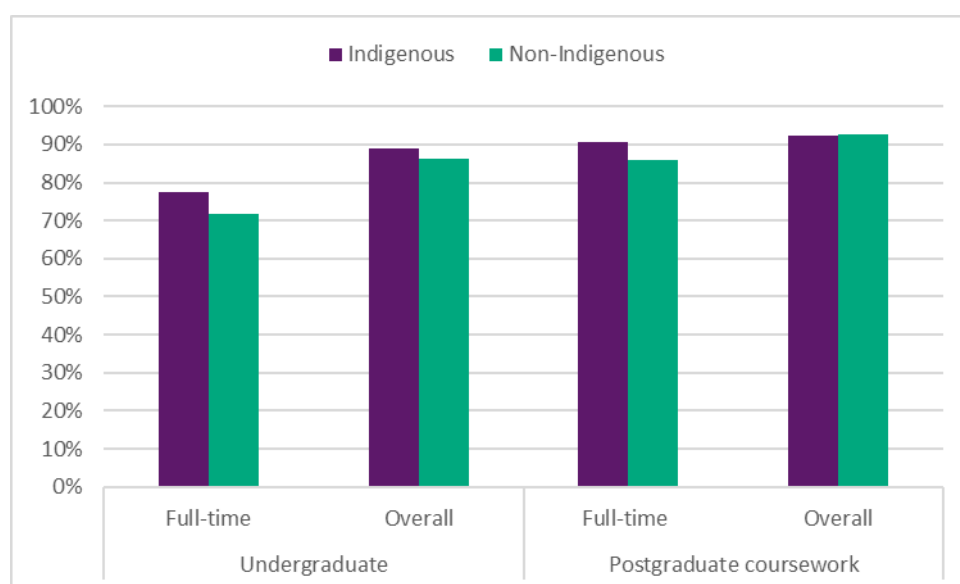
At the institutional level, there were positive examples of outstanding success and completion results in recent years. This was predominately from those institutions with a long-history of investment in strategies and efforts to advance Indigenous higher education.

A stronger uptake of strategies and investment across the sector is important to achieve further growth in Indigenous participation and success. Anecdotal feedback from some institutions indicates that 2018 completions may deliver further examples of record-breaking graduation figures. These stories should be celebrated, noting the significant efforts and tireless work that has been undertaken over many years to achieve such advances.

## INDIGENOUS GRADUATE OUTCOMES

On a further positive note, Aboriginal and Torres Strait islander graduates generally experience strong employment outcomes and, in most cases, outperform non-Indigenous graduates. Figure 12 shows the short-term employment outcomes—four months after completion—for Indigenous and non-Indigenous graduates in 2017. In 2017, 78 per cent of Indigenous undergraduates were in full-time employment four months after completion, compared to 72 per cent for non-Indigenous undergraduates.

**Figure 12: Short-term graduate employment outcomes, 2017**



Source: DET 2018, *2017 Graduate Outcomes Survey*

In 2017, Indigenous undergraduates continued to earn more than non-Indigenous undergraduates immediately upon graduation, with median salaries of \$62,600 and \$60,000 respectively. This underscores the important role of university education attainment to Australia's achievement of its Closing The Gap targets.

## USING DATA TO ANALYSE TRENDS AND DEVELOP TARGETED STRATEGIES

A focus of the survey was the extent to which universities have developed mechanisms to collect meaningful information about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students including the ability to track their progression through university. Survey responses demonstrated that most institutions are actively collecting and monitoring data. This informs their strategies and enables them to fine-tune program development at the local level for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students.

Whilst the level of sophistication in data collection and analysis demonstrated through survey responses differed, most universities demonstrated this was an area that was attracting more attention. Some universities provided clear breakdowns and highlighted notable student improvements in various areas – linking this back to the introduction of certain strategies, actions or approaches in previous years. These examples generally indicated sound monitoring and evaluation structures.

As you might expect, many institutions reported they also rely heavily on qualitative and face-to-face feedback to inform implementation of their strategies and programs for students. Whether it is quantitative data, qualitative data or both, it was clear that the regular and frequent monitoring of student data at the semester level was particularly important for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students due to higher rates of attrition and the unlikelihood of those students to re-engage in subsequent years. The prevalence of a student management system was also generally associated with a more sophisticated monitoring system.

### ***Example from The University of New England***

The University of New England (UNE) outlined that their model of combining student performance data, student surveys and academic literature is Oorala's (UNE's Indigenous unit) preferred model for development and evaluation of their student support services. One example is using data from UNE's student management system to inform how they target their tutoring program to the needs of their students, direct additional resources to students identified as 'at risk of disengagement', and present business cases to other university faculties. UNE provided a clear and detailed breakdown of student results for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students who receive tutorial assistance compared to those who do not – unsurprisingly, students who receive assistance significantly increased their GPA – which is a clear indication that this strategy is successful for this institution.

### ***Example from Charles Darwin University***

Charles Darwin University (CDU), and others, demonstrated a strong understanding of their Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander student profile, namely their 'typical' students are:

- aged 30 years and over;
- female;
- non-school leavers;
- undertake part time study; and
- come from a regional and remote area.

CDU relayed that this profile has implications for student progression and completions, with students in most part taking longer to complete their course of study, and potentially moving in and out of study depending on employment, family and community commitments and priorities. These features of CDU's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander student demographic have influenced the support systems and engagement strategies that the OISS (CDU's Indigenous unit) has developed.

### ***Example from The University of Adelaide***

The University of Adelaide reported using DET's Student Equity Data for a suite of KPI setting and benchmarking within Wirltu Yarlalu (the University of Adelaide's Indigenous unit), and to inform several qualitative and quantitative projects currently being undertaken within the unit. Adelaide's student entry process also includes a self-assessment and literacy and numeracy assessment, used to ascertain the overall support needs required by each student. That information informs a student's entrance interviews, which in turn contributes to the final recommendation on enrolment, and the selection of suitable programs.

### ***Example from The University of Queensland***

The University of Queensland (UQ) indicated they take a whole-of-university case management model that monitors student performance to improve the retention and performance of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students at UQ. This results in further direction of learning advice and additional tuition to those students who require it. UQ outlined this is a coordinated effort across a variety of UQ organisational units, including faculties, schools, the Student Affairs division (including Student Services), UQ (Student) Union and central administrative units.

### ***Example from the Australian Catholic University***

The Australian Catholic University (ACU) indicated its National Indigenous Student Database (NISD) maintains individual student progression and engagement in cultural and leadership opportunities. Data on tutorial assistance support including contract management and tutor information is entered by the IHEU team on the National Indigenous Student Database.

ACU's national database informs access, participation, retention, attainment and completion of Indigenous students, both undergraduate and postgraduate. Data on student attainments and leadership achievements also enables the IHEU teams to celebrate individual student successes. Alternatively, enrolment and performance data can identify enrolment trends in university schools and faculties to develop strategies to target and improve engagement with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.

## **THE INTRODUCTION OF THE ISSP**

The Government's ISSP commenced on 1 January 2017 and provides supplementary funding to universities to help students take on the demands of university and succeed. The new program combines and simplifies three former programs that offered similar, but less flexible funding.

Universities in receipt of the funding can offer scholarships, tutorial assistance, mentoring, safe cultural spaces and other personal support services. The ISSP Guidelines require universities to demonstrate they are undertaking certain actions on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander enrolment, success and employment to be eligible for funding. Key requirements of the UA Strategy generally align with and compliment the ISSP. These similarities will be highlighted throughout the report.

Survey responses overwhelmingly demonstrated the importance of ISSP funding, along with university/private funding and other Commonwealth program funding to implement many of the key strategies to improve undergraduate enrolment and outcomes.

UA welcomed the recent additional flexibility of the new ISSP. The survey responses appear to demonstrate this additional flexibility is a positive initiative by Government and will likely result over time in universities becoming increasingly confident in the delivery of recruitment and success strategies and services to students.

## CURRENT STRATEGIES FOR ENROLMENT AND SUCCESS

Survey responses were generally very detailed in describing the types of strategies that universities are using to improve undergraduate enrolments, attrition, success and completion rates. The detailed and broad ranging information provided by universities indicates positive effort and hard work of many people across the sector. The most common strategies identified in the survey responses include:

- strong partnerships with local Elders and community;
- outreach programs;
- enabling courses;
- dedicated Indigenous centres;
- fostering culturally safe environments;
- dedicated tutorial assistance;
- pastoral care and access to specialist advice; and
- scholarship support.

## STRONG PARTNERSHIPS WITH ELDERS AND LOCAL COMMUNITIES

There has been a stronger emphasis on creating partnerships with Elders and local communities from universities – although in varying degrees. Whilst this will be discussed in further detail at section 6 of this report, some universities reported the development of long-term and genuine partnerships with Elders and local communities as their predominant strategy for long-term success which underpinned all other strategies.

Examples of rich, genuine and productive relationships that span several decades were, as might be expected given much of the progress has been made in more recent years, not widespread. However, some institutions demonstrated making concentrated efforts to build deep long-term relationships – which may be in part as a result of the Indigenous Governance Mechanism requirement under the ISSP. One way of meeting this ISSP requirement is through a *committee constituted by a majority of Indigenous persons, each of whom has skills and experience relevant to the role*.

The collaboration of Elders with students, staff and University personnel benefits nearly all aspects of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander higher education. For example, it can lead to the adoption of more culturally inclusive policies and initiatives in teaching, research and administration across an entire institution.

### ***Example from Griffith University***

Griffith University (Griffith) reported the partnership with their University Council of Elders acts as important conduit between the university and local communities and service providers to provide a clear pathway for Indigenous students interested in enrolling in tertiary study. The Elders also provide cultural mentoring, support and advice for Indigenous and non-Indigenous students and staff across the school sector as well as the university on the development of policies, programs, services and research pertinent to Indigenous Australians, Indigenous students and staff.

Through the pathways programs established between Griffith and local communities and industry providers, the Elders worked closely with staff across the university to support the students across all levels of their study with the goal of helping the university to produce Indigenous graduate cohorts that are robust in their cultural identity and academically, personally and professionally prepared to meet the challenges of the professional discipline from which they have graduated.



Both University Council of Elders and the Indigenous student support unit also convene yarning circles. These yarning circles are for both Indigenous and non-Indigenous students and staff and can be arranged on request for Faculties, Schools, and Committees. Yarning circles provide a support program to bring together students from the various discipline degrees. It is an informal setting to bring students together to discuss academic problems, life journeys and career goals.

### ***Example from Southern Cross University***

Southern Cross University (SCU) has established the Aboriginal Elders' Council which meets annually with the University Council. This initiative engages collaboration with Aboriginal Community organisations in the Northern Rivers region.

This Council provides direct advice to the University Council and the Vice-Chancellor on all Aboriginal community matters and Indigenous issues as required. It meets annually with University Council to assess reports on performance of the RAP and Indigenous Strategies, share initiatives and plan future strategy developments.

The Elders Council has led the direction of SCU through Elders principles established in 2014. These principles, along with Indigenous Knowledge and Respectful Design, have informed progress at SCU.

## **OUTREACH PROGRAMS**

Outreach programs offer a fantastic opportunity for students to experience university student life (and normalise the university environment), be inspired to go into higher education or other career opportunities, and provide critical information to students to make university a realistic option. Universities have traditionally been quite strong at engaging with schools to provide information and programs aimed at attracting school leavers – particularly in capital cities. Survey responses demonstrate an increasing focus on specific outreach programs in regional and remote areas. Outreach programs will likely continue to be a key and hopefully growing recruitment strategy to attract younger Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students.

### ***Example from The University of Melbourne***

The University of Melbourne indicated it had conducted a total of 135 individual school visits in 2017, throughout five States and Territories. As part of its outreach activities, the university holds residential programs that bring Indigenous secondary school students on to campus. These residential programs enable students to experience the university first-hand by staying in a residential college, participating in lectures, and engaging with other Indigenous students who aspire to higher education. These programs and camps cover a range of science, leadership and sporting programs as well as general university experience camps.

One example included the 'Raise the Bar' Academy. Athletics Australia and the University of Melbourne offer a unique program for sporting and academic minded students to train with some of Australia's best athletes, develop new skills in athletics coaching, connect directly with sports industry professionals, and learn about how they can access the University of Melbourne's Indigenous pathways. The five-day program is open to Indigenous students entering Year 11 or 12, and aims to support those interested in pursuing tertiary education and a career in the sports industry.

### ***Example from Flinders University***

Flinders University (Flinders) target its recruitment efforts by working collaboratively with the Department of Education, the Catholic Education Office and the Independent Schools Board to obtain data on the number of Indigenous students enrolled in the primary and secondary sector in the State. This data is used to support and to target its outbound recruitment programs, which are coordinated in conjunction with the University's Prospective Students Office. Schools with a smaller cohort are sent materials directly and are visited on request or invited to visit the university. Schools that visit Flinders are provided with the opportunity to experience life as a university student by participating in a variety of interactive teaching activities and exploring the campus. There is a strong emphasis on removing barriers, creating opportunities and improving accessibility.

Key outreach activities held in 2017 included:

- Indigenous Science, Technology, Engineering and Maths Camp, partnered with the Smith Family and Department of State Development targeting year 8 – 11s;
- Deadly Start to High School, partnered with Department Education, Southern Region, targeting year 7s; and
- Life in the Uni Lane, targeting year 8 – 10s.

### ***Example from Edith Cowan University***

Edith Cowan University (Edith Cowan) also provided detailed examples of conducting outreach programs with a significant number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students. The outreach programs cover a range of activities designed to raise aspirations for education and employment covering computer literacy classes, drop in sessions, school pathway programs and others.

Edith Cowan's 'Old Ways New Ways Science Outreach Team' were finalists in the WA Premier's Science Awards for Engagement in 2016 and 2017 for developing a multi-award-winning outreach program that engages and inspires students to study science at tertiary level. The program links Aboriginal cultural competency and the 'Old Ways' of Aboriginal science with the current or 'New Ways' of scientific knowledge.

### ***Example from the Australian National University***

The Australian National University (ANU) hosts week long Summer Schools for Indigenous students in years 10 and 11 from across Australia interested in studying science, technology, engineering and maths. This covers student from as far afield as Western Australia, far north Queensland and the Torres Strait.

In 2018, ANU was set to host its first parallel Summer School for students interested in studying the Humanities, Arts and Social Science disciplines. The students will split into groups to explore things like how epidemiologists find the cause of a disease outbreak, the link between genetics and Harry Potter, and what it takes to build a global business.

## **ENABLING PROGRAMS**

UA strongly supports the principle that university is not just for students with the highest ATARs and those from privileged backgrounds. University should be an opportunity for students that are committed to undertaking higher study and improving their lives and the lives of their communities.

Enabling programs are generally foundation courses designed to get potential students ready for higher education by helping them to build the skills they need for university such as literacy, numeracy and critical thinking. Courses act as respected alternative pathways into higher education and the

benefits specifically to enhance access and preparedness for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students are widely accepted.

As is apparent from some of the demographic data already discussed in this report and clearly articulated by almost all institutions in their surveys, there is a relatively high proportion of non-school leaver Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander interest in higher education. Enabling programs are crucial to increase overall participation and - perhaps even more importantly - most universities have found that students are more likely to succeed if they go onto enrol into Bachelor courses.

Most universities reported a mix of Indigenous-specific enabling programs and general population enabling programs. Whilst there are obvious benefits to Indigenous specific programs, universities still reported successful outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students through the mainstream enabling programs.

### ***Example from Murdoch University***

Murdoch University (Murdoch) offers an enabling program – *K-Track* to undergraduate studies through the Kulbardi Aboriginal Centre. The program is designed to develop a range of skills that will help Indigenous students succeed in university study whilst getting a taste for university life. Murdoch were able to provide a breakdown outlining the positive results of the K-Track program compared to its former enabling program, which sees far more students not only completing the program but also entering and continuing into undergraduate STEM level subjects.

Other pathways at Murdoch include through its Pre-Law program, Waardong admission pathway for students into a range of science degrees and via a partnership with North Metro TAFE which provides a scaffolded adult education program for potential Murdoch students.

### ***Example from The University of Western Australia***

The Aboriginal Orientation Course (AOC) is a key entry pathway for Indigenous students who do not qualify for Indigenous direct or provisional entry to the University of Western Australia's (UWA) undergraduate degrees. The AOC is a two-semester course, which prepares Indigenous students for participation and success in degree studies by offering core units in Foundations of University Studies and Aboriginal Voices as well as electives in social science, physics, chemistry, maths and human biology. This enables AOC graduates to enter the full range of UWA undergraduate courses which for many AOC students is the pre-requisite to postgraduate professional courses in Law (JD), Medicine (MD), Dentistry (DMD) and Engineering (MPE). Between 25-35 Indigenous students enrol in the AOC each year, with 40-50% of these students being from regional and remote WA.

### ***Example from Central Queensland University***

Central Queensland University (CQU) outlined that the Tertiary Entry Program (TEP), classified as an enabling course of study and delivered by the School of Access Education to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, assists to gain skills, knowledge and confidence for university study.

CQU offered TEP courses in 2017 which included Culture & Learning, Independent Learning, Indigenous Australians and Education, Indigenous Australians and Health, Indigenous Australians: Business & Economy, Indigenous Australians: The Arts, Humanities & Social Sciences and Introduction to Law in Australia.

TEP is also available to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students in correctional centres around Australia through distance education, with three TEP residential schools held throughout the year.

## A DEDICATED INDIGENOUS CENTRE FOR STAFF, STUDENTS AND ACADEMICS

The overwhelming majority of surveys demonstrated universities have specific Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander centres that, among other things, provide a culturally safe and welcoming environment for students and staff. Some universities cited recent investment in their existing or emerging dedicated centres.

There are obvious benefits in specific Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander centres. In many universities, such centres are primarily responsible for Indigenous initiatives. Those include providing expert and culturally appropriate services and promoting a collegial environment of collaboration and centralised expertise. NATSIHEC's recent *Accelerating Indigenous Higher Education Report* (NATSIHEC Report) highlights that:

*universities need to be seen to acknowledge and respect Aboriginal expertise, values, perspective and knowledges. There needs to be a visible presence where the whole university community can engage with Aboriginal knowledge's and perspectives.*<sup>2</sup>

Universities must continue to ensure that the dedicated centres are not viewed as being exclusively responsible for Indigenous matters, but that this is shared across the university. This was highlighted in the Government's *Review of Higher Education Access and Outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people* in 2012 (Behrednt Review):

*However, they cannot be expected to drive whole-of-university strategies because they simply do not have the reach, resources or discipline-specific knowledge to do so. Therefore, the Panel believes that faculties should be primarily responsible for supporting the academic success of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, given the discipline-based knowledge and staff available to them.*<sup>3</sup>

### **Example from The University of Newcastle**

The Wollotuka Institute is an Indigenous-led centre located in the University of Newcastle's (UoN) Academic Division under the Indigenous Education and Research Portfolio. Wollotuka has played an important role to represent and support Indigenous Australians in higher education since 1983 and is committed to Indigenous advancement and leadership at a local, national and global level. UoN described that, through the work of the institute, it has become a leader in Indigenous education. The Institute is led by Indigenous academics, educators and administrators and is responsible for building a culture of innovation and research-informed teaching and research.

The institute also offers a range of programs to attract, equip and support students, provide cultural training to employees across the university, drive Indigenous content into curriculum and organise events that celebrate and acknowledge important culture.

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<sup>2</sup>NATSIHEC, *Accelerating Indigenous Higher Education – Consultation Paper*, January 2018, page 14.

<sup>3</sup> Australian Government, *Review of Higher Education Access and Outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People – Final Report*, July 2012, page 12.

### ***Example from the Australian National University***

The Australian National University's (ANU) Tjabal Centre provides a culturally safe space for Indigenous students and their colleagues. Tjabal strongly supports the celebration of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures and recognises the significant contributions Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and perspectives make to the ANU.

The Centre offers:

- academic support and advice;
- pastoral care and personal support;
- access to quality free tuition;
- advice on internships and scholarships;
- access to ANU services, such as health centre, careers and academic skills and learning;
- outreach programs to prospective ANU students;
- study spaces, a computer laboratory and lockers; and
- bikes for on-campus use.

Tjabal also hosts regular events to bring students and community together. This includes an annual Indigenous music on the meadow event which especially involves the new students. In 2018, approximately 2000 staff, students and community attended.

## **TUTORIAL ASSISTANCE**

Funded largely through PM&C's ISSP, the offering of specialised tutorial assistance was consistently highlighted as a key support strategy to increase the success and completion rates of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students. A large majority of universities were able to clearly display and track the success of students that engaged in regular tutorial assistance offered by universities.

### ***Example from the University of Wollongong***

The University of Wollongong (UOW) stated its retention strategy focuses on having specialist tutors in the student's discipline areas from day one of enrolment. Its Indigenous Tailored Academic Program oversees tutorial and academic support. Currently UOW has 130 current students accessing tutorial assistance in 2018, which is up 30% from 2017. Additionally, UOW have stipulated that accessing a tutor is a condition of entry placement for students entering through their Alternative Admission Program. The new preventative approach to accessing tutoring support supersedes the previous reactive approach to retention and a shift from passing to excelling in chosen fields is promoted.

### ***Example from The University of New England***

UNE said 198 tutorial matches during 2017 as part of the Targeted Tutorial Assistance (TTA) program, with a total of 3,977 hours of tuition delivered – a 10 per cent increase over 2016. The intention was to considerably expand tutoring hours again in 2018.

Tutorial assistance remained one of the most effective support mechanisms for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students at UNE. 2017 saw the introduction of an online application and tutor matching system, enabling Oorala (UNE's Indigenous centre) staff to provide more efficient and timely responses to student applications for tuition.

UNE stated that students who access tutoring, on average, perform better than students who do not. An expanded tutorial assistance program is one of the most effective strategies to address the gap in Indigenous students' academic performance. Students receiving tuition had a higher GPA – almost at parity with non-Indigenous peers.

### ***Example from Edith Cowan University***

The Aboriginal Tuition and Mentoring Program (ATMP) supported 101 Aboriginal and/ or Torres Strait Islander students in 2017 to develop strong foundations for good study habits and structure throughout university study. This represents a take-up rate of 22%, based on the total student number eligible for support through ATMP (452).

The ATMP program consists of individual and group tutorial support and scheduled group skills workshops. Aboriginal and/ or Torres Strait Islander students enrolled (internally or externally) on a full-time or part-time basis can receive up to two hours tutorial assistance per subject per week, and additional tutorial assistance totalling five hours for exam preparation.

Mentoring has been introduced into the program, to build trust between tutors and students. During 2017, ECU also designed and delivered ten culturally-appropriate study skills workshops co-ordinated by a learning advisor. They covered: managing workload; referencing; critical reading skills; effective academic writing; preparing for exams; balancing university, work and family; and numeracy skills.

## **PASTORAL CARE AND SPECIALIST SUPPORT SERVICES**

Pastoral care has been a longstanding practice to support, care and guide others through an event or experience. Feelings of disconnectedness and the associated problems this can lead to for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students make this an essential practice in universities to increase retention and success.

Similarly, survey responses indicated that specialist Indigenous student services teams were also used as a key tool to ensure Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students receive appropriate support. This is particular so for students relocating from rural or remote communities, studying part-time and/or who have family commitments.

### ***Example from Charles Darwin University***

The Office of Indigenous Student Services at CDU is a core part of the activities of the Office of the PVC Indigenous Leadership and provides a comprehensive range of services and support to assist Indigenous students in their VET and higher education aspirations.

The office consists of two discrete areas:

- Indigenous Grants Team, which provides specialist advice, expertise and support on all supplementary funding programs and projects including (but not limited to), Tutorial Support, Away-From-Base and any applicable scholarships, bursaries and targeted funding; and
- Academic Support Team, which provides a range of tailored guidance, support and mentoring to VET and HE students along their educational journey.

In collaboration with a wide range of internal and external stakeholders, the Office assists students to navigate the university environment and streamlines Indigenous student access to a diverse range of services, systems and support available to all VET and HE students.



### ***Example from University of Technology Sydney***

The University of Technology Sydney (UTS) noted its Jumbunna Institute for Indigenous Education and Research (Jumbunna) is the unit that delivers the university's most important strategies to improve participation and success. In addition to outreach programs and tutorial support, it offers:

- student services and support initiatives, ranging from cost-covered accommodation, to tuition fee waiver scholarships and stipend-based scholarships;
- student computer lab and lounge facilities; and
- dedicated student support officers who provide culturally appropriate personal support and pastoral care to Indigenous students and run a program of events designed to facilitate student wellbeing and connection.

## **SCHOLARSHIP SUPPORT**

Scholarships seek to ensure that Indigenous students receive financial support and access to secure accommodation to maximise retention, success and completions. The Government recognises this and has enabled universities to fund these scholarships through the ISSP and its predecessor program. The availability of Government funding for this initiative has meant it is a common strategy that supports Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander success.

Such support is particularly important in light of the *2017 Universities Australia Student Finances Survey* which reported that one in seven domestic students say they regularly go without food or other necessities because they can't afford these. Three in five domestic students say their finances are a source of worry. Through its work on the adequacy of Government income support, UA understands that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students face barriers to complete tertiary education due to living and relocation expenses.

### ***Example from The University of Western Australia***

UWA stated students are informed of and assisted to apply for scholarships, internships, and vacation as well as part-time employment if needed. UWA awarded 226 ISSP scholarships to Indigenous students in 2017. UWA also utilises other university scholarships and in 2017 awarded 35 scholarships to Indigenous students including 19 to rural and remote students

A key focus in recent years at UWA has been to increase the number of scholarships available to Indigenous students to enable them to reside in one of five residential colleges. This includes full fees accommodation scholarships as well as living allowance top up scholarships for Indigenous students on Abstudy, where fees are paid but living allowance is not sufficient to meet everyday living costs.

In 2017, a total of 79 Indigenous students at UWA lived in residential colleges. All students have some form of scholarship support. With between 35 - 40% of UWA's Indigenous commencing students each being from regional or remote areas, securing accommodation is critical.

### ***Example from Queensland University of Technology***

The Queensland University of Technology (QUT) indicated it has a large program of needs-based scholarships which embeds the Commonwealth-funded Indigenous scholarships, ensuring that each Indigenous applicant with a degree of financial hardship receives the scholarship package most beneficial to them, be it from Commonwealth or QUT sources. Scholarships act as a retention device at QUT, and the university has tracked the impact over many years.

First-year commencing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students who enter QUT via QTAC application or via the Oodgeroo Unit's Centralised Assessment and Selection Program (CASP) are guaranteed a \$1,500 bursary to assist with the costs of commencing study in addition to being eligible to apply for additional bursaries and scholarships through targeted applications processes (eg mail-outs, emails and one-to-one discussions with enrolling students). At the selection process and during Orientation week QUT aims to provide all commencing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students with access to some level of financial support when commencing at QUT. In 2018, 323 indigenous students received scholarships packages from this Scheme.

### ***Example from Central Queensland University***

Central Queensland University (CQU) described that scholarships have proven invaluable to supplement student income and enable students to spend less time in paid employment and more time on study. Students reported that scholarships have enabled them to meet other accommodation and education costs, without which they would not have been able to enrol in tertiary education.

In 2017, of the 191 Indigenous Student Success Program scholarships awarded to Indigenous undergraduate students at CQU, 168 were paid. Scholarships provided from other industry and organisations numbered 55 and of these 43 were initiated in 2017.



## SECTION SUMMARY

- Sector-wide enrolments figures have been positive at around triple the growth rate of non-Indigenous students in recent years — and on track to meet one of the key targets of the UA Strategy. In 2017, the first year of the strategy, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander enrolments grew by 8.3 per cent — almost four times higher than the growth in overall student numbers of 2.1 per cent. Whilst enrolments in the 25 -39 and 40-64 age brackets are comparatively strong compared to non-Indigenous enrolments, enrolments in the 15-19 and 20 -24 age brackets represent an opportunity of greater focus given the younger Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population. The 2017 sector-wide enrolments also continue to be more heavily concentrated in Society and Culture (33 per cent), Health (22 per cent) and Education (14 per cent).
- Applications data shows Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women are almost twice as likely apply for undergraduate courses compared to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander men. 2018 applications data also shows the first decline in Indigenous undergraduate applications since 2009 — although the number of offers and acceptances may be different to the applications figures. This is being closely monitored.
- Sector-wide course completions have continued to increase year-on-year (78 per cent for undergraduate awards and 89 per cent for postgraduate awards between 2008 and 2017) but there is still much work to be done. While Indigenous students typically take longer to graduate, the nine-year completion rate for Indigenous students remains around 47 per cent, well below the 74 per cent for non-Indigenous students.
- There are positive examples of universities demonstrating an understanding of what works well for them and implementing processes and mechanisms designed to track student success and monitor the evaluation of their strategies. Universities also described how they utilise IT systems to direct resources and offer targeted support to 'at risk' students.
- Whilst the level of development across the sector varies, universities are making strong investments in strategies to enhance Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander student participation and success in higher education. The most common strategies identified through the survey responses include:
  - strong partnerships with local Elders and community;
  - outreach programs;
  - enabling courses;
  - dedicated Indigenous centres;
  - fostering culturally safe environments;
  - dedicated tutorial assistance; and
  - pastoral care and access to specialist advice.

## 4 LEADERSHIP AND GOVERNANCE

### CENTRAL POLICY

Under the UA strategy, universities committed to include Indigenous higher education, research and employment as priority areas in core policy documents, including institutional strategic and business plans.

One of the principles underpinning the UA strategy is that social justice requires universities to implement effective policies and practices that recognise the contribution, potential and insight of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff and students and respond to Indigenous community needs.

Universities are accustomed to operating in an environment which links resources and accountability to objectives contained in strategic documents and business plans. Setting targets and KPIs for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, professionals and academics ensures universities are adapting their business models to achieve these targets and holding various units and schools across the institution to account.

Since the release of the UA Indigenous Strategy and ISSP requirements, there has been a noticeable increase in the number of:

- whole-of-university Indigenous strategies;
- Indigenous education strategies;
- Indigenous workforce strategies;
- Indigenous engagement plans;
- Reconciliation Action Plans (RAPs); and
- other key university documents relating to Indigenous higher education.

Of course, some universities with a long history of investment in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander university initiatives were also able to point to this content in their strategic documents and implementation of these strategies, in some cases over decades. These universities were also more likely to have explicit targets for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander matters, such as curriculum, and measures of success contained in their university Strategic Plans.

However, the level of detail and solid actions included in these plans varied. There were some instances of general or vague references to Indigenous matters in university Strategic Plans (arguably a university's most important document to guide investment and priorities). Although these universities utilise other Indigenous specific strategic documents, a move to include ambitious and measurable targets in strategic plans should be encouraged. Recognition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander matters as a priority in strategic plans is an important step to strong investment and buy-in from the whole university. Some universities acknowledged this would be a focus in the next cycle of updating their Strategic Plan (noting strategic plans are longer term and typically not updated annually).

It is common for targets and policies to be spread across numerous documents, likely due to requirements of the ISSP, the UA strategy, reconciliation commitments and other State or Territory mandates. There are valid reasons to spread Indigenous targets and objectives throughout the university, most notably that it can promote a whole-of-university approach and spread accountability. Some universities found that whilst they have separate strategies for education, workforce and research, having a single unified document and overarching Indigenous plan can be beneficial to tie each of the separate elements together.

It is worth noting the different levels of evidence attached in support of claims made in relation to documents and plans to enhance Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander participation and success in each university. Some universities were able to clearly explain in detail and provide links to evidence of implementation, whereas others signalled aspiration but lacked detailed documentation on their active efforts to make progress. It is important that the university sector demonstrates its leadership on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander initiatives and builds a comprehensive program of action.

### ***Example from Macquarie University***

The long-term aspirations of Macquarie University are set out in *Our University: A Framing of Futures* which identifies key commitments deemed vital to the overall culture and vision of the university. One of these key commitments is to Indigenous higher education. The commitment is translated into the ten-year *Indigenous Strategy 2016 – 2025*. The *Indigenous Strategy 2016 – 2025* is an overarching strategy for Macquarie University with specific plans and frameworks that provide an operational platform for action and evaluation. Commitment is further reflected in the *Reconciliation Action Plan 2017 – 2018* which complements the Indigenous Strategy and is a tangible demonstration of the university's commitment to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander higher education and reconciliation.

The strategy is underpinned by plans and frameworks that define the specific actions required to achieve a whole-of-university approach to achieving successful outcomes, including:

- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Workforce Plan 2018 – 2021 (inclusive of Cultural Safety and Responsiveness Training);
- Macquarie University Indigenous Research Plan 2018 – 2021;
- Macquarie University Indigenous Connected Curriculum Framework; and
- Macquarie University Student and Community Engagement Plan 2018 – 2021.

### ***Example from the University of Tasmania***

The University of Tasmania (UTas) provided a link to a detailed [Strategic Plan for Aboriginal Engagement \(2017-2020\)](#) (the Plan). The plan aims to 'situate a vibrant, highly visible Indigenous, especially Tasmanian Aboriginal, presence as an openly valued aspect of the life, culture and knowledge traditions of the University of Tasmania'. The plan has seven separate but interlinked sections, with Section 1: Undergraduate Students and Section 2: Learning and Teaching most directly correlated with student outcome strategies. Other sections, inclusive of Section 3: Employment and Section 6: Community also contribute to these goals.

The implementation of the plan is guided by the university's Strategic Plan for Aboriginal Engagement Steering Committee, comprising seven senior Aboriginal community members and the University Aboriginal Leadership Group. It is chaired by the Pro Vice-Chancellor Aboriginal Research and Leadership. Responsibilities for achieving actions in the plan are spread throughout the university.

The plan must be referred to in other UTas plans. Efforts are also being made to establish a formal framework to incorporate the plan and its overarching strategic direction into lower order policy documents that are not Indigenous specific.

### ***Example from the University of New South Wales***

The three key strategies for increasing Indigenous higher education success and knowledge at the University of New South Wales (UNSW) are the:

- UNSW Indigenous Strategy – underpinned by principles of Culture, opportunities to 'grow your own' and giving back to communities (inclusive of a Workforce and Education Plan) ,

- Nura Gili Strategic Plan – relating to objectives around improving access, retention and success rates for Indigenous students
- the UNSW 2025 Strategy – acknowledging, respecting and celebrating the importance Indigenous Australians at UNSW.

The UNSW Indigenous Strategy was released at the end of 2018 and is a core document tying various UNSW strategies and plans (as mentioned above) together. The strategy was developed by the PVCI office in consultation with Indigenous students, Indigenous staff and staff at Nura Gili (the Indigenous unit).

Targets and milestones are located in UNSW's Indigenous strategy, Workforce Strategy, and Employment Strategy. Elements of the Indigenous Strategy are also reflected in the UNSW Enterprise Bargaining Agreement signed in 2018 including employment targets, language allowance, funding and processes for monitoring university compliance with the Indigenous clauses of the agreement.

The strategy will ensure that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture is showcased throughout the year by engaging more fully with local and national celebrations of Indigenous culture. Providing more opportunities for non-Indigenous people to learn Indigenous history will also assist to create a wholistic approach to increasing Indigenous student enrolment and staff recruitment.

## **Increase in Reconciliation Action Plans**

RAPs continue to rise in number, both in universities and in the wider Australian community. As cited by Reconciliation Australia:

*evidence shows the RAP program is creating opportunities in employment, education and business for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and creating positive attitudes and behaviours among the three million people working in organisations with a RAP.*<sup>4</sup>

Of course, the existence of a RAP does not in itself determine a universities commitment to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander advancement in higher education. Rather, commitment either through a RAP or other reconciliation initiatives should be viewed in light of the universities' overall efforts and investment on a range of fronts.

That said, RAPs can clearly serve as a useful tool to embed the numerous Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander strategies into a united overarching model. They are also a public commitment to provide an environment that supports the advancement of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. As highlighted in the surveys, RAPs can also typically provide organisations an opportunity to reflect on their overall commitment to the advancement of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and communities, without a strict focus on higher education.

Around two-thirds of universities have an active RAP or reported they are in the final stages of implementing their RAP with Reconciliation Australia. Typically, a RAP is overseen by an implementation committee of some kind, with that committee then being accountable to Elders and/or the respective community for the annual performance in the RAPs.

## **Example from Curtin University**

Curtin stated it began its 'formal' reconciliation journey in 1998 with the signing of a Statement of Reconciliation and Commitment and, 10 years later, became the first Australian teaching and research

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<sup>4</sup> Reconciliation Australia, *The State of Reconciliation in Australia – Our History, Our Story, Our Future*, 2016, page 24 <[https://www.reconciliation.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2018/06/ra\\_stateofreconciliation\\_report\\_a4\\_revised-2018.pdf](https://www.reconciliation.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2018/06/ra_stateofreconciliation_report_a4_revised-2018.pdf)>.

institution to develop and implement its own RAP. These plans are progressively expanding responsibility for reconciliation beyond the domain of our Indigenous activities to all areas of the university.

Some highlight initiatives from Curtin's most recent RAP (2014-2017) included: on-country visits for staff and students as part of the Indigenous Cultural Capabilities Framework; the Student Internship Program which provides employment at Curtin for our Indigenous students; a partnership with the Southern Aboriginal Corporation and the Bringing Them Home Committee, which has seen Curtin students from the School of Built Environment and Spatial Sciences undertaking work-integrated learning at Indigenous healing centres in Western Australia. Curtin also continued to embed Indigenous perspectives and knowledges in its governance structures and teaching and learning activities as well as support its Indigenous researchers to further develop their capability and impact.

The RAP contains 5 objectives and 27 of the actions in the plan. An update on progress under the RAP is provided quarterly to the Curtin Indigenous Policy Committee with an annual report to Planning and Management Committee (Corporate Executive) and to Reconciliation Australia. Curtin stated it was pleased to now be developing its third RAP at the 'Elevate' level.

### ***Example from Southern Cross University***

Southern Cross University (SCU) stated its Reconciliation Action Plan (RAP) initiates significant and fundamental changes to the visible relational structural academic and cultural fabric of the university. SCU's RAP was accepted by the University Council in November 2017. Other strategies operate under the umbrella of the RAP through the Elders' principles which guide and sustain the aims of this SCU Council policy document and school and other units' operational plans. This positions the RAP as the overarching governance document that informs the flow-down of values and initiatives into university policy and administration practices.

The RAP Committee includes members from all work units of the university (including Head of Schools or their delegates) as well as community Elders and initiates, monitors and supports RAP projects from procurement to cultural safety across SCU. The RAP Committee delivers an annual report to the SCU Elders' Council, the Vice-Chancellor and Executive, the SCU Council, and Reconciliation Australia. These reports detail achievements of the plan indexed to the objectives in each area. They also propose future objectives for approval at the joint SCU Elders' Council and SCU Council meeting held each year.

## **INDIGENOUS GOVERNANCE**

The importance of the current public debate on a constitutional voice for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people cannot be understated. Effective Indigenous governance is key to create lasting positive change for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, and for all Australians. Good governance models should involve Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in decisions affecting Indigenous communities and the strategic direction of social and education policy.

As outlined above, the ISSP requires an Indigenous Governance Mechanism (IGM) to have:

- responsibility for advising on, reviewing, making recommendations about, and monitoring the use of ISSP grants;
- authority within the governance structure of the provider; and
- a charter that outlines:
  - criteria for appointment; and
  - roles and responsibilities; and

- decision-making processes.

The introduction of the IGM requirement provides additional authority for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples to make decisions on the strategies that are funded to enhance positive change for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people through education. This is not to say that some universities' environments and structures did not already promote this environment – but formalising these arrangements has been important.

Surveys demonstrated IGMs around institutions varied. This included either a single appointed Indigenous executive or a consultative mechanism. Of course, the IGM presents further opportunity to create meaningful partnerships with local communities and Elders. Provided these partnerships already exist, then the appointment of a single Indigenous executive as the IGM was not an indicator of simply meeting the minimum requirement.

Universities reported clear benefits of their IGM, regardless of their chosen model. Some of these benefits include:

- integrating with and informing several boards or committees across the university;
- capacity building and support for Aboriginal and Torres Strait islander staff; and
- clearer lines of reporting to senior executive.

There were some reports of further exploring and enhancing the future capacity of IGMs by those universities that may be less advanced than others in Indigenous higher education.

## INDIGENOUS LEADERSHIP

The Behrendt review outlined the importance of the higher education sector to the social and educational wellbeing of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. It is a powerful vehicle to ensure skills and capacity in community success, as well as individual opportunity. It stated:

*Part of this capacity building is preparing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people for leadership roles, so they are the ones making the decisions that affect their communities and providing positive examples for the people around them.<sup>5</sup>*

The Behrendt review also noted the culture of a university is generally developed through among other things, the institutions leadership. Indigenous leadership positions help to leverage influence within the university hierarchy and to effect change across the core activities of the institution.

19 of 39 universities had appointed a senior Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander leader or executive relative to the Pro Vice-Chancellor or Deputy Vice-Chancellor level at the time of the survey. The appointment of this position did not necessarily have a direct correlation with the program of work by an individual university on progress under the UA Strategy and broader Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander initiatives. There is a second crucial consideration about the relative focus of Indigenous issues across senior management roles and the institution as a whole.

Some institutions reported having advertised these positions for some months. Whilst this is a requirement under the ISSP and not the UA strategy, UA is interested in noting the increase in these numbers over time and factors that may influence these developments.

An issue raised in some institutions in the past has been the proximity of the office of the most senior Indigenous leader or Indigenous Unit to the main administration hub of the university. The survey

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<sup>5</sup> Above n 3, page 4.



particularly requested data on this matter. Most survey responses indicated relatively close proximity to the main administration hub and relayed that such issues had been raised and addressed.

## **MAKING INDIGENOUS EDUCATION AND ADVANCEMENT EVERYONE'S BUSINESS**

The concept of a 'whole-of-university' (WoU) approach has most recently been discussed in detail in the NATSIHEC Report. As you would expect, Indigenous staff are almost always most highly represented in areas of the university with specific education, research or support programs relating to Indigenous higher education. This will be touched on in further detail in sections 4 and 5.

NATSIHEC states:

*A WoU approach in respect to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples is required to achieve accelerated outcomes in higher education (eg access, participation, retention and success), in research, in learning and teaching, and in employment. To date, most of the effort in advancing these areas has been contributed by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and centres. A shared approach that encompasses the broad resources and expertise of universities is vital in achieving the significant change and advancement needed to achieve parity.<sup>6</sup>*

In its paper, NATSIHEC found universities are yet to achieve an efficient implementation of a WoU approach, despite considerable goodwill. However, survey responses indicated the spreading of responsibility across various committees (discussed above), divisions and units was becoming increasingly more apparent. This also included nominating representatives in each division to lead change and to take carriage of Indigenous matters at a local level. However, as you would expect, universities reported that faculties with senior Indigenous academic leadership (professors and associate professors) and a high percentage of Indigenous staff typically demonstrate stronger engagement with Indigenous policy and strategy, as well as better education and research outcomes.

Some of the key factors that were identified to create this environment included:

- direct and vocal support from the Vice-Chancellor as a key driver to help raise the profile of Indigenous initiatives in the university and convey the importance of this work to all staff and students;
- perceptible changes following the launch of RAPs and the commencement of the IGM having significantly increased success in the last 12 months;
- embedding special sessions on RAPs and other Indigenous strategies at annual senior leadership conferences, with a focus on how to implement its activities more widely across the university; and
- where levels of engagement with Indigenous strategy were considered generally quite high, one area identified for improvement was attempting to ensure all faculties have stand-alone Indigenous strategies for their local area.

Disseminating information throughout universities is crucial to reinforce the message that Indigenous education and advancement is everyone's business. Based on the survey responses, this is an area that may warrant further attention and/or a more concentrated effort by some institutions.

Some universities highlighted some challenges in internal communications and are considering a range of ideas to improve this. These issues are not necessarily unique to the Indigenous portfolio.

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<sup>6</sup> Above n 2, page 29.

Generally, specific funds were not allocated to disseminate support material to faculties, but there were budgets to run Indigenous staff networks.

### ***Example from The University of Newcastle***

The University of Newcastle's (UoN) NeW Futures Strategic Plan has a number of KPIs on outcomes for Indigenous students and Indigenous staff – which spreads accountability throughout the university. Performance against these strategic documents is monitored at institution, Faculty, and Division level and is reported quarterly to senior management and to University Council.

In 2017, the Sub-Committee for Indigenous Higher Education (SCIHE) was formed under the University's Executive Committee to provide periodic advice to the Executive Committee on the development and finalisation of the University's Indigenous Strategy. SCIHE is comprised of selected Pro Vice-Chancellors of the university and was initiated by the Pro Vice-Chancellor, Indigenous Education and Research. UoN noted that one challenge to implementation of a whole-of-university approach can be recruitment challenges for senior roles.

Information about teaching, learning and research is facilitated through formal committee structures including Teaching and Learning Committee, Research Committee, and the Research Training Sub-Committee. Communication strategies are embedded in these formal structures.

### ***Example from the University of Canberra***

The University of Canberra (UC) stated that each portfolio has embedded the relevant goals and actions of the relevant Strategic Plans on advancing Indigenous higher education into their overarching portfolio plans. Specific goals and actions regarding Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander student enrolments, recruitment strategies, and Indigenisation of the curriculum form a crucial part of the University's Students and Education Plan. The KPIs attached to the Plan will be reported on to the UC Council annually. Though the Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Academic) has overall responsibility for meeting the goals specific to their portfolio, every staff member in the portfolio will contribute in some way to the operationalisation and strategies to help achieve the desired outcomes. Staff will be held accountable through operational and work plans, as well as through staff performance reviews.

UC also described how its unique structure enables effective dissemination of relevant materials to staff across the university. This is achieved through various forums – including regular Deans and Directors meetings, working groups, portfolio meetings, fortnightly digital updates and other mechanisms – the Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Academic) can ensure that all staff within their portfolio are kept up-to-date with information, guidelines, and support materials. In addition, there are other all staff forums which enable the broader university community to be provided with relevant information, such as weekly bulletins and VC Town Halls after each Council meeting.

### ***Example from the University of Tasmania***

The University of Tasmania (UTas) noted that the informal nature of how colleges/divisions or schools improve outcomes in Indigenous higher education, research workforce and community outreach at their institution results in improvements being paced differentially in different areas of the university. However, UTas reported that throughout the whole of the university there has been a perceptible change in how the university supports Aboriginal business across all areas. UTas also noted that not all areas are at the same place in their level of cultural competence or have the same capacity.

An example of what has worked well as a whole-of-university initiative was in 2017 when the ISSP Governance Committee developed a specific scheme to encourage colleges and divisions to improve their Indigenous engagement. This scheme saw seven different schools and divisions apply for



funding to undertake projects, ranging from a workshop on building Aboriginal engagement with fishing science to the creation of a Tasmanian Aboriginal timeline in a busy area of the university.

### ***Example from Swinburne University***

Swinburne University (Swinburne) explained that its four key Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander strategies contain formal targets and accountabilities for meeting these targets. From 2019 onwards, all Executive Group members (Deputy Vice-Chancellors, Vice-Presidents and Faculty Pro Vice-Chancellors) will be responsible for specific RAP targets and are required to include these RAP targets in their KPIs.

The Moondani Toombdool Centre (Swinburne's Indigenous unit) is responsible for disseminating information resources and support to Swinburne staff, students and alumni – which is specifically resourced by the university. The RAP Supporters Network was recently created to encourage Swinburne staff to learn more about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander matters, reconciliation and the RAP, and to appropriately engage with these issues both at Swinburne and the wider community. There are now 50 members from across ten academic and administrative divisions at Swinburne.

## SECTION SUMMARY

- Survey responses demonstrated universities increasingly reflect Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander participation, culture and research as key areas of focus in their strategic documents and business plans – in varying levels of measurability and detail. It is important that the university sector lead the way to implement and embed this engagement deeply throughout our operations and activities.
- Targets and policies are typically spread across numerous documents likely due to requirements of the ISSP, the UA strategy, reconciliation commitments and other State or Territory mandates. Some universities found that whilst they have separate strategies for education, workforce, research etc – having a single unified document and overarching Indigenous plan can be beneficial to tie each of the separate elements together.
- Primary responsibility for driving Indigenous higher education outcomes in each university rests variously with Directors of Indigenous Centres or Units, Pro Vice-Chancellors (Indigenous), Deputy Vice-Chancellors (Academic) and other senior executives.
- At the time of the survey, 19 out of 39 universities had filled Indigenous senior executive positions. A majority of the remaining universities were undertaking recruitment processes in a bid to fill similar roles. Whilst surveys reported positive signs of collaboration across university faculties, schools and units, and diversification of responsibility, much of the heavy lifting continues to be done by the Indigenous centres or units of universities.
- Universities are increasingly including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people – whether university professionals or community elders – in decision making processes. Whilst already required under the Government's ISSP, this is a positive outcome.
- Indigenous staff continue to lead university advancement of Indigenous higher education outcomes and are highly represented in areas of the university with specific education, research or support programs relating to Indigenous higher education. However, universities reported positive university-wide results where:
  - there was clear and direct support from Vice-Chancellors to raise the profile of the initiatives across staff in the university.
  - Indigenous governance mechanisms that allow for greater decision-making and influence in strategy from local community Elders
  - clear and measurable KPIs and review mechanisms, including RAP initiatives
  - stand-alone Indigenous strategies for local areas and portfolios and embedding KPIs into these plans.

## 5 CAMPUS CULTURE AND GRADUATE CAPABILITY

### COMMITMENT TO CULTURAL COMPETENCE

Under the UA Strategy, universities have committed to:

- have current executive staff and all new senior staff complete cross-cultural training programs from 2018; and
- 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.

Universities Australia has previously defined cultural competence as:

*Student and staff knowledge and understanding of Indigenous Australian cultures, histories and contemporary realities and awareness of Indigenous protocols, combined with the proficiency to engage and work effectively in Indigenous contexts congruent to the expectations of Indigenous Australian peoples.<sup>7</sup>*

Cultural competence is important to ensure a safe working environment for staff and students - free from racism and discrimination. Universities also seek to create environments that actively promote and encourage the inclusion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff and students in all aspects of university life. This also shapes broader participation and leadership in wider society.

The National Tertiary Education Union (NTEU) Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Policy Committee sought in 2018 to assess levels of racism, discrimination and lateral violence in the workplace. The report suggests that 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> These results should propel us to redouble efforts on this front.

Some universities were upfront in survey responses by acknowledging that historical issues relating to managing race and content-based complaints needed to be addressed.

As discussed above, however, there has been a considerable investment from many in the sector, especially in recent years, in the development of university wide strategies to advance Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander participation and success in higher education. Some examples of the ways in which universities described their commitment to an environment that is culturally safe included:

- Indigenous cultural safety policies for students and staff;
- Embedding Indigenous knowledge and knowledge systems as a core element in all curriculum, exposing all students to Indigenous-specific content and context, and promote a positive sense of Aboriginal culture and heritage;
- Indigenous units providing a culturally safe space on campus for students to study, seek support and socialise;
- Cultural safety workshops and training;
- Employment of Elders as cultural advisors and utilising strong partnerships with community;

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<sup>7</sup>Universities Australia, *Guiding Principles for Developing Indigenous Cultural Competency in Australian Universities*, October 2011, page 3.

<sup>8</sup> The National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Unit of National Tertiary Education Union, *I'm Still not Racist But*, October 2018, page 4.

- Partnerships with the World Indigenous Research Alliance; and
- Diversification of campus locations into remote and regional communities.

### ***Example from The University of Sydney***

The University of Sydney's National Centre for Cultural Competence (NCCC) was one of the first of its kind in the world. The NCCC's purpose is to develop and integrate cultural competence through innovative learning, teaching, research and engagement. The NCCC has initially prioritised the growth of student, staff and community cultural competence. However, its broader perspective is forming national and international partnerships, initiating dialogues and implementing initiatives to improve educational, economic, cultural and social outcomes throughout society.

In addition to the cultural training of internal students, staff and leaders the NCCC also conducts a wide range of consulting work for external organisations. For example, in 2016, the NCCC worked collaboratively with the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies (AIATSIS) on the development of APS Cultural Capability e-learning modules that AIATSIS released that year.

Another example is the release of the 'Cultural Competence – Aboriginal Sydney' massive open online course (MOOC) through Coursera's global online platform in February 2017. Funded through an Education Innovation grant, the MOOC consists of six modules covering topics such as the importance of a Welcome to Country, sovereignty, activism, languages and protection of artefacts. The MOOC is available worldwide, although one key aim for the university is to further the university community's understanding of local Aboriginal histories, narratives and cultures. At the end of 2017 2,146 people had enrolled in the MOOC and 265 people had completed it, making this the most successful MOOC ever conducted at Sydney.

### ***Example from The University of Adelaide***

The University of Adelaide employs two Kurna Elders as cultural advisors full-time, who offer pastoral support to students and staff; provide invaluable knowledge and perspective on procedures and sensitivities for Indigenous and non-Indigenous staff. This is one strategy that is used to create a culturally safe and positive environment for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff and students.

Regular meetings and consultations with Elders in residence and cultural advisors who have close ties with the local community are also held to discuss wide-ranging issues. These can include but are not limited to: student pastoral and support requirements; strategies for incorporating Indigenous culture into University of Adelaide's daily business in a respectful and meaningful way; planning outcomes from various Indigenous committees and boards; and the needs and feelings of the local community in relation to University of Adelaide.

An Indigenous reference group has been recently established to inform the Indigenous Knowledges and Society Courses. This is a small group of members nominated by the Cultural Advisors. Members include Kurna Elders, Elders from other nations, and a Torres Strait Islander Elder.

### ***Example from the University of Tasmania***

The University of Tasmania (UTas) described that it has been developing an embedded approach to cultural competence and cultural safety. Examples of events that demonstrated this approach from 2017 include:

- Harmony Day;
- World Indigenous Day;
- University of Tasmania - Reconciliation Week;
- Cultural Safety Workshops; and
- Visiting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Scholars Program.

To bolster the cultural competency of staff and to ensure the university offers a culturally safe and enriching environment, a regular series of seminars and events across the university featuring Indigenous scholars from Australia and overseas. These events are primarily organised by the Office of the Pro Vice-Chancellor Aboriginal Research and Leadership and Riawunna (UTas' Indigenous unit), but also includes an occasional event organised by a faculty or school. These presentations are open to all University staff, students and Aboriginal community members. Events are timed so that there is at least one event most weeks of each semester and have proven popular, particularly with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students and community members, with audiences of 50-60 people for each presentation.

Further all national and international guests are provided the opportunity, in the company of staff and students, to experience *palawa* culture and meet community during their visits.

## **CULTURAL TRAINING OF STAFF**

Cultural training of staff is a crucial tool to shape a culturally safe environment for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people at university (or any environment). Australians will have varying levels of interaction or an understanding of Indigenous culture for a variety of reasons including school education curriculums, social divisions, geography and so on. However, levels of knowledge among non-Indigenous Australians about the richness and sophistication of Indigenous culture are patchy.

Almost all universities appear to offer cultural competency training programs with an Indigenous focus to all staff members. This was especially so for new starters who were introduced to Indigenous cultural training as part of induction processes. Whilst new starters almost always undertake cultural training, it was a relatively even split in terms of whether cultural competency training is mandatory or optional for existing staff members. It was common for online modules to be supplemented with additional face-to-face workshops traditionally offered by Indigenous staff or cultural advisers (subject to availability and resourcing). Some universities noted that the online programs could be accessed at any time and could also commonly be used as 'refreshers'.

It is particularly important that executive and senior staff members have a strong understanding of Indigenous culture and knowledge to be able to lead change within their university. Despite the UA Strategy actions, survey responses did not identify a distinct difference between mandatory requirements of Indigenous cultural training for executive and senior staff members compared to all other staff members. However, some universities indicated that formal cultural training for executive and senior staff members (as opposed to informal cultural inductions from relevant Indigenous staff members) are currently being developed.

### ***Example from the University of Technology Sydney***

The University of Technology Sydney (UTS) offers cultural training programs through the Equity and Diversity Unit. This suite of face-to-face half-day workshops are offered twice per year, and includes general cultural diversity training, unconscious bias training, and a dedicated Indigenous cultural awareness workshop. The workshops are not mandatory but are widely publicised and all staff are encouraged to attend. There is no limit on the number of times a staff member may attend the training.

The cultural training and awareness programs at UTS appear to be bearing fruit, as evidenced by the results of the recent biennial staff surveys. The Indigenous category received the highest percentage of positive replies than any other category, higher even than training programs on broader social justice and inclusion/ethics topics.

In addition to the above cultural training available to all staff, senior staff who commence at UTS are provided with an Indigenous resource kit that contains books including works by Professor Larissa Behrendt on Indigenous culture and Professor Bruce Pascoe's award-winning book *Dark Emu*.

The PVC (Indigenous) meets with newly appointed Deans and senior executive staff to brief them on UTS Indigenous strategy. Senior staff are encouraged to contact the PVC (Indigenous) to raise cultural questions as they arise. Senior executive/managerial staff are also invited to participate in Indigenous cultural enrichment activities and are invited to attend Indigenous events and forums held at UTS and with external partners.

### ***Example from the University of South Australia***

The University of South Australia (UniSA) stated it offers a full day of Cultural Safety/Awareness training for all staff. This is delivered face-to-face by an Aboriginal Community member who is a trained educator. They hold a senior position in the Aboriginal Community and have links to community both personally and professionally across South Australia as well as the wider Australian community. This training is mandatory for all Senior Executives from Vice-Chancellor down to Director and Head of School level. Some senior leaders have also made the training mandatory for their individual work units.

The training is based on Aboriginal specific-content, however, it does touch on broader issues of cross-cultural interaction and perspective as much of the content is about treating all people regardless of background with respect and dignity. The material included in the training looks at colonialism and its history in Australia, policy and procedure which has shaped and continues to shape Aboriginal people's lives, and whiteness and racism in all its forms. There is also a half-day course which is open to all staff specifically on working with Aboriginal people.

### ***Example from the Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology***

The Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology (RMIT's) RAP details that cultural learning needs for employees include online training, face-to-face workshops and/or cultural immersion will be embedded at RMIT in the longer term as business as usual activity. The next phase of ongoing cultural learning for staff will be delivered in an advanced online module, which is currently being developed. RMIT's next RAP will also continue to evolve the University's approach to cultural training for staff.

RMIT stated that since the commencement of their most current RAP (early 2017), 2,330 members of RMIT have engaged with cultural awareness training since. This training is currently delivered over 3.5 hours, face-to-face by the Koorie Heritage Trust. Colleges and Portfolios have set targets for all staff to complete the training and this will form standard practice into the future. In 2017, there were 25 workshops with 1,731 staff completing the training (compared to 45 staff in 2016). By the end of 2018, all staff members should have participated in the training.

As mentioned above, a mandatory online cultural competence module is being developed for RMIT staff. In addition, specific executive-level training is being developed which executive staff will complete once available.

### ***Example from the University of Southern Queensland***

The University of South Queensland (USQ) encourages employees to engage in cultural learning opportunities to increase their understanding and appreciation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, histories, cultures and achievements. The 'Share our Pride program', available through Reconciliation Australia, is linked to USQ's professional development program and is designed to take staff on an awareness journey which, in turn, supports the goals outlined in the RAP 2015-2017.

Although not mandatory, USQ offers senior managers and other staff a regular On-Country Learning Journey at its Toowoomba campus to engage staff in local Aboriginal narratives of 'place' and provide them with a chance to 'try on different lenses' as part of the need to strengthen relationships. USQ is continuing to work in embedding cultural competency in University governance, teaching and learning, research, Human Resources and community engagement, and stated it is committed to building on the foundations that have been laid.

### ***Example from Victoria University***

Victoria University described its 'Our People and Culture Department' providing cultural awareness training. The Yulendj Wurrung mandatory online training is a 2-hour series of modules available to all staff through the University's VU Develop system. This training was designed and developed by the Aboriginal staff of Moondani Balluk Indigenous Academic unit and covers pre-invasion to contemporary Aboriginal society, issues and concerns. It also covers whiteness, invasion, dispossession and dispersal and the impact of colonial policy and practices.

## **RESPECTFUL AND WELCOMING UNIVERSITY ENVIRONMENTS**

Under the UA Strategy, universities have committed to the continued development of learning and working environments that are 'respectful and welcoming' to support the social and emotional wellbeing of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff and students.

A respectful and welcoming environment is essential to make Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff and students feel safe and welcome. It is also essential to foster a greater sense of connection and collaboration between Indigenous and non-Indigenous cultures.

- Universities described a range of initiatives which seek to support students and staff. These covered:
  - cultural diversity and racism policies;
  - Indigenous specific HR and Counselling staff;
  - complaints handling units;
  - Indigenous specific student service staff;
  - welcome and acknowledgement of country practices (also on websites);
  - displays of Indigenous symbols and artwork in strategic locations;
  - purpose built spaces;
  - regular commemoration of important dates and celebratory activities; and
  - scholarships for accommodation, cost of living expenses, study materials and books etc.



The major announcement late in 2018 of Australia's first Indigenous university residential college – to be built by the University Technology of Sydney (UTS) – is an innovative and exciting prospect for the entire sector. The residence, expected to be one of the most significant of its kind in the world, “will focus on celebrating Indigenous culture, with public spaces devoted to events and education.”<sup>9</sup>

The residential college will primarily be for Indigenous students and seek to remove one of the biggest barriers to participation in higher education. The securing of accommodation and the security to study without financial pressure is considered a key barrier to success in Indigenous higher education – which would be addressed by this initiative. Importantly, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students will also be hosts rather than guests in such a university facility.

This type of major long-term investment is one that should be encouraged and replicated. There are also other promising practices being implemented across the sector that seek to remove barriers to university participation and make universities a welcoming and respectful environment.

### ***Example from The University of Notre Dame Australia***

The University of Notre Dame Australia (Notre Dame) stated it takes a holistic approach to the support of the social and emotional wellbeing of all its students and staff. It says its strategies and actions set out to lift the career aspirations and goals amongst Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students through university events, career expos and university learning and teaching.

The university has consolidated its approach to formal and informal recognition of the traditional owners of the lands on which Notre Dame's campuses are located. The university's public profile also proudly acknowledges that “the Fremantle Campus is located on Nyungar country, the Broome Campus is located on Yawuru country and the Sydney Campus is located on Cadigal country”.

Welcomes to Country are frequently conducted by Elders of the community and Acknowledgements of Country are undertaken by Indigenous staff as appropriate. Senior and executive leaders of the University have also introduced Acknowledgements of Country at School and Divisional meetings, Graduation events, Open and Orientation days.

Notre Dame stated it continually embraces and encourages all staff and students to participate in cultural activities and events that are held yearly. Aboriginal artwork is displayed in all university buildings across the three campuses, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander flags are flown each day with the Australian flag, and other promotional materials are prominent in offices and within Schools. The Manjaree room opened in 2017, providing a key focal point for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture on the university's Fremantle campus.

Notre Dame also stated it has robust policies and guidelines relating to incidences of racism on and off its campuses. These are publicly available and the university has clearly identified support offices who provide assistance to any student seeking to make a complaint or access support services.

### ***Example from The University of Southern Queensland***

The University of Southern Queensland (USQ) defined respectful and welcoming environments as values that enable Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, whether students, staff or members of the communities, to have a sense of safety and belonging on university campuses. This belonging is evidenced in the Indigenisation of the university's physical environment.

For example, the Gumbi Gumbi Cultural Gardens at USQ Toowoomba highlight the University's commitment to developing a better understanding of local Aboriginal heritage and acknowledging the

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<sup>9</sup> <https://www.smh.com.au/education/uts-to-open-australia-s-first-indigenous-residential-college-20181213-p50lxl.html>.



cultures and contribution that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples make to Australia. The gardens are situated at the front entrance to the University's Toowoomba campus and received awards in 2015 for Gardening Gold Leaf Excellence from the Toowoomba Regional Council. Gardens are also planned at USQ's Ipswich campus.

### ***Example from Federation University Australia***

Federation University Australia (FedUni) cited the presence of the Aboriginal Education Centre (AEC) on each of its Australian campuses. This is a specialist area in the university that provides culturally safe environments for Indigenous students as well as promoting Aboriginal cultures and resources to the wider university. The AEC is also proactive in developing relationships with the student engagement and support service areas within the University. The purpose of this is twofold: to meet the students' social and academic needs and, assist in student course/pathway progression towards completion and employment.

FedUni also described its strategy on naming of university buildings and spaces. In 2017, the new student commons area on the Mt Helen campus was named Gnarrwirring Karung, meaning 'Learning Place'. In 2018, a bush tucker garden was named Wayn-Gurr Derrk meaning 'Good Ground'. This naming strategy has been consolidated and documented in a broader strategy for all future designs.

Welcome to Country ceremonies are now included as part of university graduations, and an Acknowledgment to Country is now a formalised norm in all university meetings and events. Various promotional material such as "cultural protocols" cards and banners have been developed to assist and guide FedUni staff on cultural respect and also to create a welcoming and embracing environment for Indigenous students and staff.

### ***Example from Bond University***

Bond University's (Bond) Nyombil Indigenous Student Support Centre is the central focus for the university's Indigenous community and provides supportive learning environment for its Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students. Academically, the centre assists students with their transition into the higher education environment, understanding university life and supporting their studies. Culturally, the centre promotes engagement by assisting students and the university to connect with the local Aboriginal and Torres Strait community. The centre is adept at assisting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students with unique challenges and cultural differences that they may face in moving from remote communities and undertaking university study. The university stated it supports the emotional and cultural wellbeing of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students through the centre in the unique way it operates as both a learning and as a social space, which encourages students to work together and to share information and experiences.

Bond is also home to Australia's largest private collection of Indigenous art on public display. The unique collection features the works of some of Australia's most celebrated and revered Indigenous artists. Free tours of the Corrigan Collection are available to share these artworks with a wide audience and to raise awareness of Australia's rich indigenous culture.

### ***Example from James Cook University***

James Cook University (JCU) described how it worked with architects, Indigenous staff and community members to re-establish its Indigenous Centres in Townsville and Cairns with designs more akin to a traditional sense of place and family environments. These buildings now have common facilities for students and staff in shared arrangements and included a vegetable garden for use by staff and students. JCU also leads all its major events with the Acknowledgment of Country and all graduation ceremonies start with Welcomes from the Traditional Owners.

JCU condemns racist behaviour and their policy documents provide context for staff and students. These documents set the standards for what is and what is not acceptable across campuses.

All senior JCU staff have undertaken mandatory training in a range of areas including unconscious-bias training. All Indigenous Education and Research Centre staff have undertaken loss and grief workshops, and student support staff have all undertaken the mental health first-aid training so that they are better able to manage situations with students.

## CULTURAL CAPABILITIES OF GRADUATES

The importance of embedding Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander knowledge and perspectives into schooling and higher education is becoming increasingly more apparent. Doing so benefits both students (Indigenous and non-Indigenous) and society. The benefits for Indigenous students may appear obvious, that is that they are more likely to identify with the curriculum and therefore engage more meaningfully in education. However, it is important that all Australians are exposed to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander viewpoints, history, knowledge and cultures.

The Behrendt review stated:

*The Panel considers it imperative that graduates across a range of faculties are exposed to and build their understanding of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander contemporary issues and perspectives. Such knowledge will help to equip them as professionals to better meet the needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and organisations with whom they will be doing business and to whom they will be providing services.<sup>10</sup>*

Survey responses were mixed on the level of engagement for current university students with Indigenous specific curriculum. Aside from Indigenous specific courses, which are offered at most institutions, most universities reported that areas of health studies contained the most levels of engagement with Indigenous curriculum.

One university stated:

*The university currently has only limited processes and mechanisms to ensure our students engage meaningfully with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander content and knowledge. This is an area where much work needs to be undertaken.*

Some universities indicated they have an Indigenous graduate attribute however most claimed to have processes or plans in place seeking to ensure Indigenous curriculum is being embedded into every course. Similarly, many universities acknowledged that this is an area that has recently or is currently subject to review.

Amongst the varied responses included descriptions of:

- compulsory online modules for all commencing undergraduate students. The modules are cultural literacy resources to develop a threshold understanding of Indigenous Australian insights to prepare all students to engage in an informed and meaningful way in Indigenous Australian perspectives.

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<sup>10</sup> Above n 3, page 14.

- an Indigenous Connected Curriculum Learning and Teaching Framework to guide embedding of content and perspectives into all programs across the university. Some universities noted UAs guiding principles and framework for Indigenous Cultural Competency informed development of their institutional guides.
- endorsement of curriculum design policies by the Academic Board to ensure all students encounter and engage with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural content – developed in partnership with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people – as integral parts of their course.
- each of the faculty colleges engaging members of the Indigenous community to contribute Indigenous knowledge and perspectives to learning programs.
- recent undertakings of university-wide curriculum reviews to address this matter – leading to programs which provide students with the opportunity to work on real-world projects that have been prioritised by Indigenous communities.
- appointment of Indigenous staff to establish to lead (ongoing) projects such as the Indigenous Graduate Attribute project.
- employment of Indigenous Curriculum and Pedagogy Consultant (and however else described) to connect with faculties and provide expertise.

### ***Example from Charles Sturt University***

Charles Sturt University (CSU) uses the Indigenous Australian Content in Courses Policy to advance its work to have all students encounter and meaningfully engage with Indigenous content throughout their course. As of 2017, there were 71 subjects approved by the Indigenous Board of Studies across all three Faculties: Arts and Education; Science; Business Justice and Behavioural Science.

CSU described that when a subject or course is reviewed, one of the criteria looked at is its compliance with the policy. Where it is found to be not yet compliant, resources are available from Gulaay and from the School of Indigenous Australian Studies (SIAS) to assist with the development of this. Two core Indigenous Australian Studies subjects are available that are included in many courses. Alternatively, where appropriate, content will be included by the creation of a hybrid subject that is co-taught by the school and by SIAS.

CSU's Indigenous Board of Studies (IBS) plays a key role, ensuring that all proposed content fits within the policy guidelines and is in alignment with this Graduate Learning Outcome and approving subjects with Indigenous content incorporated in them as well as monitoring the movement towards the end goal of ensuring that all courses at CSU include relevant and appropriate Indigenous content.

### ***Example from Griffith University***

Griffith University (Griffith) has a dedicated graduate attribute aspiring to ensure its graduates are 'culturally capable when working with First Australians'. Griffith involves a broad range of stakeholders in the development and monitoring of culturally sensitive materials for embedding in curricula, experiences and learning activities. This process includes the utilisation of a longstanding council of elders that provide mentorship and advice.

Two specific examples of embedding Indigenous culture and knowledge into subjects include:

### **1. Embedding cultural knowledges and competency with a business course**

The innovative business course adopts a storytelling teaching pedagogy to enhance the cultural competency of students when engaging with First Australians and included elements such as informal yarning, sharing family journey stories, as well as visual art and critical reflection. By engaging with these practices, students are provided with an opportunity to become conscious of the following:

- Aboriginal knowledges;
- what they do not know;
- what they are already familiar with; and
- what they already feel.

Videos providing useful information on the content, outcomes and transferrable lessons for future course design can be viewed online by [clicking here](#).

### **2. Connecting students to First Peoples communities through collaborative music making**

This course provides students with an opportunity to collaborate with community organisations in remote Australia, enabling students to engage in cross-cultural learning experiences by working with Elders and artists on community-led arts projects. Videos providing useful information on the content, outcomes and transferrable lessons for future course design can be viewed online by [clicking here](#).

### ***Example from Monash University***

Monash University (Monash) indicated a key focus area for the future is embedding Indigenous knowledge into curriculum and stated it is committed to changing views and attitudes through student learning, unpacking themes of racism, disparities, partnership, engagement, reconciliation, native title and treaty. Cross-cultural competence is a graduate attribute and Monash aspires to enable all graduates to engage analytically in complex and multifaceted discussions on Indigenous topics and the historical and contemporary issues in Australian society and beyond.

Current examples include the Gukwonderuk Indigenous Health Unit being informed by the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Curriculum Framework and an Interdisciplinary Indigenous Health Curriculum Committee. The Unit facilitates the development of teaching resources; professional development of educators; and educational research. The Unit also provides an annual professional development day, as well as an online short course on teaching Indigenous health. The online course allows access flexibility particularly for clinical educators in health services, sessional educators and educators located in rural settings.

The Monash Indigenous Studies Centre also runs a field school in which Elders and community members teach 'on country.' The Yanyuwa and Garrwa animations developed through this work have also been included on the Endangered Languages Project website. There has been an increased use of the animations within the teaching at Monash University. They are used regularly in the teaching by staff of the Monash Indigenous Centre, but increasingly also in Linguistics, Anthropology and Religious Studies, and a number of Law faculty students have also been using them to highlight issues associated with land rights and native title law. Monash indicated that activities such as this program might play an important part of developing graduate attributes in other faculties in the future.

## SECTION SUMMARY

- Survey responses did not demonstrate formal Indigenous cultural training for senior executives as being mandatory. However, almost all universities provide specific online and/or face-to-face Indigenous cultural training for staff. Whilst almost always provided as part of induction, most of this training is not mandatory.
- Universities are making conscious efforts to create welcoming environments for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people – including through physical places and facilities and through the engagement of cultural advisers. Even so, discrimination experienced by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people continues to occur across society.
- The majority of universities did not currently have a formal Indigenous graduate attribute at the time of the survey collection. However, there were some positive examples of embedding Indigenous curriculum into mainstream subjects.

## 6 UNIVERSITY WORKFORCE

Under the UA Strategy, universities have committed to:

- include Indigenous higher education, research and employment as priority areas in core policy documents, including institutional strategic and business plans;
- ensure that additional workload expected of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff is recognised in workload planning and in performance assessments and promotions processes

Whilst workforce targets are not explicitly listed in the strategy, UA encourages all universities to grow their numbers through recruitment and other practices to make universities an attractive workplace for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. The development of workforce requirements in the ISSP was developed in consultation with UA and UA welcomes institutional initiatives to increase both academic and non-academic professional participation in universities.

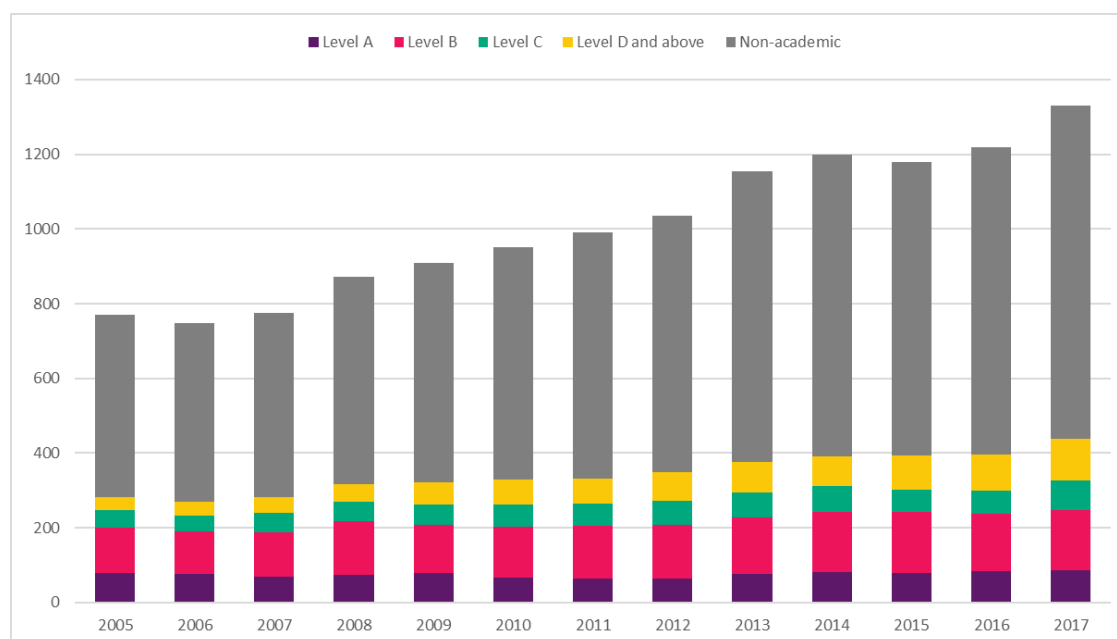
### SECTOR WIDE STATISTICS

This section provides a summary on the number of Indigenous staff currently working in the university sector and the number of Indigenous postgraduate research students. Note that Indigenous staff data in this section refers to staff headcount and only includes full-time and fractional full-time staff.

#### INDIGENOUS STAFF: ACADEMIC VS NON-ACADEMIC

Figure 13 shows the total number of Indigenous staff has increased by 72.6 per cent since 2005, from 771 staff to 1331 staff in 2017. Of these, around one-third are academic staff. The number of Indigenous academic staff has increased by 55 per cent over the sample period, from 282 in 2005 to 437 in 2017.

**Figure 13: Number of Indigenous staff by duties classification, 2005 to 2017**

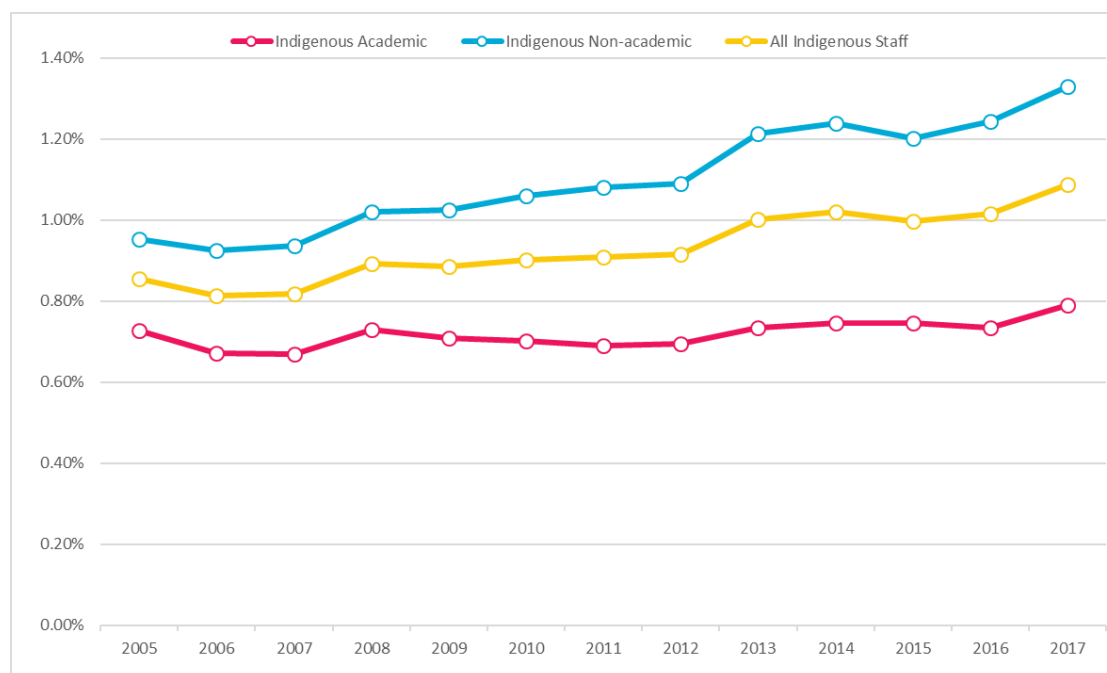


Source: DET 2018, Unpublished HEIMS data.

Despite the strong growth in the number of Indigenous staff, Figure 14 shows the proportion of Indigenous academic staff only increased marginally from 0.73 per cent in 2005 to 0.79 per cent in 2017. There has been some limited 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 0.95 per cent in 2005 to 1.33 per cent in 2017.

In 2017, only 1.09 per cent of Australian university staff—both academic and non-academic—were from an Indigenous background, significantly below the working-age population parity of 3.1 per cent.

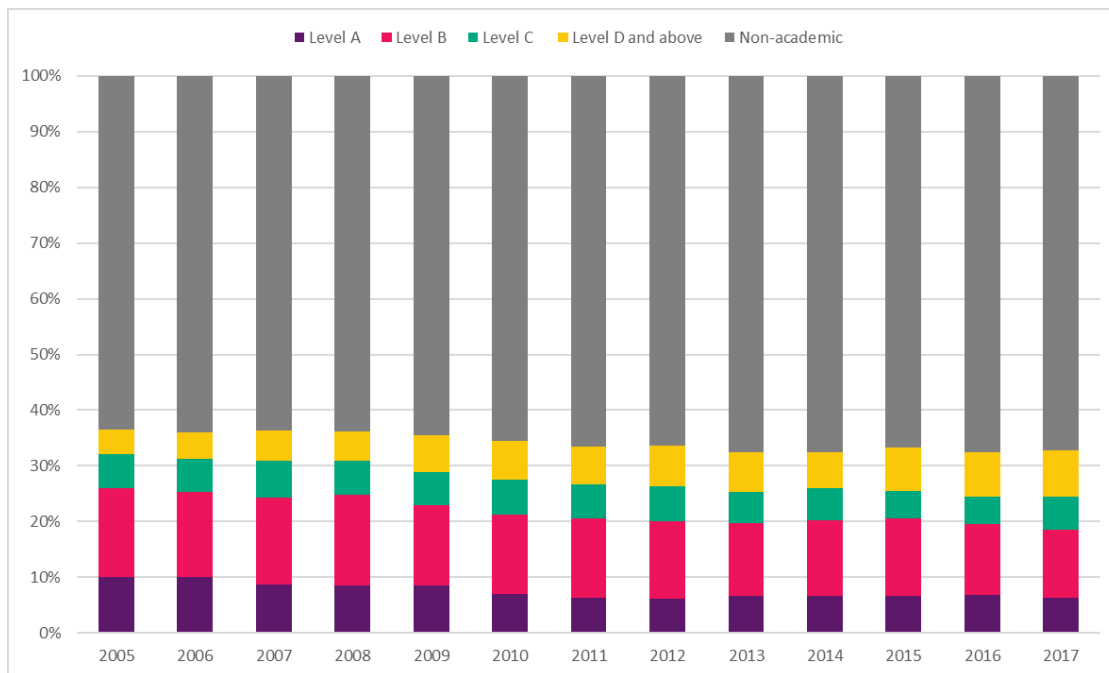
**Figure 14: Share of Indigenous staff, 2005 to 2017**



Source: DET 2018, Unpublished HEIMS data.

Figure 15 shows the share of Indigenous staff in non-academic roles has increased from 63.4 per cent in 2005 to 67.2 per cent in 2017, while the share of Indigenous staff in academic Level A position has declined from 10.1 per cent to 6.4 per cent over the period. In 2017, 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 15: Proportion of Indigenous staff by duties classification**



Source: DET 2018, Unpublished HEIMS data.

### Comparisons to non-Indigenous staff

In 2017, a greater proportion of Indigenous staff were women, over 40 years old and in lower academic positions compared with non-Indigenous staff. This share has remained relatively unchanged since 2005.

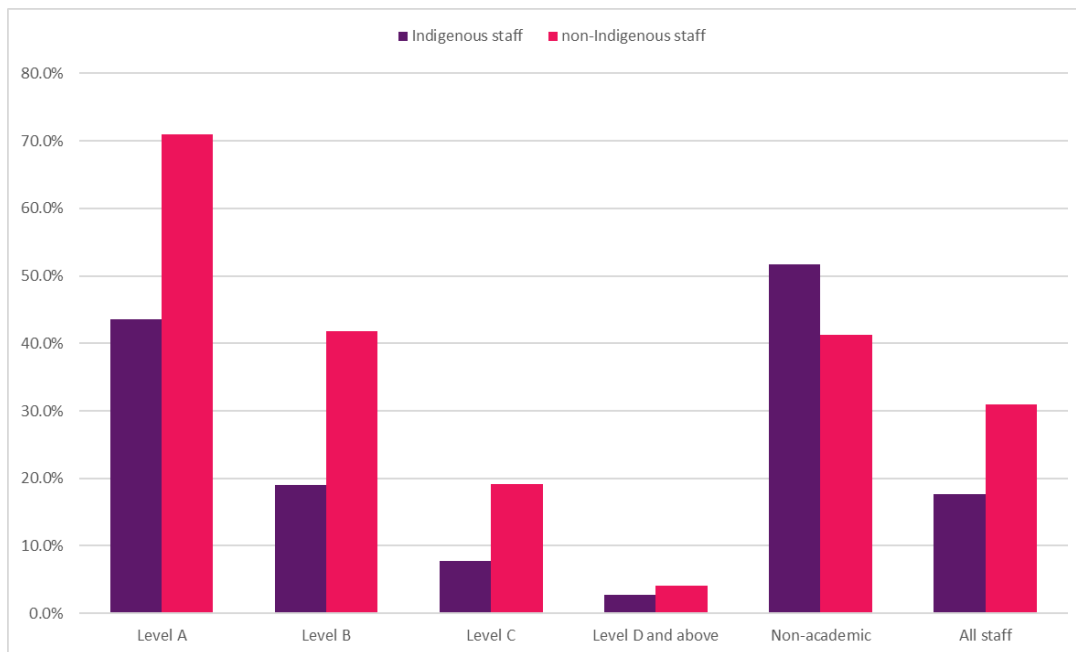
### Age

Figure 16 shows Indigenous staff are more likely to be older than non-Indigenous staff. In 2017, only 17.6 per cent of Indigenous staff were aged under 40 compared to 31 per cent of non-Indigenous staff.

The share of Indigenous staff aged under 40 are significantly lower than non-Indigenous staff for staff employed in academic Level A, Level B and Level C positions. Nonetheless, in 2017, 51.7 per cent of Indigenous staff employed in non-academic roles were aged under 40, compared to 41.2 per cent of non-Indigenous staff.



**Figure 16: Share of staff aged under 40 by duties classification, 2017**

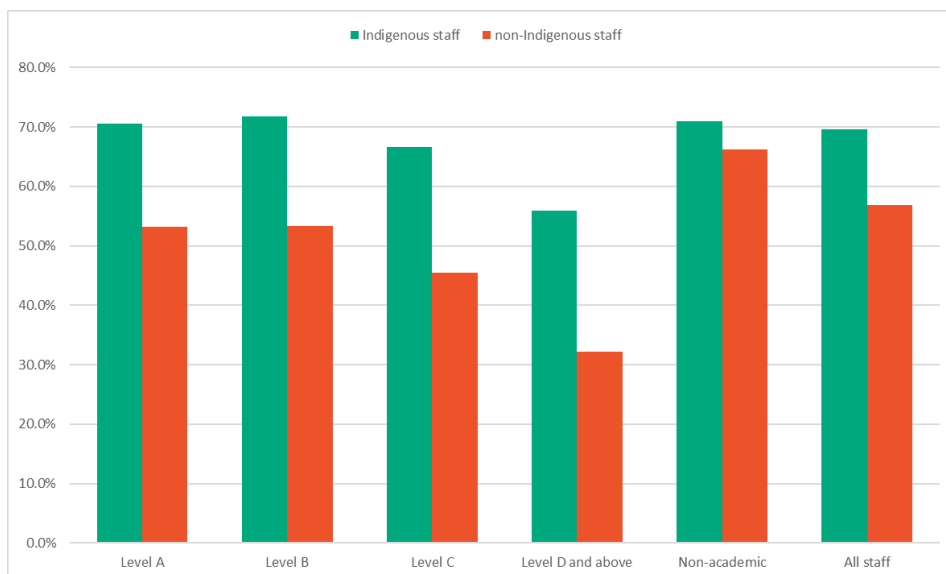


Source: DET 2018, Unpublished HEIMS data.

## Gender

Figure 17 shows Indigenous staff are more likely to be female compared to non-Indigenous staff. In 2017, 69.6 per cent of Indigenous staff were female compared to 56.8 per cent of non-Indigenous staff.

**Figure 17: Share of female staff by duties classification, 2017**



Source: DET 2018, Unpublished HEIMS data.

## Academic functions

Figure 18 shows that Indigenous academic staff are more likely to be employed in teaching and research and teaching-only positions and less likely in research-only function. In 2017, most Indigenous staff were employed in teaching and research function (61.5 per cent), declining from 80.6 per cent in 2005. The proportion of Indigenous academic staff employed in teaching-only and research-only function increased from 5.6 per cent and 13.9 per cent respectively in 2005 to 14.2 and 24.3 per cent respectively in 2017.

This compares to only 10.8 per cent of non-Indigenous academic staff employed in teaching-only function; 32 per cent in research-only function and the remaining 57.2 per cent in teaching and research function in 2017.

**Figure 18: Share of staff by academic functions, 2005, 2010 and 2017**



## Duties classification

In 2017, Indigenous academic staff were proportionally over-represented at below lecturer (Level A) (19.5 per cent, compared to 17.8 per cent for non-Indigenous) and lecturer (Level B) (37.3 per cent, compared to 30.5 per cent for non-Indigenous).

In contrast, Indigenous academic staff were proportionally under-represented at senior lecturer (Level C) (17.8 per cent, compared to 23 per cent for non-Indigenous) and above senior lecturer (Level D and above) (25.4 per cent, compared to 28.7 per cent for non-Indigenous). Nonetheless, it is important to note that the share of Indigenous staff in senior academic roles—Level D and above—has doubled since 2005, from 12.1 per cent to 25.4 per cent.

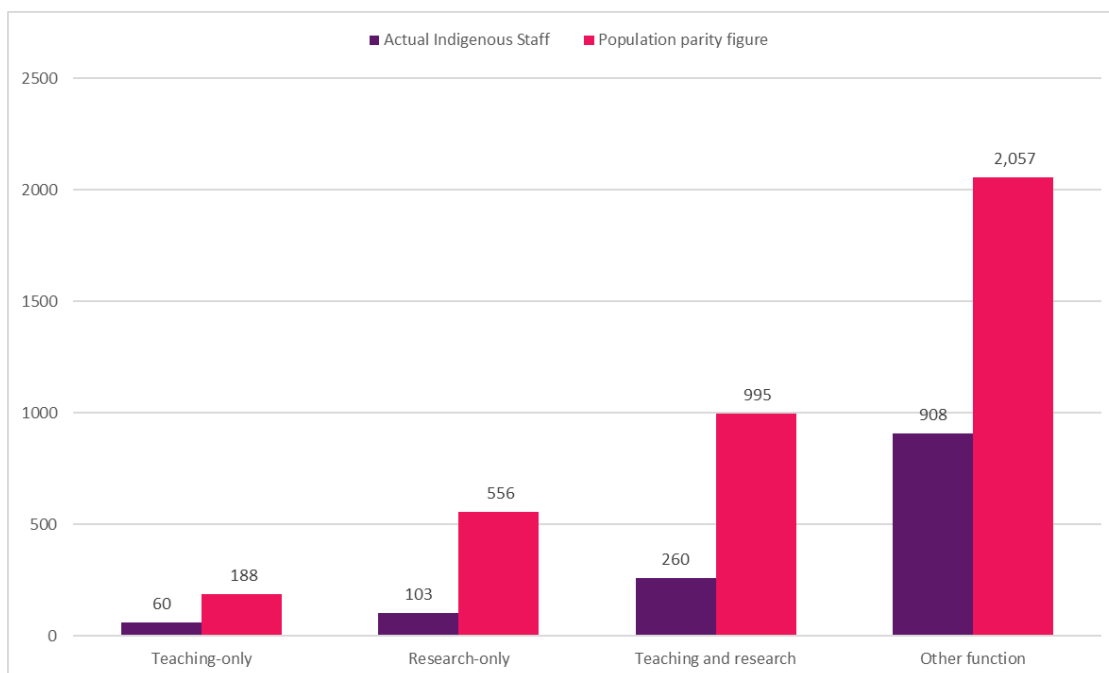
**Figure 19: Share of staff by academic duties classification, 2005, 2010 and 2017**



### Population parity – staff

In 2017, 423 Indigenous staff were employed in teaching or research function in Australian universities, representing 0.75 per cent of all staff employed in teaching or research function. Whilst it is not a specific action under the UA Strategy, to have reached population parity of 3.1 per cent in 2017, an additional 1,316 Indigenous academic staff would need to have been employed (see Figure 20). Similarly, the sector would need to employ an additional 128 Indigenous staff in teaching-only function, 453 in research-only function and 735 in teaching and research function in 2017.

**Figure 20: Indigenous staff, actual vs population parity figures, 2017**



UA hopes positive and demonstrated efforts in a range of areas will translate into universities becoming employers of choice for more Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. For example:

- a commitment to cultural competence and safety (discussed elsewhere in this report);
- raising the profile of the university's commitment to reconciliation through a growing number of Indigenous events held on and off campus (discussed elsewhere in this report);
- growing number of partnerships with Indigenous specific organisations (discussed elsewhere in this report).

## WORKFORCE STRATEGIES AND PLANS

As discussed previously, it is promising that many universities reported conducting a review of their Indigenous Workforce and Employment strategies since 2017. This is, in part, due to the ISSP guidelines requiring universities have in place by 2018 effective Indigenous workforce strategies that will increase measures for recruitment, retention, promotion and development of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff.

This explicitly includes plans to increase the number of such staff to three percent of the total workforce and for the employment of at least one Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander person in a senior executive role. As noted above, whilst UA encourages its members to grow their Indigenous workforce, it also acknowledges the population demographics of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples throughout Australia and is supportive of strategies that are realistic and representative of their communities.

### *What strategies are currently being used?*

Universities are implementing a range of strategies to increase workforce participation. These strategies and actions cover:

- Using targeted job search boards and **Indigenous-specific media** (eg Koori Mail) to increase the awareness of the university as an inclusive employer of Indigenous Australians and to contribute to CDU's efforts to establish itself as an Indigenous Employer of Choice.
- Entering into collaborative partnerships with consultancies to establish Indigenous **mentoring services** to create Indigenous leadership pipelines from middle to senior management across the Indigenous workforce.
- Similarly, many employment plans refer to **growing their own** and for example developing and establishing a professional/technical intern and graduate employment program. This could also involve promoting and support the update of cadetships and traineeship schemes within Divisions/Colleges to Indigenous students.
- **Career planning** – with managers and HR to identify opportunity external to their business units, faculties or portfolios.
- Establishment of **databases which maintains a register** of potential Academic and Professional/Technical workforce participants.
- Attendance and participation at job and careers expos that specifically target Indigenous Australians.

It was encouraging to hear some universities spread workforce participation targets across all faculties and divisions. Each of those faculties and divisions would then be responsible for reporting against annual outcomes to Indigenous Committees and other DVC/VC level mechanisms. As with most strategic targets, however, the success of such approach is linked to the overall presence of 'whole-of-university' approach at that institution and without a strong cultural commitment to such a philosophy and accountability to KPIs, the impact of such approach is varied.

For example, some universities reported there being no formal process of holding colleges/divisions or schools accountable for Indigenous targets. The informal nature of how colleges/divisions or schools improve outcomes in Indigenous higher education, research workforce and community outreach results can also result in varying levels of improvements across different areas of universities.

## WORKLOAD PLANNING

Responsibility for creating, maintaining and monitoring university Indigenous policies, mechanisms and community relationships, as well as pastoral care of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students and employees, often falls disproportionately on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff also often informally provide pastoral support to a wider family network through kinship and support others in the workplace and community dealing with loss, pain, grief, anxiety and – conversely – in joyful and triumphant occasions. Survey responses indicated that the additional pastoral workload expected of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff, not specific to universities, can at times be a large emotional and physical burden.

Under the UA strategy, universities have committed to ensure that, where additional workload is expected of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff, this is recognised in workload planning and such workload is considered in a non-prejudicial way in performance assessments and promotions.

Overwhelmingly, universities reported that enterprise agreements granted additional leave recognition for Aboriginal staff to attend specific community days/celebrations and undertake additional pastoral care commitments. These include:

- family leave;
- carer's responsibilities;
- bereavement;
- ceremonial or religious obligations;
- domestic violence; and
- leave to sit on community to sit on panels, boards or other contingency leave.

Interestingly, some universities reported cases of extending these leave entitlements to non-Indigenous staff who were required to undertake Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural responsibilities as part of their role description. The value to the individual, community and university of a whole of having university staff attend cultural ceremonies was widely recognised and often promoted by universities.

Whilst this type of additional leave is important, in part to recognise the additional obligations for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff, they are distinct and separate to workload planning initiatives. Workload planning initiatives and strategies are there to specifically address the increased workload of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff – which can lead to unmanageable workloads and unachievable performance outcomes.

Further, some universities reported that whilst these leave entitlements are available, they are typically under-reported. It was frequently acknowledged that this is an area that requires further attention.

Some of the examples of workload performance initiatives included:

- negotiating conditions and adjusting the workload in the role or level in advance of entering into employment contracts;
- reflecting workload planning in non-employment contract documents, such as RAPs or workload planning documents between supervisors, that can lead to time off in lieu;

- recognising Indigenous committee membership as an additional element of their workload and therefore making appropriate accommodations;
- confidential counselling services, such as the Employee Assistance Program (EAP), which is designed to enhance the emotional, mental and general psychological well-being of employees and their immediate family;
- commitments to an Indigenous language allowance promoting Indigenous staff to undertake a formal Indigenous language course of study; and
- further, some universities highlighted that recent focus on spreading building senior Indigenous academic leadership (and Indigenous academic progression) within faculties and in supporting the career progression of Indigenous professional staff will also ensure that additional workload is distributed evenly and that capacity is built at all levels.

Flexible working arrangements such as part-time work, job shares and additional non-standard leave types (eg family leave, volunteering leave, reduced working weeks scheme) were also cited as a strategy to foster improved Indigenous employment outcomes.

## PERFORMANCE AND OPPORTUNITY

Whilst strategies to address workload issues demonstrates a key challenge and area for improvement, survey responses were positive on consideration of this additional workload in performance reviews. Recognising and rewarding a wide range of activities and contributions in its performance review and promotion policies and procedures, including the community engagement in various forms undertaken by Indigenous staff was highlighted as an important step in the right direction.

For example, some universities indicated that depending on an individual's employment status, either as an academic or professional staff member, performance and achievements in areas mentioned above will be considered in routine HR processes including promotion applications. These matters could also be considered as part of regular work plan reviews, performance review and identification of future professional and career development opportunities for all staff.

It was promising to see instances of formally acknowledging additional workload of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff in performance assessments and promotion processes, such as in RAPs. However, many institutions still demonstrated that additional efforts may be need to formalise such acknowledgement in performance reviews and implement the practices.

A small number of universities highlighted an opportunity to have paid leave-of-absence to work in nominated communities such as Jawun. Jawun is a partnership model which emphasised working with Indigenous people, rather than simply providing services to Indigenous communities.

## DEVELOPMENT OF NON-INDIGENOUS STAFF

Under the UA Strategy, universities are encouraged to develop the skills of non-Indigenous staff to enable them to share the extra workload currently delegated to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff. The offering of cultural competency training is distinct and separate to the issue of workload sharing across the institution.

Building capacity across institutions to, for example, undertake pastoral or community engagement work that traditionally might have only been the responsibility of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff is an important next step. Whilst some universities reported for example, where pastoral responsibilities were typically led by Aboriginal and Torres Strait islander staff there it is an expectation that this responsibility is shared across every faculty and division, this was not a common occurrence. It was also reported that a process of collaboration between Indigenous units and non-Indigenous staff

prior to embarking on activities involving community engagement, student initiatives or research plan that involves Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people was a successful practice.

Further, many institutions highlighted that this current approach ensures that services are provided in a culturally appropriate manner. It is acknowledged that not all pastoral or community engagement work can be successfully delegated to non-Indigenous staff. Knowing what roles and tasks can and what can't be shared or taken up by non-Indigenous staff can also be a difficult task and highly dependent on the specific circumstances.

Whilst UA acknowledges agrees that the current model is necessary to ensure the successful delivery of culturally appropriate support, this should not be used as a justification to limit the development of non-Indigenous staff to perform as many responsibilities as is culturally appropriate to the circumstance.

Further, the continued investment into the development of non-Indigenous staff also addresses an issue that can arise for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff at any workplace. That is the tendency for staff to get 'pigeon holed' into Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander specific roles even where this might not necessarily relate to the individual's long-term area of interest.

That being said, there was a general acknowledgement that this is an area that would also attract future attention and some examples of current efforts to actively increase capacity of non-Indigenous professional and academic staff across the university.

### ***Example from Deakin University***

Deakin University (Deakin) stated it's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Higher Education Agenda 2016-2020 seeks to educate teaching staff in Indigenous pedagogy for teaching Indigenous Studies and students effectively, including developing appropriate content and learning resources, teaching strategies and assessment methods. This is achieved through:

- establishing a team to lead this work across the Faculties in partnership with the Institute of Koorie Education so that Deakin Cultural Competency is Deakin run and managed;
- including cultural competency education in the standard training program for all student peer to peer programs (mentors, hosts, library rovers, IT help, PASS, tutors etc);
- developing a focussed approach to employability for all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students;
- building further Work Integrated Learning placements in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander settings for students across Faculties;
- providing learning advice for all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students that is cultural appropriate and available on all campuses; and
- reporting twice yearly against this Agenda, as well as against the Reconciliation Action Plan and the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Employment Strategy, once approved.

Deakin stated it is currently developing professional development opportunities for University staff in advanced Indigenous cultural competency, with priority for investigators and supervisors of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander research, Student Services and other first point of engagement colleagues. The University educates senior management to support and work effectively with Indigenous staff and trainees. In addition, Deakin University is creating Indigenous staff awards that celebrate and reward the achievements.



### ***Example from the Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology***

The Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology (RMIT) indicated it has a number of non-Indigenous academic staff that champion the cause of engaging with the wider Koorie community about their discipline areas. Examples include academics in Land and Conservation, Engineering, Allied Health. Success is monitored via the subject rating provided by students in course feedback surveys and associated NPS.

Ngarara Willim (RMIT's Indigenous unit) staff have also developed a 'red flag' system that engages with program coordinators to identify any issues with the Indigenous student cohort in a timely manner. This has created a very important opportunity for non-Indigenous academic staff to proactively engage with their Indigenous students to ensure success and to support retention. This process has created a practice based need to develop staff skills in a very specific and targeted way that is linked to real world outcomes. This program is currently a pilot program so no evaluation has been conducted to date, but it is expected to have a positive impact on student experience and on retention and completion rates.

## **SECTION SUMMARY**

- Whilst from a very low base, the Indigenous university workforce is increasing, particularly the professional workforce. The level of senior academics also continues to increase — doubling since 2005 — but still is proportionately below non-Indigenous senior academics.
- Further time is needed to fully implement Indigenous workforce strategies. Whilst there are obstacles at the local level to achieving three per cent population parity targets required of the Government's ISSP program – sector-wide performance is likely to increase as a result.
- Survey responses indicated there is still a need for greater distinction between workload planning and cultural leave. The former requires mechanisms and processes that actively manage the additional workload required of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff. One strategy to address this is a greater emphasis on the development of non-Indigenous staff to be capable of performing some culturally-appropriate activities. There is scope and opportunity for further improvement in this — which is also a key factor in a university's ability to recruit and retain Indigenous staff.
- Universities generally indicated that the additional workload required of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff is recognised in performance review and promotion opportunities.

## 7 PARTNERSHIPS AND ENGAGEMENT

Under the UA Strategy, universities have committed to:

- build robust, respectful and collaborative partnerships between themselves and the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities that they serve; and
- take a community leadership role in promoting Indigenous higher education and building opportunities for wider community engagement in it.

This is underpinned by, among other things, the principle that true partnerships between universities and the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities within and outside the university are essential to deliver the best results.

Partnerships and engagement is an area that looks increasingly positive as universities seek to engage more deeply with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, organisations and other stakeholders to advance Indigenous higher education.

### EXTERNAL PARTNERSHIPS AND COLLABORATION

Universities were asked to cite some of the external partnerships (with other education providers, community groups, Elders or others) they collaborate with, as well as describe the nature of partnerships they have with Indigenous-focused or Indigenous-run organisations. These partnerships and collaborations spanned business, industry, Government, education providers, Aboriginal organisations and community groups across the states, the nation and internationally.

The nature of these partnerships and collaborations vary. They include philanthropic partnerships, financial sponsorship, research collaborations, graduate opportunities, professional and career development, teaching and learning, community education and community engagement. Partnerships and collaborations can operate university wide, as well as at the faculty, school or program level. Universities collaborate and partner with the following.

- Elders – for example through the Elder-in-Residence programs which provide guidance and teaching of Indigenous culture as well as playing a pivotal role in the governance structures and leadership within Indigenous education at the university.
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities – through formal councils that provide ongoing advice and cultural mentorship, as well as specific relationships that allow for placements in regional and remote Indigenous communities (such as health related clinical placements).
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations such as the Aurora Education Foundation, the Aboriginal Chambers of Commerce and Industry, Supply Nation, Jawun, Reconciliation Australia, Aboriginal Land Councils and many more.
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander heritage councils and cultural materials conversation groups.
- Other education providers – for example with the cross development and delivery of outreach programs such as AIME.
- Local schools, state government education agencies and VET (TAFE) providers.
- Local and City councils, other various government agencies and Ministers at Federal and State levels.
- A variety of community groups and health networks – such as PCYCs, Headspace, local hospitals and health services etc.

- Sporting organisations – such as NRL, Netball, AFL sporting clubs etc.
- Media entities – such as Koori Mail Newspaper.
- Private businesses, such as ANZ, BHP and Rio Tinto – offering programs including scholarships, apprenticeships and cadetships.

Meaningful partnerships with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, similar to those outlined in sections 2 and 3, are critical because they foster a greater understanding of Indigenous issues and help universities implement policies and programs based on principles of social justice and reconciliation. They also offer formal mechanisms to seek permission from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities to reinforce and celebrate elements of culture. Universities should look to each other for positive examples of council of Elders and Elders-in-residence programs.

Partnerships with private business and non-Indigenous offer the human and financial capital to help create societal change as well as specific opportunities for Aboriginals and Torres Strait Islander peoples to demonstrate their talents. Some of the positive examples of private partnerships contained in survey responses demonstrate that there may be further potential opportunities across to sector for enhanced collaboration.

Some universities reported managing these relationships at the personal or individual unit level opposed to an overarching body – with little formal mechanisms in place to manage and monitor the relationships. However, other universities reported having a dedicated unit or committee for the engagement and nurturing of external partnerships. Those institutions were also more likely to be managed through MOUs, formal written agreements and contracts. Regardless of the mechanism it is worth stressing the importance of maintaining and further strengthening relationships, such as those listed above, to continue to work together to improve Indigenous higher education outcomes for students, staff and community.

### ***Combined example from The University of Queensland and Charles Darwin University***

An example of an award-winning partnership between the University of Queensland (UQ) and Charles Darwin University (CDU) was recently recognised at the 2017 Business Higher Education Round Table (BHERT) awards. The Kakadu Plum project was launched in 2010 and is a major initiative between UQ and CDU and the agriculture industries. It has transformed the native food industry and empowered Aboriginal Communities in the process. The project utilises the properties of the Kakadu Plum, which as a functional ingredient is now used by 75% of the Queensland aquaculture industry as a natural preservative, which significantly extends the retail shelf life of prawns.

*Our communities have been harvesting Kakadu Plum for thousands of years for its powerful nutritional and medicinal benefits. People around the globe are only just starting to recognise the amazing properties of this fruit. It has the highest vitamin C content of any fruit on the planet and can be beneficial both as a functional food or ingredient in cosmetic products.’<sup>11</sup>*

### ***Example from the University of Canberra***

The University of Canberra (UC) described a process of collaboration to ensure its marketing and communications campaign were culturally relevant and representative of the local Aboriginal Traditional Owners. The university engaged Gilimbbaa Creative Agency who followed their ‘Fish Trap’ framework to develop Indigenous-specific graphic elements for the university. This allowed critical and complex cultural, historical and social contexts to be incorporated into a contemporary creative process and delivered informed, employed and impactful communication outcomes. The process involved:

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<sup>11</sup> <https://naakpa.com.au/>.

- initial consultation with Elders from the United Ngunnawal Elders Council, University of Canberra Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students and staff, University of Canberra Wider staff and faculty, university of Canberra Marketing;
- input from Ngunnawal artist/s; and
- Gilimbaa creative process

The UC Indigenous Corporate image is now a framework for a university-wide approach to closing the gap between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. This process resulted in UC developing a unique Indigenous Corporate image that visually represents the University of Canberra's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander audiences. The image is embedded in the University's core style guide. The key themes represented in the final design are Culture and respect, Trust, Diversity, Collaboration and Unity, Innovation, Thinking Differently and Embedding Culture.

### ***Example from La Trobe University***

In 2015 La Trobe University created and filled the position of University Elder. This key role is responsible for providing cultural insight and strategic advice to the university and the relationship with the University Elder is managed by the Office of ISE. The University Elder also acts as an Ambassador for the University and is Co-Chair of the University's Indigenous Advisory Council.

The university has a longstanding relationship with Aunty Joy who named the Ngarn-gi Bagora Indigenous Centre in 2002, the Gamagoen Yarrbat strategy in 2015 and Tambalang Indigenous Workforce Strategy this year. Aunty Joy has officiated at many university events over 20 years and contributed to the development of Wominjeka La Trobe, an online cultural literacy module. La Trobe also described how each campus has developed relationships with their respective local traditional custodians through work by Indigenous Student Services Officers.

### ***Example from Western Sydney University***

Western Sydney University (Western Sydney) stated it engages with a wide-range of community groups; however, it's most sustained engagement with the local community is through the Elders Advisory Group. The Elders are a long-running institution of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander governance at Western Sydney.

The Elders meet regularly and are the primary mechanism for feedback from local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities as well as providing strategic advice to the university in relation to its Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander initiatives. As such, most of the Western Sydney's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander policies are considered by the Elders, alongside the University's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander research agenda, broad community engagement, and other matters. The Group also acts in an ambassadorial role for the university, attending a range of community and university events.

Responsibility for maintaining external partnerships is predominantly held by the PVC Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Leadership, with assistance from other areas of the university – in particular, the Indigenous Outreach Team. Partnerships are reviewed on a regular basis by the relationship owner, with regular reporting to the university executive on performance. The PVC Chairs the meeting, and acts as a conduit for the advice of the Elders to the university Executive.

### ***Example of International partnerships from The University of Western Australia***

The University of Western Australia (UWA) is one of seven international universities in the international Matariki Network of Universities (MNU), which focuses on improving the undergraduate experience. The network has developed the Matariki International Indigenous Student Mobility program.

UWA's School of Indigenous Studies (SIS) strongly supports global engagement as a significant component of Indigenous leadership development that enhances the quality of the Indigenous student learning experience and is integral to student retention, success and completions. The SIS stated mission is developing Indigenous leaders and creating positive futures for our communities.

To ensure Indigenous students have the same access to global experiences as other students UWA provides significant additional funding for Indigenous students on exchange and undertaking international electives, sponsors Indigenous students to attend international conferences, symposiums and development programs and meets all student costs of the indigenous short-term mobility programs developed by SIS.

Indigenous students are sponsored to undertake exchange opportunities at any of the 180+ partner universities around the world including the University of British Columbia, University of Copenhagen, University of Vienna, University of New Mexico, Queen's University, University of Glasgow, Leeds University and Durham University. Since 2009, a total of 27 semester- and year-long international exchange opportunities for Indigenous students have taken place.

Indigenous students and graduates also seek opportunity for international study tours, electives, volunteering, conferences and symposiums. To date, 53 International Indigenous Student Mobility placements have seen students travel across the continent to destinations in Africa, North America, South America, Asia, Europe and Australia/Oceania.

A major development UWA has undertaken is creating a number of international short-term mobility programs specifically for Indigenous students. These are intensive units for which students receive course credit. This includes New Colombo Plan funded programs in Indonesia and Fiji. The Matariki International Student Mobility Program is a partnership program involving Indigenous students and staff from UWA, Otago University (NZ), Dartmouth College (USA) and Queens University (Canada). To date, 64 Short-term Mobility Program placements have seen Indigenous students study in New Zealand, Fiji, Bali, Chile and the USA.

### ***The Australian Indigenous Mentoring Experience (AIME)***

AIME is an educational program that provides Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander higher school students the skills, opportunities, belief and confidence to complete high school and go onto post-school work or further study. AIME has strong partnerships with many of Australia's universities and this partnership has been rewarding to both AIME and the universities in which they operate. Examples provided by universities in the survey responses included:

***Curtin University*** - AIME runs 2 types of engagement with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students in high schools at Curtin University. Tutor Squads are held weekly at schools, with university students attending to mentor high school students through their homework. In 2017, 8 schools had 178 sessions run on their campus. Program Days were held at Curtin University campuses in Bentley and Kalgoorlie on 24 days. On Program Days the high school students attend the Curtin campuses and take part in a full day of sessions and activities designed to build their strength and resilience, all while being exposed to the university campus and alongside university students who mentor them. In 2017, 486 Curtin students participated in the AIME program as mentors. Outcomes include improved school engagement and retention of AIME school participants and increased cultural capability of mentors.

***The University of Sunshine Coast*** - The University of the Sunshine Coast (USC) described having a long-standing relationship with AIME and have established a service model under which USC provides in-kind and financial support to AIME, and AIME provides USC with information about activities and refers prospective students seeking information about university study to USC. Curtin described the two organisations working collaboratively to increase the participation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students at USC.

## INDIGENOUS EVENTS

As reported earlier, universities are increasingly raising the profile of Indigenous culture in their institutions. A key way to achieve this is through hosting and promoting events that celebrate or highlight Indigenous matters and local Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander customs/knowledge.

Universities that demonstrated a stronger connection to their local Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander community generally reported higher levels of Indigenous events and external participation. However, all universities were able to list and describe hosting Indigenous related events celebrate or highlight Indigenous matters. As you would expect, universities typically host:

- NAIDOC Week events;
- Reconciliation Week events;
- National Sorry Day events;
- Welcome to country and smoking ceremonies to mark the commencement of the academic year;
- Regular lectures and series from guest Indigenous speakers on a range of topics and/or to mark special occasions;
- Aboriginal Art exhibitions;
- Concerts and Aboriginal Film festivals;
- Student summer camps;
- Indigenous unit events to mark special occasions; and
- O-Week events with specific focus on Indigenous students.

What became apparent through the survey responses was the leading role that some universities are taking in actively promoting opportunities for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in their university communities. A major part of this is through celebrating success within institutions with both the Indigenous and non-Indigenous community. The university sector should continue to acknowledge and celebrate success on a formal and regular basis.

### ***Example from the University of New England***

The University of New England (UNE) run a significant number of events to celebrate and share Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture and knowledge. For example, the Celebrating 30 Years project successfully ran events from Oct 18 to Nov 30, 2017. Events run from this project included the Oorala Art Exhibition, the Sunset Opening Ceremony and the Oorala 30 Open Day specially created as public focal points of celebration. Opportunities to showcase the Oorala's student services and other ongoing projects and events such as the Youth Camps, special lectures, AIME gatherings, STEM Experience Days, the graduation of 21 students and the awarding of two honorary Doctorates to Aboriginal community leaders, were incorporated into its calendar of events.

The Oorala Art Exhibition brought together practicing regional Indigenous artists with the Indigenous art from the UNE Collections, transforming the Oorala building into a cultural centre. From this event 54 artworks (14 paintings, 16 sculptures & 24 trinkets) with a total value of \$10,924 were sold. The Sunset Opening raised the flag to the 100 people present. The showpiece event was the Oorala 30 Open Day where over 1000 people, made up of school children of all ages, teachers, performers, presenters, artists, UNE students and staff, Aboriginal community members, Elders, volunteers and invited guests, all joined in a celebratory day across the Oorala Aboriginal Centre and the UNE Campus.



### ***Examples from Charles Sturt University***

Charles Sturt University provided a long list of examples, including the following.

*Deadly Dreaming* - an annual school engagement event hosted by Kulbardi Aboriginal Centre. This expo style event caters to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander, secondary school students, school staff responsible for supporting Indigenous students and those who provide career guidance to students. The purpose of the event is to raise aspirations amongst secondary students and to engage them in a university context.

*NAIDOC Living Library* - Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff, students and community members shared their lived experiences with the University community using the Living Library format as part of the University's NAIDOC week celebrations.

*Bullagar: Bullagar* - an annual event hosted by the Kulbardi Aboriginal Centre that provides Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander graduates and students in their final year at University with the opportunity to network with corporates. Students attending the event are given the opportunity to communicate about graduate employment opportunities.

### ***Examples from Macquarie University***

Macquarie University provided a long list of examples, including the following.

*Reconciliation Action Plan Launch* - in 2017 the University launched its inaugural *Macquarie University Reconciliation Action Plan*, which demonstrates our commitment to strengthening relationships with Aboriginal people and Communities. Over 100 people attended the event, including members of the University Council and Executive, RAP Working Group members, Aboriginal Advisory Committee members, representatives of Reconciliation Australia, and Aboriginal Community members.

*Reconciliation Scholarship Cocktail Event and Auction* - in 2017 the University launched its inaugural Reconciliation cocktail and fundraiser event, to raise the profile of Aboriginal higher education, strengthen external and Community relationships, and raise funds for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander scholarships. Awards were presented to staff who have made significant contributions to the University's reconciliation achievements, and an Aboriginal art and artefact auction was conducted.

*Patyegerang Annual Oration* - the University hosts an annual oration to coincide with Indigenous Literacy Day. The event is widely attended by University staff. In 2017 Professor Bob Morgan presented the Patyegerang Oration and spoke to the University on the future direction of Indigenous higher education.

*Deadly Ball* - the annual Deadly Ball is hosted by Walanga Muru and the Indigenous Students Association. The event celebrates the achievements of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students and nominated academic staff and professional staff who contribute to Aboriginal success.



## SECTION SUMMARY

- Universities increasingly build and maintain crucial relationships with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, other educational agencies/bodies, private organisations and not-for-profit bodies to collaborate on opportunities to enhance Indigenous higher education and broader society. These relationships are not always formalised – which can present a risk to the ability of some institutions to maintain and deepen these vital relationships if a key staff member leaves the institution.
- Universities are also increasingly establishing governance mechanisms to enhance the involvement of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people — whether university professionals or community Elders — in decision making processes (a requirement under the Government's ISSP).
- Universities that demonstrated a stronger connection to their local Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander community generally reported higher numbers of Indigenous events and levels external participation. The scale of Indigenous events hosted by universities are vast – and go beyond traditional events such as NADIOC celebrations or reconciliation events.

## 8 RESEARCH

Under the UA Strategy, universities have committed to have Indigenous Research Strategies in place by 2018.

This is underpinned by the principle that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people hold unique knowledge and knowledge systems which are foundational and fundamentally important to Australia's intellectual, social and cultural capital. This knowledge benefits not only Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students or academics, but also Australia's society and economy.

As highlighted in the Behrendt Review:

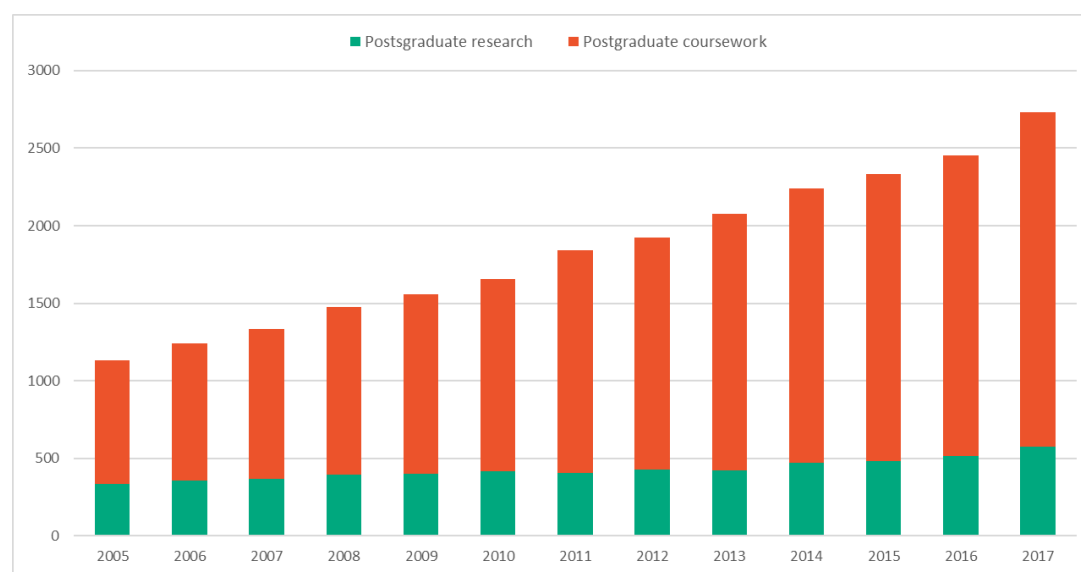
*To close the gap, the Panel considers that universities should better equip professionals with the skills and knowledge to meet the needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander clients, communities and other professionals with whom they will come in contact. They should also increase the number and capability of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander researchers who can bring a diversity of expertise and skills to the broader research agenda. The research agenda should, in turn, include Closing the Gap-related priorities.*

*Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspectives can bring a diversity of approaches to old problems and can help to tap into potential existing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander talent that is currently underutilised.<sup>12</sup>*

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

Many universities seek to rely on final-year students, postgraduate students and alumni from Indigenous backgrounds to 'grow their own' Indigenous academics and researchers. Figure 21 shows Indigenous postgraduate student enrolments have increased since 2005. The number of Indigenous enrolments in postgraduate research has increased 72 per cent since 2005, from 334 students to 575 students in 2017; and enrolment in postgraduate coursework degrees has almost tripled (or 170 per cent), from 799 Indigenous students in 2005 to 2,159 Indigenous students in 2017.

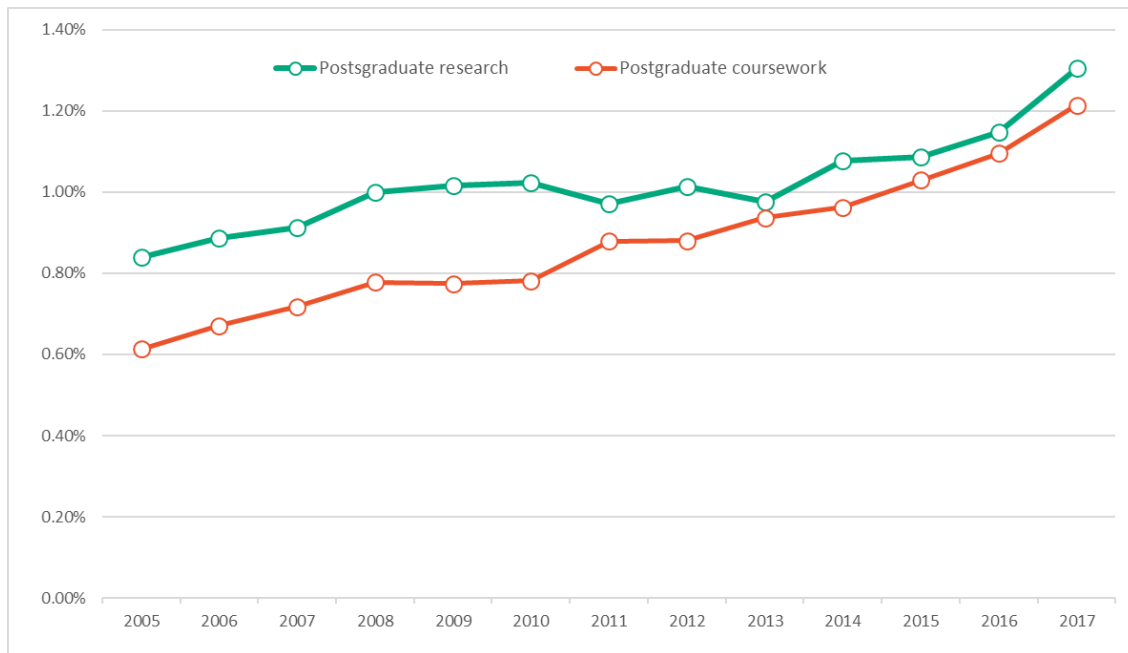
**Figure 21: Indigenous postgraduate enrolments, 2005 to 2017**



<sup>12</sup> Above n 3, pages 94-95.

As a result, the total number of Indigenous postgraduate students as a proportion of all domestic postgraduate students increased to 1.23 per cent in 2017, from 0.67 per cent in 2005. Figure 22 shows that the share Indigenous postgraduate research students increased from 0.84 per cent in 2005 to 1.30 per cent in 2017, while the share of Indigenous postgraduate coursework student also increased from 0.61 per cent to 1.21 per cent over the period.

**Figure 22: Share of Indigenous postgraduate enrolments, 2005 to 2017**



Despite the growth in postgraduate enrolments, Figure 23 shows Indigenous postgraduate student completions remain low despite the growth in recent years, representing less than one per cent of all domestic postgraduate coursework completions (0.97 per cent or 693 completions) and all domestic postgraduate research completions (0.87 per cent or 60 completions) in 2017.

**Figure 23: Share of Indigenous postgraduate award completions, 2005 to 2017**

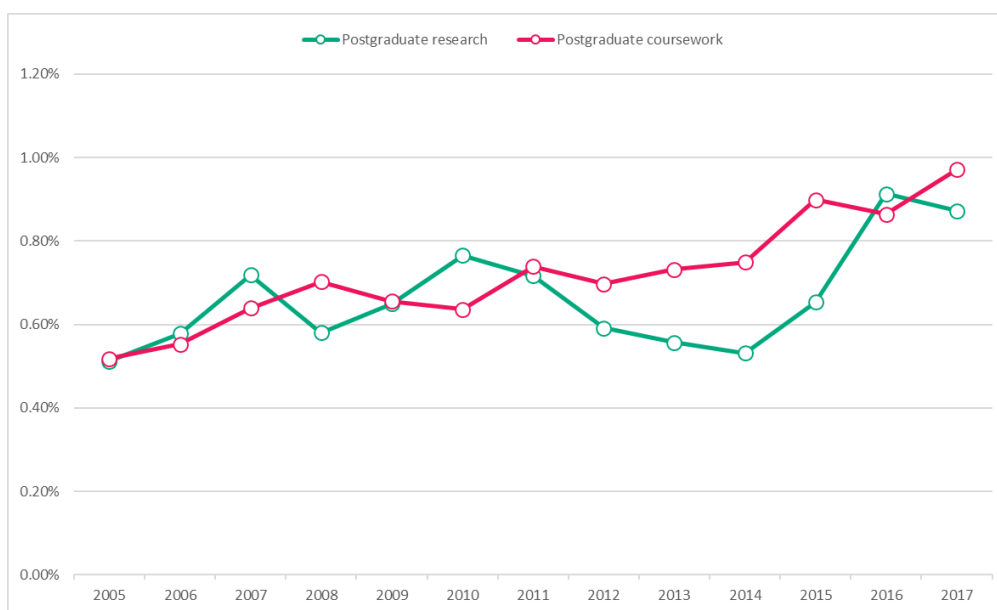
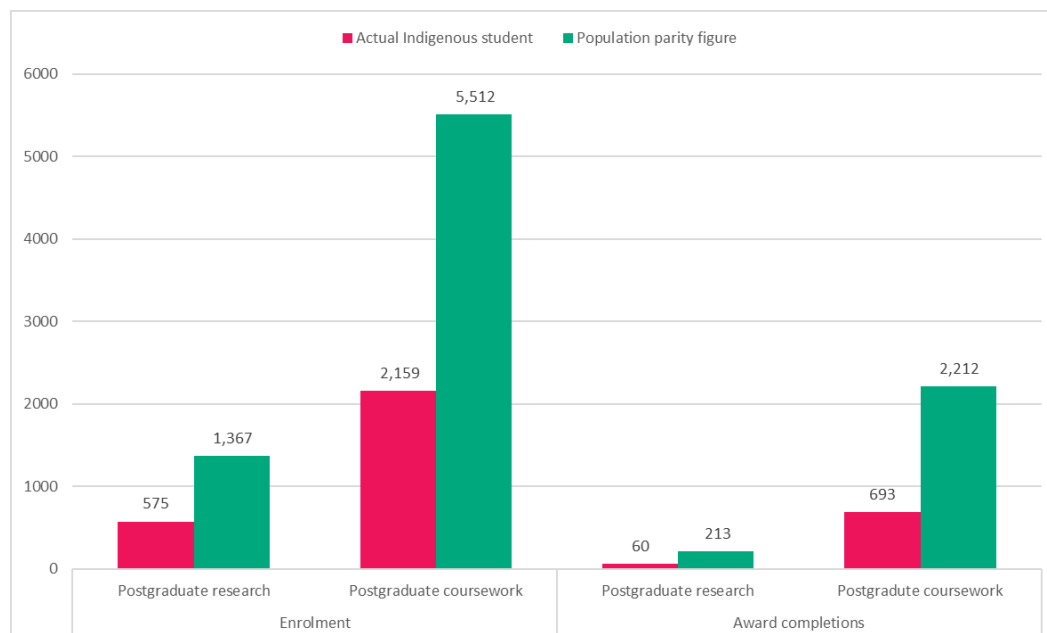


Figure 24 shows that to reach a population parity of 3.1 per cent, the sector would need to be enrolling an additional 792 Indigenous postgraduate research students and an additional 3,353 postgraduate coursework students in 2017; and graduating an additional 153 postgraduate research students and an additional 1,519 postgraduate coursework students from Indigenous backgrounds in 2017.

**Figure 24: Indigenous postgraduate student, actual and population parity figures, 2017**



## INDIGENOUS RESEARCH STRATEGIES

A (close) majority of universities indicated they were still in a development phase at the time of survey collection (i.e. the first half of 2018) when it came establishing their Indigenous research strategies. These strategies were typically being developed in close collaboration with Indigenous academics and consultation with community, although primary responsibility varied between:

- Directors of Indigenous Research;
- Pro Vice-Chancellors – Indigenous; and
- Deputy Vice-Chancellors – Research.

However, there were also positive reports of current implementation of Indigenous research strategies. Some universities were also currently going through a review of their existing Indigenous research strategies to identify gaps and focus on new priorities – including where targets had already been exceeded.

Key focus areas of research strategies included the following.

- Identifying high potential Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students in their early years of candidature. These students would be encouraged to follow a research track through the university with opportunities for PHD scholarships being available upon completion of undergraduate degree.
- Strong mentoring arrangements for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students throughout their postgraduate research journey.
- Building pathways into academic careers for Aboriginal and Torres Strait islander peoples.

- Encouraging Aboriginal and Torres Strait islander students to explore varied areas of research, including research relevant to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and communities but not exclusively.
- Building Indigenous community research capacity, which includes the recognition of Indigenous knowledge and knowledge holders, enabling culturally determined research and establishing accredited research training that builds community research.

Strategic actions sitting underneath some of the key focus areas covered:

- the creation and funding of Indigenous Research Fellow positions;
- establishment of Indigenous Research Networks;
- collaboration with key Indigenous communities and research partners;
- initiation of public lecture series led by esteemed national and international Indigenous scholars to provide a space for rigorous intellectual discussions;
- development of Indigenous research ethics best practice guides for university researchers;
- research workshops for Indigenous university HDR students; and
- linking university Indigenous academics into national training opportunities and scholarly community networks through establishing a specific Aboriginal staff development fund.

Universities with current Indigenous research strategies in place typically reported multi-layered monitoring and evaluation mechanisms. This reflects the intended collaboration and accountability of Indigenous higher education outcomes throughout the university and amongst Indigenous and non-Indigenous colleagues.

There were also extremely encouraging examples of the Australian Research Council (ARC) issuing research rankings of 'mature' for institutional Indigenous research - the highest ranking on a three-point scale of 'limited', 'emerging' or 'mature'. This is a positive sign and indicates there are lessons to be learnt amongst some universities with a longer history of development and investment in this space.

### ***Example from the University of Technology Sydney***

The University of Technology Sydney (UTS) has an Indigenous Research Strategy in place since 2011. The Indigenous Research Strategy forms part of the overarching UTS Indigenous Education Strategy. The major focus areas of the Indigenous Research Strategy are to:

- encourage the development of Indigenous research across UTS by taking a coordinated approach;
- increase Indigenous staff research capacity;
- increase Indigenous higher degree by research (HDR) student enrolment rates;
- improve Indigenous HDR student retention and progression rates;
- promote the protection of Indigenous cultural knowledge;
- encourage international Indigenous research linkages; and
- ensure UTS adopts best practice relating to Indigenous research.

The Indigenous Research Strategy is implemented by the teams specified against each initiative, and is assessed and monitored by the Chair, Indigenous Research in collaboration with the PVC (ILE), the Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Research), and the Indigenous Research Committee (chaired by the Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Research)).

The investment into Indigenous Research at UTS have positioned it well in relation to ARC grant awards and research outputs.

### ***Example from the Queensland University of Technology***

The Queensland University of Technology outlined it has a broad strategic imperative of QUT's Indigenous Research Strategy is to be responsive to the needs of the Indigenous community. The current research strategy acts as a conduit for how research is done in partnership with Indigenous communities often focussing on community needs rather than the needs of the university. The Indigenous Research Engagement Unit (IREU) has a memorandum of understanding with Minjerribah Moorgumpin Elders-in-Council Aboriginal Corporation in Queensland as part of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Research Strategy.

The Indigenous research strategy also seeks to ensure that QUT researchers are engaging with Indigenous communities both an ethically and culturally responsive manner. This strategy aligns with the Australian Research Council's recognition of the importance of research, science and innovation for increasing productivity and wellbeing and the impetus on demonstrating returns on investment in research in terms of environmental, economic and social impact.

Examples of the IREU actively promoting and undertaking a series of capacity building activities for Indigenous postgraduates, include:

- access to ARC funded NIRAKN Level A workshops: graduate capabilities, dissertation examination, project management, supervision, ethic applications, indigenous research ethics and integrity, Indigenous research methodologies, conference paper protocols, academic writing, the value of publishing, academic career planning and endnote database
- access to ARC funded NIRAKN seminar series, critical reading groups and research methodologies masterclass support for supervisors of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander postgraduate students through the creation of an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Supervisory Advisor Group (ATSISAG)
- creation of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Research Strategy working party to produce highly skilled Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander research graduates who have the knowledge and skill sets required to conduct complex research, analysis and for evidence-based policy development across the faculties
- regular Indigenous postgraduate student morning/afternoon teas further deepening relationships and mentoring to completion marketing of University HDR programs through an indigenous specific outreach community event *IndigiSearch*.

## SECTION SUMMARY

- Survey responses showed the majority of universities were in the process of developing a formal Indigenous Research Strategy at the time the survey was issued (in early 2018). Many universities also said they were seeking to 'grow their own' talent.
- For context, to achieve population parity in 2017, the sector would have needed to enrol an additional 792 Indigenous postgraduate research students and graduate an additional 153 Indigenous postgraduate research students.
- Universities with current Indigenous Research Strategies in place cited some of the following key areas as underpinning their strategies:
  - identifying high potential Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students in their first two years of candidature;
  - strong mentoring arrangements for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students throughout their postgraduate research journey;
  - building pathways into academic careers for Aboriginal and Torres Strait islander peoples;
  - encouraging Aboriginal and Torres Strait islander students to explore varied areas of research; and
  - building Indigenous community research capacity.



## 9 UA DIRECTORATE ACTIVITY

The UA Strategy is guided on the principle that primary power to forge progress in universities rests with universities themselves. However, UA, as peak body for Australian universities, has a role to:

- demonstrate sectoral commitment;
- support members through encouragement;
- provide public visibility and example; and
- advocate on behalf of the sector for appropriate changes to government funding policies and programs.

The relevant actions under the strategy (reflecting these principles) are to:

- regularly include Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander observers at Plenary meetings of Vice-Chancellors;
- 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;
- maintain formal ongoing dialogue with NATSIHEC and other Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander university leaders;
- develop, through the four Deputy Vice-Chancellor Committees, agreed sector-wide initiatives which will be implemented in common across all member universities;
- include Indigenous higher education issues in all relevant submissions it makes and advocacy work it undertakes;
- increase the profile of Indigenous higher education in public events such as the Universities Australia Higher Education Conference;
- continue to advocate for increased Government investment in specific Indigenous higher education initiatives and for related outreach and participation programmes;
- develop, by 2018, a platform or mechanism to identify and share good practices; and
- obtain annual feedback from universities on their progress towards meeting the commitments they have made in this strategy, and publicly releasing annual reports.

### UA Plenary and Board meetings

The UA Plenary has appointed two Indigenous Pro Vice-Chancellor observers for two years to attend the bi-annual meetings. The intent of the observer role is to provide further senior level exposure to current Indigenous leaders. This experience, including the exposure to Vice-Chancellor discussions on key sectoral issues, may assist with advancement into Vice-Chancellor roles in future.

The first joint meeting of the NATSIHEC executive and the UA Board was held on 30 November 2017. The second one is scheduled for 7 February 2019 (due to diary clashes in 2018). Importantly, the joint annual meeting allows for open and meaningful dialogue on the sectors performance against the Strategy and to identify key areas of focus for the year. The senior NATSIHEC executive have also been invited to present to the Plenary as part of a discussion on progress of the UA Strategy at the next UA Plenary.

The UA Directorate also maintains an ongoing dialogue with NATSIHEC representatives, PM&C and DET on a range of key Indigenous higher education matters. For example the UA Directorate:

- recently attended NATSIHEC annual meeting to discuss progress of the UA Strategy and other issues relevant to Indigenous higher education. The UA Directorate is also in regular contact with the NATSIHEC senior executive;
- engages in bi-annual meetings with PM&C to discuss the ISSP and other issues relevant to Indigenous higher education; and
- gave a presentation at the latest National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Educational Conference.

The UA Directorate looks forward to continuing its positive relationship with all key stakeholders into the future. UA especially looks forward to greater collaboration with all of the new NATSIHEC appointments at the senior executive and executive level. The new NATSIHEC structure aligns neatly with that of the UA Deputy Vice Chancellor (DVC) committees – and this is likely to only deepen the opportunities for collaboration and further progress.

## **DVC Committees and Sub Committees**

The four main DVC portfolios across the sector, each have a responsibility to advance certain objectives of the Strategy that align to their area of expertise. The areas 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.

Progress to date for the four DVC Committees against their longer-term strategies has been mixed and, in some cases, limited. The initial stages since the release of the Strategy have mainly been restricted to scoping the initial projects and deciding on the areas of focus. It is worth noting the obvious challenges associated with the development of a sector-wide agreed approach to relatively detailed elements of the strategy – in this respect UA acknowledges the leadership role of the Working groups to foster momentum.

### ***DVC Academic***

The DVC As' first major initiative was to draft a set of Guidelines to ensure that internal course accreditation processes within our member universities formally involve Indigenous consultation and input curriculum development and subsequent review processes.

Draft Guidelines were approved by the DVCs A at the end of 2017. The Guidelines seek to ensure that courses:

- are accessible and culturally safe for Indigenous students; and
- give access to Indigenous knowledge to all students.

In 2018, the DVCs A decided the Guidelines needed to be revised to make them a more principles-based document and to avoid going into operational detail, which is properly handled at an institutional

level. Whilst there has been some useful discussion of cultural competency programs at member universities, different approaches and efforts to improve content, methods and reach there has been no resolutions to date about cultural competency programs across the sector.

In addition to Indigenous matters being a standing agenda item at DVCs A meetings, the DVCs A Committee has set up an Indigenous Higher Education Standing Group to take carriage of Indigenous matters – both DVC As' responsibilities under the Strategy and more generally. The Standing Group includes several DVCs A, the Indigenous representatives on the DVCs A Committee and some other senior Indigenous staff from around the sector.

### ***DVC Corporate***

The DVC Cs established a Working Group to develop a discussion paper to improve Indigenous staff employment in the sector following its September 2017 meeting. A discussion paper was tabled at the September 2018 DVC C meeting to provide a framework for discussion at the DVC C meeting to develop an agreed Indigenous employment action plan that complemented each institution's employment strategies.

The discussion paper proposed four actions to increase Indigenous staff employment.

1. Development of a critical reflection tool for the sector to help assess current Indigenous employment practices in the sector. It is a tool to encourage discussion, ongoing reflection, and to guide the planning and development of future initiatives to grow Indigenous staff employment.
2. Development of a common level of Indigenous cultural competency across all universities' senior executives.
3. Consideration of specific actions to increase Indigenous staff employment.
4. Collection of case studies across universities to share examples of practices that were deemed to have been successful or unsuccessful in individual university's operating context.

However, the DVC Cs agreed that the discussion paper should be focussed on initiatives to recognise and develop the talent of Indigenous staff not progressing through traditional academic pathways, including:

- identifying alternative pathways; and
- guidelines to recognise potential staff experience as qualification for roles in universities.

### ***DVC Research***

In 2016 and 2017, progress was made by the Committee firstly to identify and agree on issues and priorities, and then formulate and discuss a project proposal. The project focussed on raising Indigenous participation through:

- strengthening the undergraduate to postgraduate pathway;
- developing a national program to increase institutional post-graduate cultural competence and the availability of high quality and culturally knowledgeable supervisors/assessors;
- recognising and reducing the misalignment of mainstream ethical guidelines and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community research practices; and
- creating a viable and accessible system of sharing of best practice on higher research degree participation, retention and completion.

The Committee endorsed these priorities. It discussed a business plan for the development of a training module to assist universities on appropriate supervision and examination practices, and the

creation of a set of national resources to advance the strategy objectives. However, agreement has not yet been reached on the business plan.

### ***DVC International***

The DVC International Committee convened an Indigenous Student Mobility Working Group to develop a sector wide strategy to increase international student mobility for Indigenous students.

The Working Group identified a gap in the data describing Indigenous student participation in mobility programs as well as a lack of analysis on the specific needs of indigenous students in relation to international mobility and the obstacles faced by Indigenous students in taking up international mobility experiences.

Next steps will be discussed at the upcoming DVC International Committee meeting.

### **Public submissions**

The UA Directorate most recently provided a formal submission to Government on the post-implementation review of the Indigenous Student Success Program. Recommendations included that Government:

- develop a handbook to accompany the program guidelines;
- work with the sector to develop effective ways of sharing good practice;
- further the development of a flexible ISSP, including by removing transitional provisions;
- move to a multi-year funding cycle; and
- examine options for enhanced performance reporting.

Moving forward, the UA Directorate will look for further opportunities to consider the impact of broader higher education Government policies on the impact of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students.

UA has sought to inform Government and the public of negative impacts of broad policy on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, for example the impact of the funding freeze. See CEO Catriona Jackson's public comments and media interviews of 28 October 2018 where she discussed the disappointing reduction in number of applications from indigenous Australians (fell by 5.2% in 2018). UA also ensured a dedicated section of its Pre-Budget Submission to Government included a focus on sensible policy and funding settings for Indigenous higher education initiatives – informed through close consultation with NATISHEC and UA.

Current and future work, such as UA's income support project, will continue to ensure the UA policy Directorate actively consider Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander issues.

### **UA Public Forums**

UA has a strong commitment to ensuring engaging and practical sessions at all its public forums.

In 2018, Indigenous focused sessions were held at the 2018 Higher Education Conference. The Higher Education Conference is an annual conference delivered by the sector for the sector and is the signature event on the Australian higher education calendar. Participants include Vice-Chancellors, Chancellors, senior university representatives, Government representatives, industry representatives, members of the research community, international education specialists, and media.

The two sessions were:

1. *What does indigenous higher education look like in 2025? (description of what they were and how they were received)*
2. *Overcoming barriers to Indigenous mobility.*

The two-day 2018 UA Marketing Communications and Development Conference also featured two Indigenous focused sessions.

1. *Growing Indigenous opportunity through partnerships*
2. *Why marketing and comms teams need to tell Indigenous stories, promote Indigenous voices and include Indigenous perspectives in marketing and comms plans.*

## **Annual survey and reporting**

The first survey collected from universities in 2018 – drawing on 2017 actions and information – was intended to collect a baseline of information as a benchmark for further progress in coming years. The open-ended and qualitative nature of the survey may change in future years, as UA looks for opportunities to balance reporting workload for universities with the ability to have sufficient information to report on progress. The availability of full year-data for the previous reporting year should continue to be a salient consideration for timing of public reporting.

## 10 UNFINISHED BUSINESS AND NEXT STEPS

The UA Indigenous Strategy is a coherent sector-wide initiative that commits all universities to common goals and promotes collaboration for the advancement of Indigenous higher education.

Whilst there are no direct financial incentives attached to this strategy, universities, UA and NATSIHEC have entered into a partnership by committing to the strategy. Annual survey and reporting are an important part of this commitment and creates opportunity for meaningful evaluation and discussion on progress.

This strategy builds on previous work and complements other Government programs such as the ISSP - which was launched on 1 January 2017. As discussed, there are some areas of significant overlap between the UA Strategy and the ISSP. This was intentional. It means the initiatives have investment and support from multiple bodies which increases the likelihood of sector-wide success.

It is also critical to acknowledge the pioneering work done by some institutions on their own initiative over many years. Some of this work and commitment to reconciliation long predates the work of the UA Strategy. Their efforts demonstrate the most successful approach to achieving positive outcomes in relation to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and knowledge is a strong, whole of university, long-term investment approach.

Survey responses from some universities that have a longer history in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander higher education investment generally suggested the strategy was an important commitment for the sector and was a useful tool in the development of strategies and processes that were already in chain.

Others reported the UA Strategy complementing the changes in the ISSP as well as the general direction that their institution has taken. In this way the UA provided added impetus to reviewing their strategies and a useful benchmark to measure progress and identify gaps.

Comparatively, some institutions acknowledged that there was a critical need to align with the UA Indigenous strategy to meet its obligations for Aboriginal and Torres communities, students and staff. As such, the release of the UA Strategy has encouraged universities to undertake audits of their performance to guide future action.

### REFLECTIONS ON UNFINISHED BUSINESS

The UA Strategy was developed in close consultation with universities, NATSIHEC and PM&C. While it contains key commitments, it does not cover the entire range of activities that touch on or engage with Indigenous higher education and research. Early signs of progress in some key areas of the UA Strategy are promising. Yet it will also be important to continually keep abreast of a broad spectrum of matters that affect universities and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and communities. The UA Strategy and its existing commitments will be formally reviewed following its initial period to 2020.

Recent discussions between the UA Board and NATSIHEC Executive have identified potential areas of combined future efforts. These include:

- The development of a communications strategy focusing on successful individual stories of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students. These stories will also focus on the positive social and financial benefits for students and the wider community when they have a degree.
- Supporting NATSIHEC in the development of policy/funding proposals for projects to better understanding contributors to Indigenous participation and attrition.

- Formalising the existing productive relationship between NATSIHEC and UA through a memorandum of understanding.
- Considering options for professional development opportunities at the supervisory, academic and professional streams to both increase career opportunities for Indigenous staff and Indigenous cultural competency for non-Indigenous staff.
- The development of a good practice platform to share case studies and positive outcomes across institutions (discussed below).
- Input into NATSIHEC proposals to have dedicated Field of Research Codes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Knowledge and Philosophies.

Individual universities also raised a variety of other matters they both continue to prioritise as institutions and that which also impacts the broader sector, including the following.

- The impact of different legislative obligations across different jurisdictions on universities and their advancement in relation to these issues.
- Intensification of whole-of-university approaches to Indigenous education and employment and further consultation on strategic vision.
- Looking further at the nature and extent of universities engagement with Indigenous businesses, enterprises and consultants.
- Balancing resource-intensive and competing teaching, research and administration with broader community engagement priorities.
- Maintaining alignment between institutional strategic plans policies and operational practices with various sector and government requirements present in each of these guiding frameworks, which requires a considerable institutional investment to meet reporting requirements.
- Whilst a key focus for institutions is on greater and more direct engagement with Aboriginal communities throughout their states, particularly regional and remote communities, this can present particular challenges for some universities given some of their sizes.
- The establishment of a centre that is accessible for current students, alumni, survivors and their families, local schools and members of the community to gather and reflect on experiences and history of Aboriginal people in the university's region
- It was highlighted that Reconciliation Australia is keen for organisations who have a RAP in place to establish a RAP Industry Network Group (RING). As an increasing number of universities have a RAP, it might be helpful for UA to review what, if any, RING arrangements are in place across the sector (none in WA) and how these might connect with UA's existing committee structures and the UA Indigenous Strategy's implementation, surveys and reporting arrangements.
- Looking for funding sources to implement scholarships for all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students – at all levels of study – enabling, undergraduate, postgraduate and higher degree research.

## **A MECHANISM FOR SHARING GOOD PRACTICE**

Sharing good practice and stories as success is continually viewed as vital to deliver the best results for the most people, particularly in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander initiatives. This applies across the diversity of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. While examples of good practice cannot simply be picked up and replicated exactly across institutions, the sharing of good practice can inspire and encourage other institutions to introduce similar initiatives.



Universities cited many examples of sharing good practice within their own institutions. These included having videos of successful embedding of Indigenous curriculum into mainstream courses that all lecturers/students could access easily.

Broadly, feedback on the proposed best mechanism covered:

- UA continuing to dedicate mainstream sessions and satellite sessions at its annual conference to Indigenous practice sharing;
- UA conducting an annual, mobile Indigenous good practice workshop – each with a different focus – in which senior executive staff from each university can participate;
- a conference or symposium (with a report and associated outputs) profiling best practice under themes (such as those suggested below) would have the benefit of connecting academic and professional staff, students and collaborators engaged in progressing their Universities Indigenous agendas;
- a national forum or opportunities for dialogue and discussion that bring together Indigenous staff at all levels in Indigenous centres and the wider university to share ideas and discuss challenges particularly around Indigenous student support services, Indigenous curriculum and teaching, and cultural competency;
- UA to consider establishing networks similar to that of the Chairs of Academic Boards and Senates, and the Association of Australian University Secretaries, which maintain networks and lists for sharing information;
- a consolidated UA web page or online platform that publishes information and has links to best practice, resources and data;
- utilising existing models such as National Indigenous Research and Knowledges Network, National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Higher Education Consortium, Innovative Research Universities and Indigenous-specific journals;
- interestingly, two institutions noted PM&C could consider funding and developing a mechanism, including hosting forums across the country to share and discuss agendas; and
- caution against this type of information being distributed via ‘dense’ reports / documentation which tends to limit accessibility for those in operational positions was highlighted as a risk.

The issue of who defines *best practice* and how that is assessed was also raised as question that continues to pose challenges. As mentioned above, *best practice* will be specific to individual intuitions and individual communities. However, sharing *good practice* and new ideas will encourage more universities to try different approaches. UA sees its role under the UA Strategy as actively requesting examples of good current practice and promoting the sharing of case studies/stories from its members to encourage more universities to try different approaches.

## PROPOSAL

Sharing good practices should be an active and multi-faceted process. This could include:

- an online platform (UA website in the immediate future) hosting resources and case studies;
- UA's Directorate routinely sharing good news stories and relevant information;
- Board, Plenary and DVC meetings; and
- regular Indigenous specific workshops at conferences.

UA Website	UA Directorate	Conferences	UA Boards and subcommittees, NATSIHEC and Plenary	Other mechanisms
<p>UA Website to have a dedicated and visible Indigenous content section.</p> <p>The section will host a range of resources, such as:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>the UA Strategy</li> <li>the Australian Council of Graduate Research Good Practice Guidelines</li> <li>university good practice case studies</li> <li>relevant UA submissions</li> </ul> <p>UA will ask universities to share positive examples of good practice that may be beneficial to share with the sector. Requests will be focused on specialised topics/areas of expertise at first to avoid over-crowding of material.</p>	<p>The UA Directorate will incorporate the following practices into its standard operating procedures:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>weekly/monthly sharing of good news stories (through regular university media announcements and the specific collection of good practice case studies)</li> <li>continued regular inclusion of sector-wide or events in Member Updates</li> <li>dissemination of content to primary Indigenous contacts at universities (utilising information from PM&amp;C)</li> </ul>	<p>UA will continue to ensure its two annual conferences engage in meaningful and regular Indigenous higher education focused sessions.</p> <p>Sessions will primarily be practically focused opposed to theoretical and UA will ensure session development is done in close consultation with NATSIHEC.</p> <p>Universities are responsible for ensuring appropriate attendance and participation from staff at these events.</p>	<p>The Board, Plenary and NATSIHEC meetings present an opportunity to engage in discussion on progress and risks associated with Indigenous higher education outcomes.</p> <p>The primary governance mechanism to identify and share good practice examples is through the DVC committees and sub-committees. An increased focus on this identifying good practice must occur moving forward. Once identified, these good practice examples will be hosted on the UA website.</p>	<p>Sharing good practice is a process that is attracting more attention from other bodies that have a shared interest in promoting the availability of useful/practical information.</p> <p>For example, PM&amp;C and other sector bodies have signalled an intention to actively promote good practice amongst universities – these activities offer the potential to complement any proposed UA mechanism.</p>