



Australian Government



Indigenous Higher Education Advisory Council

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Supplementary Submission to the Review of Australian Higher Education

August 2008



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Professor Roger Thomas, Chair
Ms Jillian Milroy, Deputy Chair
Ms Clair Andersen
Professor MaryAnn Bin-Sallik
Associate Professor Tracey Bunda
Mr Graeme Gower
Professor Jeannie Herbert
Dr Tamara Mackean
Professor John Maynard
Professor Martin Nakata
Dr Kaye Price
Professor Boni Robertson
Professor Mark Rose
Mr Gary Shipp
Dr Maggie Walter

Professor Denise Bradley AC
Chair
Review of Australian Higher Education
Location 023
PO Box 9880
CANBERRA ACT 2601

Dear Professor Bradley

IHEAC – Supplementary Submission to the Review of Australian Higher Education

I am pleased to provide you with the Indigenous Higher Education Advisory Council's (IHEAC) supplementary submission to the Review of Australian Higher Education.

As previously discussed with you, Council felt it important to provide you with this supplementary submission, bolstering its initial submission with practical evidence to substantiate Council's core arguments.

Council's Stakeholders' Forum of 14 August 2008 themed *Our Place in the Education Revolution* was a huge success. The meeting was attended by more than 80 Indigenous staff from 31 universities. Discussions held at the forum have informed the attached supplementary submission from IHEAC.

Thank you for agreeing to accept this supplementary submission, informed by Indigenous staff across Australia. I am certain you will find the recommendations of interest in your deliberations.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'R Thomas'.

Professor Roger Thomas
Chair

27 August 2008

INTRODUCTION

The Indigenous Higher Education Advisory Council's *Stakeholders' Forum on Indigenous Higher Education: Our Place in the Education Revolution* was held in Canberra on 14 August 2008. The purpose of the Forum was to identify key issues and recommendations for submission to the Review of Australian Higher Education, maintaining Council's commitment to consultation and partnership with Indigenous centres¹ and staff in universities and sector stakeholder groups.

Over 80 delegates from 31 universities and a number of professional organisations attended the Forum, including Heads and Directors of Indigenous centres, leading Indigenous academics and researchers and Indigenous professional staff including Indigenous student support staff. The *Stakeholders' Forum* showcased the depth of knowledge, skills, expertise, experience and commitment of Australia's Indigenous higher education community.

In November 2007, IHEAC convened the *Ngapartji Ngapartji-Yerra: Stronger Futures* Conference in partnership with Universities Australia. The ongoing commitment of Universities Australia to take a leadership role in partnership with IHEAC to close the gap in Indigenous higher education has meant that some of the issues identified in the forum are already being worked on.

In addition to the issues raised in IHEAC's initial submission to the Review of Australian Higher Education, *Forum* delegates identified a number of key issues and recommendations to be submitted to the Review. A summary of these is below.

KEY ISSUES AND RECOMMENDATIONS

1. CELEBRATING OUR SUCCESS

- There was a strong feeling from delegates that more needs to be done to recognise, publicise and celebrate the continuing contributions, achievements, and success of Indigenous people in higher education. This will increase the Indigenous community's knowledge of higher education *and* the wider Australian community's knowledge and appreciation of Indigenous higher education.
- Australia sits on a unique educational asset. Indigenous knowledge and Indigenous culture have a powerful and marketable currency; but it is scholarship that has yet to be fully recognised within the higher education sector. This currency has global value, which ranges from international students' interest in our culture and knowledges, international scholarship and exchange with other Indigenous peoples and the aspirations of Indigenous students to access the opportunities of study abroad. The engagement of Indigenous peoples enriches our society and distinctively positions our nation within the global community. For the higher education sector, this means that Indigenous knowledge and Indigenous education is core business. Indigenous higher education must be embedded across the whole of the sector and across the whole of individual universities.

2. INDIGENOUS HIGHER EDUCATION IS CORE UNIVERSITY BUSINESS

- Universities' recognition and engagement with Indigenous communities, students and staff needs to flow beyond the symbolic to the centre of university practices and processes. Limiting Indigenous university business to specific programs and centres is not sufficient to close the educational gap. Indigenous issues are university core business and this translates to visible Indigenous representation on executive and

¹ See Section 3., for explanation of use of the term in the context of this paper.

other decision making structures, and a permanent Indigenous presence on university and sector agendas, with these functions endorsed within university policy.

- Indigenous education policy needs to be broad-based, consultative, inclusive and flexible. The responsibility for translating Indigenous aspirations and needs within higher education into practical and sustainable outcomes must be led by universities themselves in partnership with Indigenous educational leaders. This partnership must include national level policy and national and local strategies that contain defined and accountable targets for Indigenous participation across all levels of the university sector.
- In budget terms this means that specific Indigenous funding needs to revert to its policy intent of being *supplementary or additional funding*. Indigenous students and Indigenous staff are enrolled and employed as staff and students of the university; university budgetary allocations should reflect this and provide a secure and appropriate funding base for programs and centres. The role of Indigenous specific funding is to address the additional needs of Indigenous students and/or staff and should not be expected to meet the full costs of Indigenous higher education or represent the total amount spent on Indigenous higher education within an institution.
- Higher education and university budget processes need to be formulated to ensure transparency, accountability and value in the way Indigenous funds are expended within the sector. A clear division needs to be made between functional funding for items such as Indigenous student support and strategic funding aimed at innovative and developmental Indigenous programs and activities.
- Indigenous higher education funding within universities should reflect the full range of roles and responsibilities that Indigenous centres and individuals undertake across all key areas: students, teaching and learning, research, community engagement, administration and governance. This also requires universities to meet the specific training and professional development needs of Indigenous staff to be able to fulfil these responsibilities. Universities also need to formally recognise the statesmanship of our Elders, the intellectual contributions that they bring and the roles that they undertake in institutions and the higher education sector.
- All university staff and students need to be culturally competent. Cultural competency must be a whole of institution responsibility that develops good citizenship and helps address issues of institutional and individual racism that continue to be faced by Indigenous staff and students in universities. The move by universities to endorse cultural competence as a graduate attribute reinforces a whole of institution approach.

3. INDIGENOUS CENTRES ARE AN ASSET

- The term *Indigenous centres* is used within this submission in its generic sense to collectively refer to a wide range of organisational structures within universities including centres, schools, colleges, houses of learning, institutes and units that have key responsibility for providing recruitment and support services for Indigenous students, community engagement and the development of Indigenous higher education within that institution.
- Indigenous centres vary widely in size, budgets, programs, reporting lines within universities, the number of Indigenous academic and professional staff and the extent to which they are engaged in teaching, research, and governance. Some universities have more than one 'Indigenous centre', and some universities also have programs and/or individual Indigenous academic staff located outside Indigenous centres, in various Schools and Faculties. Whatever the model, *Indigenous centres* are central to Indigenous leadership and Indigenous education strategies in universities and responsible for core, ongoing services and programs.

- Indigenous centres have historically been, and continue to be, essential to the engagement of the Indigenous community, the success of Indigenous students in higher education and the graduation of these students from universities Australia wide.
- Universities need to increase the knowledge and awareness of the roles and expertise of Indigenous centres across the institution. This could be achieved, for example, by including in all new staff orientation a visit to the Indigenous centre.
- Faculties and schools need to be proactive and engage in partnerships with Indigenous centres to support Indigenous students and the broader development of Indigenous higher education within their respective faculties, schools and universities. Indigenous centres cannot be expected to do everything. Indigenous students are enrolled as university students, and therefore are a university wide responsibility. Increased academic support should be provided across campus, in faculties and schools as well as through Indigenous centres.

4. INDIGENOUS STUDENTS NEED FINANCIAL AND ACADEMIC SUPPORT

- Financial support for Indigenous students is crucial. There was overall support from Forum delegates for improving Indigenous student finances through the restructuring of ABSTUDY and other strategies outlined in the IHEAC submission to the Review of Australian Higher Education. In addition, delegates recommended that value of scholarships should increase and additional HECS scholarships should be provided.
- The Forum supported the National Union of Students' (NUS) submission to the Review of Australian Higher Education which called for a reform in Indigenous students' finances.
- The various pathways that Indigenous people take to higher education and the specific needs of Indigenous students need to be acknowledged and Indigenous centres supported with appropriate resources that are a part of core university funding. The pathways and support needs identified include:
 - A comprehensive range of marketing and recruiting pathways such as science camps, career camps, work and career field trips for high school students, Year 8 discovery days and summer and winter schools
 - Pre-orientation academic skills programs and pre-enrolment preparation programs
 - Flexible delivery modes of study
 - Residential support programs for students commencing flexible study
 - Regional student cohorts as support networks
 - Formal and informal mentoring programs
 - Improved access to IT including laptop loans, for example for distance students
 - Study Abroad schemes for Indigenous undergraduate students prior to completion of their degree
 - Promotion of Indigenous culture in universities, inclusive curriculum and cultural competency which enhance student engagement and success.
- Specific consideration needs to be given to the resource requirements of higher education programs for Indigenous Australians in prisons. The delivery of tertiary education and training programs to Indigenous students in these settings is crucial to

redressing previous educational disadvantage and providing positive employment and further education options.

5. INDIGENOUS STAFF ARE VALUABLE

- Indigenous staff in universities should be recognised, valued and appropriately supported. This includes the provision of appropriate training and professional development. Key areas of identified need are:
 - University, higher education sector and general management training, including for example Australian Institute of Management courses
 - Mental health issues training, tools for negotiation and conflict resolution and disability services workshops.
- Indigenous Employment Strategies are a university responsibility that require wider accountability for outcomes. Strategies with appropriate funding and good key performance indicators are successful; strategies often don't work if the Indigenous Employment Officer and/or Indigenous staff are isolated and not working in a culturally secure environment.
- Indigenous Employment strategies have tended to concentrate on recruitment of general staff and need to increase the focus on Indigenous academic staff.

Indigenous Academic Staff

- Funding support for Indigenous academic staff, particularly those working in Faculties outside of Indigenous centres is needed to enable full engagement in Indigenous research and scholarship and to contribute to the development of the Indigenous higher education sector. This includes maintenance of cultural knowledge and protocols, community profile and networks, Indigenous peer support networks and engagement with Indigenous scholars in other universities, and national and international contexts. This need cannot be adequately addressed within the funding constraints of the Indigenous Support Program.
- Universities need to develop specific strategies to develop Indigenous academic positions and support Indigenous academics to meet the increasing demands on academics to publish, obtain research grants and have higher degree qualifications. Strategies could include academic internships, time release or buy back and more flexible study leave provisions.
- Indigenous academics enrolled in PhDs find it difficult to complete given other workload demands. University grants and study leave provisions to support research and early career development often do not meet the specific needs of Indigenous staff. Universities need to ensure appropriate levels of support for Indigenous staff to complete PhDs.
- There is a need to acknowledge the nature of Indigenous academic workloads, which can also include additional student support, mentoring, governance and community engagement. The burden of stress from racism that Indigenous academics face in teaching Indigenous studies also needs to be acknowledged and addressed within workload models and through appropriate support mechanisms.
- While some of these issues, particularly in relation to Indigenous knowledge, scholarship and research development can be facilitated at a national level by the proposed Indigenous Learned Academy and/or the Indigenous Centre for Research Excellence (ICRE), there is also a need to address these directly at the institutional level.

6. INDIGENOUS KNOWLEDGE IS CRITICAL TO ENGAGEMENT

- Forum delegates reiterated the need for Indigenous knowledge to be valued, respected and recognised as critical to Indigenous engagement in the higher education sector. A key means of achieving this within universities would be to:
 - Appointment Elders to Cultural Chairs (Professorial)
 - Appointment Indigenous scholars to Professorial Chairs developed across the discipline and within the professions.
- There was support for the Indigenous Learned Academy and its potential to facilitate the above and address a number of key issues in relation to Indigenous knowledge. These are:
 - Visibly valuing and respecting Indigenous knowledge systems
 - Retaining the integrity of Indigenous knowledge systems
 - The inclusion of Elders and preservation of the knowledge from Elders before them
 - Maintaining a strong connection to community
 - The ability to sustain Indigenous knowledge and develop a cohort of students well studied in Indigenous knowledge
 - The establishment of formal governance of protocols and principles for Indigenous knowledge
 - Formal support for cultural supervisors and rightful respect of their role
 - Providing infrastructure to support external and philanthropic funding for Indigenous knowledge
 - Developing intellectual property around Indigenous knowledge
 - Developing national principles of Indigenous ethics to support Indigenous knowledge development and use.

7. INDIGENOUS RESEARCH CAPACITY SHOULD BE ENGAGED

- To engage and further develop the research culture and capacity of Indigenous centres and individual Indigenous academics within universities and across the sector, the establishment of a national Indigenous research block-funding scheme is essential. This could be used to build research training and skills, as small research grants, to fund community research projects and to appoint research development officers and/or postgraduate coordinators.
- The Forum facilitated discussion of the proposal to establish an ICRE and a range of potential benefits were identified including:
 - An empowering cultural space for Indigenous researchers
 - Residential and non-residential writers' retreat for PhD students
 - Respite for PhD students who were also in the workforce
 - Support to Indigenous centres to facilitate PhD completions within their institutions
 - A broader ethics role in Indigenous research, support for Indigenous research integrity and intellectual property
 - Innovation and mapping of universities in relation to Indigenous research and researchers, a clearing-house and database for Indigenous research

- Postgraduate training and mediation as well as training of Indigenous supervisors and sharing across the sector
- A role as lobbyist for financial support of Indigenous PhDs and research.
- In any development of the ICRE the following issues were raised as concerns that would need to be addressed:
 - Provision of pathways for Indigenous engagement other than PhD studies
 - Ensuring that the ICRE did not operate at the expense of other Indigenous programs
 - A clear outline of the role of the ICRE and other bodies, e.g. AIATSIS
 - Connections to and inclusion of the Indigenous community
 - Sustainable funding.

Postgraduate training

- Indigenous postgraduate students need greater financial and material support than they currently receive.
- Increased support for Indigenous postgraduate students should be provided through the development and provision of:
 - Pre-PhD intensive skills that are general and Indigenous specific
 - Mediation in relation to topics and research methodologies between Indigenous students and supervisors
 - Supervisor training that includes general and Indigenous specific training
 - Protection of the intellectual property of Indigenous PhD students particularly while formulating proposals.
- A stronger network of Indigenous scholars should be established to mentor Indigenous PhD students.
- Indigenous supervisors should be recognised with appropriate funding to reflect the high time demands on a relatively small group of Indigenous academics, the fact that some Indigenous supervisors may come from outside of the sector including Elders and community leaders, and in recognition of the contribution that cultural supervision makes to postgraduate training.
- A national database of current Indigenous PhD candidates and topics, as well as a national database of Indigenous PhD graduates and their topics should be established. This is different to databases which may list completed PhDs on Indigenous topics, but not indicate if the PhD graduate is Indigenous or non-Indigenous.
- It was noted that the ICRE and Indigenous Learned Academy have the potential to facilitate some of these issues.

8. APPROPRIATE AND INCREASED RESOURCES ARE ESSENTIAL

- Funding Indigenous higher education is a sector wide responsibility and a university responsibility.
- Indigenous centres need to be properly resourced to undertake all their roles and responsibilities. Indigenous Support Funding is not an adequate and secure base,

and must be regarded as additional funding. It should not be subject to any infrastructure fees or overheads within universities.

- Funding should be based on life cycle rather than university entry and exit and include mechanisms for early rather than crisis intervention. Flexible funding arrangements are needed to address all the determinants impeding success of Indigenous students.
- Financial support for Indigenous students should increase and this should be accompanied by HECS decreases.
- The Indigenous Tutorial Assistance Scheme (ITAS) is critical to student success but does not cover the cost of administration and has complex reporting requirements. ITAS funding needs to be more flexible, include adequate administrative costs and streamlined reporting requirements.
- A national specific Indigenous higher education funding scheme for Indigenous academic staff should be established to enable full engagement in Indigenous research, scholarship and professional development at national and international levels.
- The development of a national Indigenous research block-funding scheme is essential to build research culture, training and skills within universities.
- Funding support for the development of Cultural Chairs and Professorial Chairs for Indigenous scholars should be developed.
- A national approach to infrastructure development is supported.