



Australian Government



Indigenous Higher Education Advisory Council

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**Submission to DEEWR**  
**Discussion Paper:**  
*Indicator Framework for Higher  
Education Performance Funding*

**March 2010**



Australian Government

Indigenous Higher Education Advisory Council

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Dear Mr Coutts

**Indigenous Higher Education Advisory Council - Submission to DEEWR Discussion Paper:  
Indicator Framework for Higher Education Performance Funding**

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 *Discussion Paper: Indicator Framework for Higher Education Performance Funding*, developed by DEEWR.

IHEAC's submission has been developed with consideration to a number of other policy initiatives currently being considered and pursued by the Council, including:

- the development of a draft Indigenous Education Action Plan, prepared by the Ministerial Council for Education, Early Childhood Development and Youth Affairs' in consultation with the third IHEAC and other stakeholders in February 2010;
- the development of a National Indigenous Higher Education Workforce Strategy;
- the development of an Indigenous Centre for Researcher Development, and
- the *Indigenous Cultural Competency in Australian Universities* project, currently being progressed by a Steering Committee consisting of representatives from IHEAC, DEEWR and Universities Australia.

The content of this submission was discussed at the 15<sup>th</sup> Council meeting on 24 February 2010 and subsequently endorsed by Council via electronic communications.

Yours sincerely

Professor Steven Larkin  
Chair  
1 March 2010

## **Indigenous Higher Education Advisory Council Submission to the 'Indicator Framework for Higher Education Performance Funding' Discussion Paper**

IHEAC supports the development of performance indicators that have a direct line of sight to the Government's broader policy objectives, and the tying of performance funding to the completion of targets set against these indicators. However, unless changes are made to the indicators they will fundamentally fail to meet the Indicator Development Group's principle of being *relevant* to Indigenous learning outcomes.

### **Student Participation and Inclusion.**

IHEAC strongly believes that a performance goal of increased participation of Indigenous people in undergraduate higher education should be added to this measure. This would help to address current Indigenous underrepresentation within universities and also increase the participation of the general population, helping to meet the Government's wider ambition that 40 percent of *all* 25-34 year olds will have at least a bachelor-level qualification by 2025.

While the proposed measure allows for Indigenous participation to be nominated by each university as their mandatory second performance indicator for under-represented groups, increased Indigenous participation is an ambition that should be sought by all Australian universities *in addition* to any other localised priorities or individual missions being pursued.

IHEAC supports the suggestion that the participation and inclusion measure be expanded to include post-graduate coursework and research students, again with the caveat that an Indigenous-specific performance indicator be included.

### **Student Experience**

IHEAC supports the proposal that 'engagement' be used as a broad proxy indicator of first year retention rates, with a view to developing a more comprehensive indicator of the overall quality of student's university experience in the medium term. In developing the 2012 indicator IHEAC believes that the first priority should be to review the Course Experience Questionnaire, the First Year Experience Survey, and any future indicator of student satisfaction to ensure they *fully* capture the experiences of Indigenous Australians. This will encourage universities to better embed Indigenous cultural competency principles within all aspects of their business.

### **Student Attainment**

IHEAC strongly believes that Indigenous attainment should be added to low-SES attainment within the performance goal. As with the Student Participation and Inclusion goal, this will help to increase the completion rate of Indigenous Australians seeking bachelor-level qualifications while also increasing the overall number degrees within the general population. IHEAC reiterates its view that increased Indigenous attainment is an ambition that should be sought by all Australian universities, in addition to any other localised priorities that might be self-identified through a second performance indicator.

### **Quality of learning outcomes**

In proposing its performance goals, the discussion paper notes that it is timely to consider how the Graduate Skills Assessment (GSA) may be used as an indicator of the value that universities 'add' to students. IHEAC agrees, and notes that the GSA might provide an appropriate tool for assessing a student's growth in cultural competencies areas. As the discussion paper states, the interpersonal understanding component of the GSA measures ability to show insight into the feelings, motivation, and behaviour of other people, issues related to helping or working with others, including effective feedback, listening, communication, teamwork and leadership. IHEAC advocates the embedding of Indigenous cultural competencies within all areas of university business, including student development, and believes that the GSA should be reviewed to ensure it can successfully measure growth in this specific area.

### **CONCLUSION**

IHEAC is supportive of the development of performance indicators and robust targets that are tied to performance funding. However IHEAC believes that mandatory Indigenous targets must be explicitly named in the framework and included in university Compacts, in particular those that promote increased participation and inclusion, greater attainment, and enhanced cultural competency within all aspects of university business. The explicit recognition and monitoring of Indigenous targets would be in keeping with the Deputy Prime Minister's comments to the Third Council that enhanced Indigenous outcomes were always intended to be covered by the low SES initiatives.