



Australian Government

Indigenous Higher Education Advisory Council

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**Submission to development of the
Higher Education Participation and
Partnership Program**

March 2010



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Dear Mr Coutts

Higher Education Participation and Partnership Program (HEPPP) Guidelines

Since its inauguration in 2005, the Indigenous Higher Education Advisory Council (IHEAC) has provided policy advice to Government on improving outcomes in higher education for Indigenous students and staff relating to their participation, retention and progression both in study and in employment.

The Council, now in its third term, reports to both the Minister for Education, Employment and Workplace Relations and the Minister for Minister for Innovation, Industry, Science and Research. The Council welcomes the opportunity to provide comment on the development of the *Higher Education Participation and Partnerships Program* guidelines.

The content of this submission was discussed at the 15th IHEAC meeting endorsed by myself as Council Chair via electronic communications.

Yours sincerely

Professor Steven Larkin
Chair
1 March 2010

Indigenous Higher Education Advisory Council Submission to the development of the *Higher Education Participation and Partnership Program Guidelines*

Key Recommendation:

The Indigenous Higher Education Advisory Council (IHEAC) recommends that 10 percent of the Higher Education Participation and Partnership Program (HEPPP) funding be allocated to ensure Indigenous students receive an equitable level of support.

The Indigenous Higher Education Advisory Council (IHEAC) recommends a number of changes to the Higher Education Participation and Partnership Program (HEPPP) to ensure Indigenous students receive an equitable level of support through HEPPP funding.

As raised in IHEAC's submission on DEEWR's *Measuring the Socio-economic Status of Higher Education Students* discussion paper, low-SES should be a broad measure that assists all underrepresented groups, including Indigenous students through an Indigenous-specific indicator.

In 2008 Indigenous students represented just one percent of undergraduate commencements¹, despite forming 2.4 percent of the total Australian population. To address this and ensure concrete action towards closing the gap, IHEAC believes that, as well as including an Indigenous-specific indicator in SES measurement, 10 percent of a university's HEPPP 'Participation Component' should be allocated to programs that target the specific needs of Indigenous students.

In its recent submission on the proposed *Indicator Framework for Higher Education Performance Funding*, IHEAC argued that Indigenous-specific student and academic staff targets should be included in all university Compacts. In the event that occurs, a 10 percent allocation from the HEPPP Participation Component will help universities to enhance participation, inclusion, and attainment outcomes for Indigenous students.

The second IHEAC has in the past raised concerns that incorporating Indigenous students into the low-SES category may allow universities to ignore the specific needs of Indigenous students and instead target programs towards those students who are the 'easiest and cheapest' to access. Allocating 10 percent of a university's Partnership funding specifically to Indigenous people would help prevent this from occurring, and would assist universities meet the goal of HEPPP Guideline 1.50.10, which states:

'Providers should tailor their programs to address the specific disadvantage, as appropriate, to the demographics of their low SES student population and applicants.'

IHEAC believes that the 'Partnership Component' of the HEPPP guidelines should be redrafted to ensure the needs of Indigenous students are adequately addressed. Under the current arrangements, funding for Indigenous outreach strategies can be sought through the proposed competitive grants process, to commence in 2011. However, from 2010 onwards universities will also receive a level of 'base' funding to help increase the aspirations of people from low SES backgrounds to access and participate in higher education. IHEAC believes that 10 percent of the 2010 'base' funding should be allocated to Indigenous-specific programs and strategies, and that further reserves of 10 percent be

¹ See '2008 Full Year Student Summary tables - All Higher Education Providers' in *Students: Selected Higher Education Statistics (2009)*, Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations, 2009, available online at: <http://www.deewr.gov.au/HigherEducation/Publications/HEStatistics/Publications/Pages/2008FullYear.aspx> >

allocated from the base funding of years 2011, 2012 and 2013. This will help ensure the specific needs of Indigenous students are addressed, particularly in the unwelcome occurrence that few Indigenous programs or strategies originate from the competitive grants process.