



**Australian Government**



Indigenous Higher Education Advisory Council

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**Submission to the  
Review of Australian Higher Education**



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Indigenous Higher Education Advisory Council

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Dear Professor Bradley

**Indigenous Higher Education Advisory Council – Submission to the Review of Australian Higher Education**

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

Council was pleased to have the opportunity to meet with you in person on the 24 June 2008 in Melbourne. IHEAC's submission was informed by our discussions at this meeting.

As previously discussed, Council has organised a stakeholder forum for 14 August 2008 themed *Our Place in the Education Revolution*. IHEAC will provide you with additional information shortly after this forum, as participants will have provided further practical evidence to substantiate Council's core arguments.

IHEAC has recently finalised its 2007 Annual Conference Report, and this is attached for your information. This Conference was themed *Ngapartji Ngapartji – Yerra: Stronger Futures*.

Please contact me if there is any further information you require.

Yours sincerely

Professor Roger Thomas  
Chair

31 July 2008

## INTRODUCTION

Since its inauguration in 2005, the Indigenous Higher Education Advisory Council (IHEAC) has provided policy advice to Government, and currently reports directly to the Minister for Education, Employment and Workplace Relations.

Now in its second term, Council is pleased it has successfully placed Indigenous higher education more prominently on the national agenda and overseen significant positive outcomes within the sector. Council remains conscious, however, that there remains much to do to improve the participation and success of Indigenous people, at all levels, within Australian universities. Council is committed to building the capacity of Indigenous higher education to provide stronger futures for Indigenous peoples.

Council's submission to the Review addresses the under-representation of Indigenous people within the higher education system as a whole with specific attention paid to the under-representation of Indigenous students. The factors behind such under-representation are complex, multi-faceted and interrelated. They include, but are not confined to, the high rates of poverty and its incumbent educational disadvantages; high attrition rates of Indigenous students particularly in senior secondary school years; and the over-representation of Indigenous students undertaking vocational rather than academic studies in Years 11 and 12. The consequence is a low proportion of Indigenous students who possess the prerequisites needed to enrol directly into higher education courses. The evidence base for these factors is outlined in section four of this submission.

### **A National Approach Responsive to Local Needs**

Successful strategies to address Indigenous under-representation also need to be multi-faceted. Just as there is no one Indigenous higher education 'problem' there is no one Indigenous higher education 'solution'. Council argues that in order to improve Indigenous higher education outcomes across the sector a national approach is required. This approach should be national insofar as it represents a concerted, coordinated and comprehensive effort but it should also be characterised by a flexibility and responsiveness toward local contexts and the needs and aspirations of diverse Indigenous communities. Council is concerned that a plethora of approaches by individual agencies to discrete aspects of Indigenous higher education under-representation are evolving or have evolved in isolation from each other. Without a clear strategic direction or consideration these are unlikely to result in a sustainable process or attain success over the longer term. Council considers that higher education is central to the aspirations of Indigenous people for a rightful place in Australian society, believes that Australian Universities must play a leadership role in the nation's recognition of Indigenous people and culture, and believes that policy for Indigenous higher education should be underpinned by the goal of social, cultural and economic development of the whole Indigenous community.

To develop a strategic coordinated approach to turning the currently highly inequitable Indigenous participation figures around, Council has identified a set of key policy strategies. Council considers that the pathway towards a stronger and sustainable future is via the development of a vigorous, broad-based and linked Indigenous higher education infrastructure. This infrastructure would bring together and streamline existing support structures, resources and expertise as well as cohesively developing other vital elements. The principal purpose is to facilitate, in a structured and cohesive way, the growth, capacity building and presence of Indigenous undergraduate students, post-graduate students, researchers, scholars and professional staff within and across the higher education sector.

As outlined in previous documents, and elaborated on within this submission, the issues around Indigenous higher education need to be tackled simultaneously across a number of interlinked fields. **The strategies** and corresponding rationale to begin building a stronger future for Indigenous participation and success at all levels are categorised under the following topics:

- 1. Indigenous Higher Education in Australia: Valuing and Sustaining Indigenous Knowledge Systems by Establishing the Indigenous Learned Academy.**
- 2. Research and Innovation: Closing the Gaps on Indigenous Post-graduates and Indigenous Research Leadership by Establishing The Indigenous Centre for Research Excellence.**
- 3. Productivity: Building Capacity and Skills by Developing a National Indigenous Workforce Strategy and Implementing a Cultural Competency Framework.**
- 4. Indigenous Students: Closing the Gap by addressing Student Finance.**
- 5. Governance: Making Indigenous Business Core University Business.**
- 6. Resourcing Indigenous Higher Education: Achieving Success by Funding for Success.**

## **1. Indigenous Higher Education in Australia: Valuing and Sustaining Indigenous Knowledge Systems by Establishing the Indigenous Learned Academy**

Indigenous people do not come empty handed to Australia's higher education system but bring significant strengths, both in knowledge capital and human capital that enriches higher education in Australia. The recognition of Indigenous peoples' contribution as well as needs, is critical to full Indigenous engagement in higher education.

Aboriginal people in Australia have the oldest living knowledge system in the world, and intellectual traditions that predate western intellectual traditions by millennia. Torres Strait Islander people also have their own distinct knowledge system. These Indigenous knowledge systems and intellectual traditions have culturally distinct knowledge bases, research methodologies, evidentiary systems and values. They are complete systems in their own right.

Indigenous knowledge systems are a vital and unique part of Australia's knowledge capital but there has been a national failure to fully acknowledge the value of Indigenous knowledge systems as well as the expertise of Indigenous custodians and knowledge holders, and to make both of these *visible and integral* within higher education in Australia. There needs to be stronger formal recognition that Australia has two knowledge systems operating: a 'collective' non-Indigenous or western knowledge system that links to similar systems worldwide and an Indigenous knowledge system (also a collective system) that links to other Indigenous knowledge systems worldwide, and which operate in higher education as well as Indigenous community contexts. Australia has the potential to have one of the richest and *most complete* knowledge systems in the world.

Australia has invested heavily in developing its western knowledge capital in universities. Similar substantial resource investment in Indigenous knowledge is required for Australia to have both of its knowledge systems operating effectively in higher education. The nature and custodianship of Indigenous knowledge means that this must include funding for Indigenous scholars and researchers within universities, Indigenous communities and knowledge custodians outside of universities and the relationships between them. In the context of higher education in Australia, Indigenous peoples and communities want to be able to participate fully in western knowledge systems as well as to maintain, practice, and grow Indigenous knowledge systems within universities, and in communities. The Indigenous knowledge systems of Australia are unique in the world, if they are not fully maintained, practiced and developed in Australia, where in the world will they exist?

The more formal recognition of Indigenous knowledge systems has included a call from Council and supported by Universities Australia, for Indigenous knowledge systems to be listed as a separate division within the ABS Research Fields, Courses and Disciplines codes, making Australia a world leader in recognising the values and potential benefits that derive from the knowledge of Indigenous peoples in the research classification system.

## The Indigenous Learned Academy

To develop and support Indigenous knowledge systems and Indigenous scholarship, it is proposed that a National Indigenous Learned Academy (ILA) be established. The role of the ILA would be complementary to the learned academies already in existence and like them, critical to the economic, social and cultural development of the nation. The ILA can be an intellectual resource to the nation, provide independent credible advice to inform government and operate meaningfully in an international context.

The ILA would function to affirm and sustain Indigenous knowledge and philosophy within Australia; enable Indigenous scholars and researchers to collaboratively develop a national vision and context; and advance Indigenous knowledge, philosophy and scholarship in an area of rapid development internationally. The ILA could put Australia at the forefront of these developments and facilitate international collaborations and scholarship. With some 370 million Indigenous people in 70 countries worldwide, this is a potentially huge global network.

The ILA will provide cohesion and direction in the development of Indigenous knowledge in higher education by bringing together leading thinkers in Indigenous knowledge and learning and providing a forum for collaborative debate. It has the potential to assist universities in the development of Indigenous knowledge and cultural competency frameworks, and advise on principles for best practice.

There is already strong support for the concept from the Federal Government, which has funded a scoping study that Council is currently undertaking to investigate:

- The scope and role of an ILA
- How best to establish an ILA
- The support and rationale for an ILA from both Indigenous and non-Indigenous stakeholders
- The key foci of the academy, which should be determined by Indigenous stakeholders (i.e. what the academy can achieve that cannot be achieved through current system or mechanisms)
- The appropriate mechanisms that make transparent the outcomes of the ILA (i.e. what are the benchmarks and key performance indicators of a successful learned academy)
- How these key ideas can be implemented and sustained over time
- Sustainable funding arrangements for the ILA

For Indigenous people and particularly for Indigenous young people, the ILA is a visible and tangible expression of the value placed on Indigenous peoples' knowledge at the highest levels of Australia's education system and the recognition of the partnership in education that Indigenous people seek.

## 2. Research and Innovation: Closing the Gaps on Indigenous Post-graduates and Indigenous Research Leadership by Establishing The Indigenous Centre For Research Excellence

Two critical gaps are apparent in relation to research and innovation within the higher education sector. The first is the need to raise the low postgraduate participation and completion rates. The second is to address the overall absence of Indigenous academics in leadership positions in any meaningful numbers within the higher education sector. Closing these gaps requires a large, immediate and coordinated effort to build Indigenous research capacity. The lack of progress on either of these issues over the past decade means that major change in the way Indigenous researchers are developed and supported within higher education is required and to this end, Council proposes the implementation of the **Indigenous Centre for Research Excellence**. The key role of this Centre, to build Indigenous research capacity, networks and leadership sector wide, is a crucially important purpose that is fundamentally different to existing bodies such as AIATSIS, Cooperative Research Centres and the United Nations University of Traditional Knowledge.

Indigenous research and methodologies remain at the margins to the core of higher education research and innovation culture. Bringing Indigenous and western knowledge systems into the same space is an essential infrastructure task to 'close the gap' in Indigenous disadvantage.

A significant effect of the marginal position of Indigenous research and knowledges is the dramatic shortfall in the number and capacity of Indigenous researchers to provide a robust Indigenous research culture and practice within the core of higher education research. Better Indigenous research within the higher education sectors is vital because it will:

1. enable better outcomes for Indigenous people and our nation, and
2. enrich the innovation and research sector via inclusion of unique qualities of Indigenous research and knowledge.

### Indigenous post-graduate students

There is an obvious and urgent need to raise the number of Indigenous researchers. As shown in Tables 1 and 2, the disparity in enrolment, participation and especially completion rates of Indigenous post-graduate students is dramatic. Indigenous students make up only 0.3 percent of Doctorate and 0.6 percent of Masters by Research completions. To achieve parity of participation the number of Indigenous doctoral students needs to more than triple and completions need to increase by more than 600 percent. The task is formidable.

**Table 1: Indigenous and non-Indigenous Doctorates, 2001-2006**

	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	Parity number
<b>Enrolments</b>							
Indigenous	131	147	182	209	220	256	775
Non-Indigenous	28252	29244	30671	31992	32760	33596	
% Indigenous	0.46	0.50	0.59	0.65	0.67	0.76	
<b>Completions</b>							
Indigenous	8	9	12	12	16	N/A	102
Non-Indigenous	3334	3682	4014	4051	4372	N/A	
% Indigenous	0.24	0.24	0.30	0.30	0.36	N/A	

Source: IHEAC (2008)

The post-graduate gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous students and the impact of this on measures to close the health and socio-economic gap for Indigenous Australians is made clearer by the disaggregation of these data into key areas. In Table 2 the numbers of Indigenous post-graduates in specific disciplines is juxtaposed against the proportion of all post-graduate students in this discipline. A population parity percentage would be around three percent. As is obvious from the data presented in Table 2, only in the fields of Indigenous Studies and Indigenous Health are Indigenous post-graduate proportions above parity rates. In nearly all other fields, the proportion of Indigenous post-graduate students is well below one percent.

**Table 2: Indigenous Post-Graduates: Numbers and Percentages of Total: 2006**

Field of Education		No. of Indigenous post-graduates	Indigenous post-grads as % of all post-graduates (Parity = 3%)
<b>01 SCIENCES /INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY/ENGINEERING</b>			
01.01	Mathematical Sciences	2	0.16
01.07	Earth Sciences	2	0.24
01.07.03	Geology	1	0.47
02.01	Computer Science	7	0.15
02.03	Information Systems	3	0.04
02	Not classified to detailed level of field	3	
03.01	Manufacturing Engineering and Technology	1	0.21
03.03	Process and Resources Engineering	4	0.18
03.03.03	Mining Engineering	2	0.32
03.07	Mechanical and Industrial Engineering and Technology	2	0.13
03.09	Civil Engineering	1	0.05
04.01	Architecture and Urban Environment	6	0.19
04.03	Building	1	0.22
05.09	Environmental Studies	28	1.00
<b>06 HEALTH</b>			
06.01	Medical Studies	15	0.33
06.01.01	General Medicine	5	0.34
06.01.09	Paediatrics	2	0.81
06.03	Nursing	58	0.74
06.05	Pharmacy	3	0.31
06.07	Dental Studies	0	0.0
06.13	Public Health	141	2.42
06.13.05	Indigenous Health	54	58.70
06.17	Rehabilitation Therapies	7	0.21
<b>07 EDUCATION</b>			
07.01	Teacher Education	154	0.65
<b>08 MANAGEMENT AND COMMERCE</b>			
08.01	Accounting	9	0.05
08.03	Business and Management	136	0.24
<b>09 SOCIETY AND CULTURE</b>			
09.01	Political Science and Policy Studies	11	0.33
09.03	Studies in Human Society	163	2.51
09.03.11	Indigenous Studies	104	47.27
09.05	Human Welfare Studies and Services	52	1.00
09.07	Behavioural Science	46	0.59
09.09	Law	63	0.59
09.11	Justice and Law Enforcement	8	0.85
09.15	Language and Literature	22	0.51
09.19	Economics and Econometrics	1	0.03
<b>10 CREATIVE ARTS</b>			
10.01	Performing Arts	9	0.65
10.03	Visual Arts and Crafts	26	1.43
10.05	Graphic and Design Studies	2	0.22
10.07	Communication and Media Studies	18	0.42

Source: DEEWR (2008) Data provided to IHEAC.

Increasing the number of Indigenous research post-graduate students is not just a matter of getting more enrolments. Although we clearly need significantly more Indigenous undergraduate students to desire and commit to post-graduate studies we also need to focus on quality of outcomes. Council is aware of the risks inherent in fast-tracking Indigenous students through their studies. Indigenous post-graduates, as is the case for all post-graduates, require adequate time and training to develop and master key research skills. It should be noted that Indigenous academics are also often, simultaneously Indigenous post-graduate students. Only 15 percent of Indigenous academic staff hold a Doctorate compared with 57 percent of non-Indigenous academic staff. The support systems for these staff need to be considerably strengthened to build their capacity and opportunities to complete higher level qualifications.

Council acknowledges the existence of some Indigenous research programs. The Research Mentor program for Indigenous women at the Social Policy Research Centre at The University of New South Wales is an example. Others include the Australian Academy of the Social Sciences' Summer School for Indigenous post-graduate students, held at the University of Melbourne and the recent Indigenous Research Methodologies Master Class held at Queensland University of Technology. Such programs provide vital academic and research skills and support and networking opportunities for Indigenous post-graduates from around Australia as well as providing support and guidance for non-Indigenous researchers and supervisors. Overall, however, the sector wide commitment to, and program implementation of, support for Indigenous researchers tends to be ad hoc, often short term, with success and innovation not specifically rewarded. Conversely, lack of success is usually unsanctioned.

The IHEAC over-arching strategy of establishing an Indigenous Centre for Research Excellence and an Indigenous Learned Academy directly address the current lack of recognition and capacity building of Indigenous research, Indigenous researchers, the place and recognition of Indigenous knowledges and the building of a sustainable Indigenous academic workforce.

### **The Indigenous Centre for Research Excellence (ICRE)**

The core aim of the Indigenous Centre for Research Excellence (ICRE) is to develop a critical mass of Australian Indigenous researchers within the higher education sector. Achieving this aim requires a substantial body of individual Indigenous people with high level educational qualifications and research training and an established, dedicated infrastructure to provide leadership and support for Indigenous research development and research activity. An ICRE will directly address both of these pre-requisites. The ICRE will also address the need to build a cooperative, supportive and supported, affiliation of Indigenous researchers within the sector and promote scholarships and skills around Indigenous research methodologies.

At the base of this aim is the vision of an Indigenous research workforce that can lead an Indigenous research agenda towards projects that improve the life options and outcomes for Australian Indigenous peoples. Indigenous research within this context is research on issues of importance defined from an Indigenous perspective. The ICRE's core research focus will incorporate 'closing the gap' themes of social inclusion, economic opportunities and educational transformation. Within this vision is a commitment to excellence and to providing valuable, tangible returns to funding bodies, Australian universities, Indigenous researchers and Indigenous communities. The long-term value of the ICRE will be to contribute to achieving identified national goals.

An ICRE would be virtual and dispersed with hubs of research support throughout the sector. The Centre will be a collaborative project of Indigenous researchers and their respective universities across the Australian higher education sector. Universities will be invited to be participating entities in the Centre and individual active Indigenous researchers will also be invited to affiliate with the Centre. The ICRE will be a discrete body, operating collaboratively with, but outside the boundaries of, existing Indigenous Centres at Australian universities.

The Centre, as envisaged by Council, has twin primary purposes:

1. Build Indigenous research capacity

As its first priority, the Centre will initiate, support and build the capacity and capability of Indigenous researchers at the post-graduate level and among Indigenous staff. The focus will be on bridging the transition of a research career from undergraduate study to research leadership and maximising the completion and success rates of Indigenous Masters and Doctoral candidates. The development of Indigenous research capacity will be undertaken at two levels:

- a. Formal research development programs, support and tailored research skills training will be provided for Indigenous research students and researchers. Indigenous research methodologies skills and training will form a stand-alone arm of such skilling.
- b. The Centre will support participating universities to build their internal Indigenous research capacity.

2. Build Indigenous research leadership within the higher education sector.

As its second priority the ICRE will build Indigenous research leadership, nationally and internationally. This priority is a vital addition to priority one of capacity building in that it develops and builds an Indigenous research infrastructure within the higher education sector with viable and productive national and international Indigenous research collaborative relationships and programs.

The scoping study has identified a number of specific tasks of the ICRE aligned with these two key purposes.

**Tasks of the Indigenous Centre of Research Excellence**

The following specific tasks are aligned with these two key purposes. Their breadth emphasises the importance of the ICRE. These include:

**Build Indigenous research capacity**

- Foster a research culture among Indigenous academics and students
- Directly develop the research capacity and capabilities of Indigenous academics and students through specific programs, such as mentoring programs, thesis writing workshops and master classes on Indigenous research methodologies
- Foster post-doctoral fellowships for Indigenous researchers throughout the higher education sector
- Sponsor and initiate transition programs to higher level education such as research internships
- Facilitate workshops around key issues in research such as producing high quality research proposals, developing research budgets, writing for peer reviewed journals
- Develop initiatives and programs to underpin and strengthen support for Indigenous researchers (undergraduate, post-graduate and academic) within Australian universities
- Foster the growth, quality and breadth of Indigenous related research within the Australian higher education sector
- Promote and foster opportunities for Indigenous researchers to work together
- Develop an accessible register for Indigenous research expertise
- Encourage and support Indigenous researchers to publish their work
- Provide a (virtual) central hub for information on Indigenous research/er opportunities such as scholarships and funding opportunities
- Develop an active (virtual) Indigenous researcher network
- Provide small-scale seed funding to facilitate the development of viable research proposals by Indigenous researchers

## **Build Indigenous Research Leadership**

- Identify gaps in, and priorities for, Indigenous research in the higher education sector around the 'closing the gap' key themes
- Build an on-line central publications list around the 'closing the gap' key themes
- Provide support and advice to higher educational institutions
- Build interdisciplinary research links and relationships with key stakeholders including the private sector, government, Indigenous communities and organisations
- Build formal links and relationships with international Indigenous Centres and research programs
- Collaborate with Universities Australia and other key organisations to develop a national Indigenous research strategy
- Monitor progress of Indigenous research capacity building within the higher education sector
- Provide advice and support on Indigenous research for entities administering contestable funded grant programs
- Working collaboratively with competitive funding entities to facilitate the development of research projects to address the 'closing the gap' key themes
- Sponsor international Indigenous scholars to study or research in Australia
- Initiate a national/international journal for Indigenous research around three key themes
- Develop programs to encourage Indigenous leaders, organisations and communities to become users, initiators and promoters of research
- Provide central collation of data on Indigenous research within the higher education sector around theme areas

The Federal Government has provided \$125,000 over 2008/09 for scoping studies for the ICRE and the ILA. Council is committed to working to make these centres a reality but both key Indigenous higher education infrastructure items require a commitment of funding and other resources to move them from the scoping study stage to establishment. However, Council firmly believes that without the establishment of an Indigenous higher education infrastructure as represented by these two bodies, meaningful progress in closing the educational and other gaps between life outcomes for Indigenous and other Australians is unachievable.

## **3. Productivity: Building Capacity and Skills by Developing A National Indigenous Workforce Strategy and a Cultural Competency Framework**

The disparity of educational attainment of Indigenous students compared to non-Indigenous students is especially significant given the very young demographic profile of the Indigenous population. The 2006 ABS Census indicated that 38 percent of the Indigenous population are aged under 15 years compared to 19 percent of the non-Indigenous population, and that the median age of Indigenous people is 21 years, some 16 years younger than the median age for the non-Indigenous population (ABS, 2006).

Hence, the negative consequences of on-going educational inequality will be experienced by Indigenous young people themselves, but also, increasingly, by the nation. Indigenous youth represent a growing proportion of Australia's potential labour market. If we look at international comparisons of attainment then the picture is bleak for many Indigenous students at age 15 years.

### ***Australia's international reputation***

The Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) Program for International Student Assessment (PISA) assesses the scientific, reading and mathematical literacy skills of

students at 15 years of age. The PISA Survey Report 2006 for Australia shows that despite Australia's overall high performance, Indigenous students score well below non-Indigenous students and there has been little improvement since PISA was first conducted in 2000.

- In Scientific Literacy, 40 percent of Indigenous students performed below the OECD 'baseline' and were judged to be at serious risk of not being able to participate adequately in the 21<sup>st</sup> century workforce or to contribute as productive future citizens.
- In Mathematical Literacy and Reading Literacy, 39 percent and 38 percent of Indigenous students respectively were below the 'baseline' and this compares to 12 percent for non-Indigenous students in both categories.
- Average PISA scores for Indigenous students place them two and a half years behind the averages of their non-Indigenous contemporaries in terms of formal schooling. (Thomson and De Bortoli, 2008)

The costs of leaving this group under-skilled are great, particularly within the context of Australia's ageing population. Unlike the rest of the population, the Indigenous population is experiencing increasing birth rates and, as a consequence, a population skewed towards the early working years.

### **A National Indigenous Workforce Strategy and Cultural Competency Framework**

The higher education sector has a particular role to play in maximising productivity. This involves building the capacity of Indigenous people to participate in the labour market. In the context of higher education in Australia this includes:

- Building the Indigenous higher education workforce, and
- Building the Indigenous professional workforce.

Council believes the best means to achieve this is the development of a **National Indigenous Workforce Strategy**.

Increasing Australia's broader national productivity involves building the skills and capacity of Australia's professional workforce. Cultural competency is a necessary graduate attribute for all Australian graduates and can be achieved through the development of a **Cultural Competency Framework**.

### **The Indigenous Higher Education Workforce**

Within higher education, Indigenous academic and professional staff are central to the development of Indigenous knowledge systems, teaching and research, which provide the culturally secure framework and culturally enriched spaces within which 'success' can be achieved across all areas and sustained over the long term.

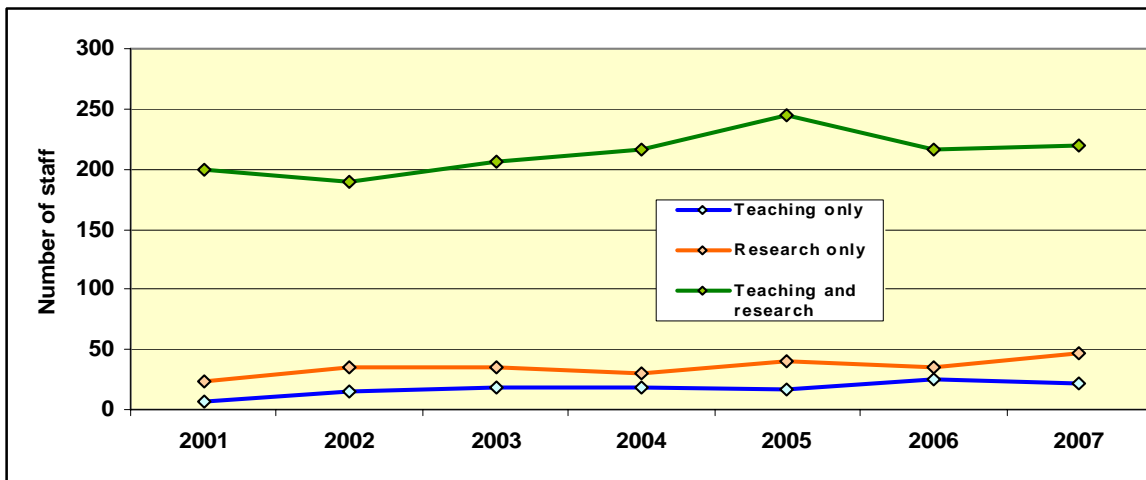
Yet, Indigenous higher education staff are significantly and deleteriously under-represented in both the academy and the sector.

- Overall, the proportion of Indigenous staff to all staff in 2007 was 0.83 percent, or less than a third of what it should be if population parity existed.
- Whilst Indigenous non-academic staff increased in 2007, there was a drop in the proportion of Indigenous academic staff in 2007 to 0.67 percent, less than a quarter of parity rates.
- While there have been strong increases in the number of Indigenous non-academic staff since 2001, Indigenous academic staff numbers increased at a lower rate than non-Indigenous academic staff from (approximately 20% compared with 26%).

- Indigenous academic staff are also over-represented at lower levels in the academy. Only one third of Indigenous staff are in positions above Lecturer B level compared to nearly half of non-Indigenous academic staff (33 percent compared to 47 percent).

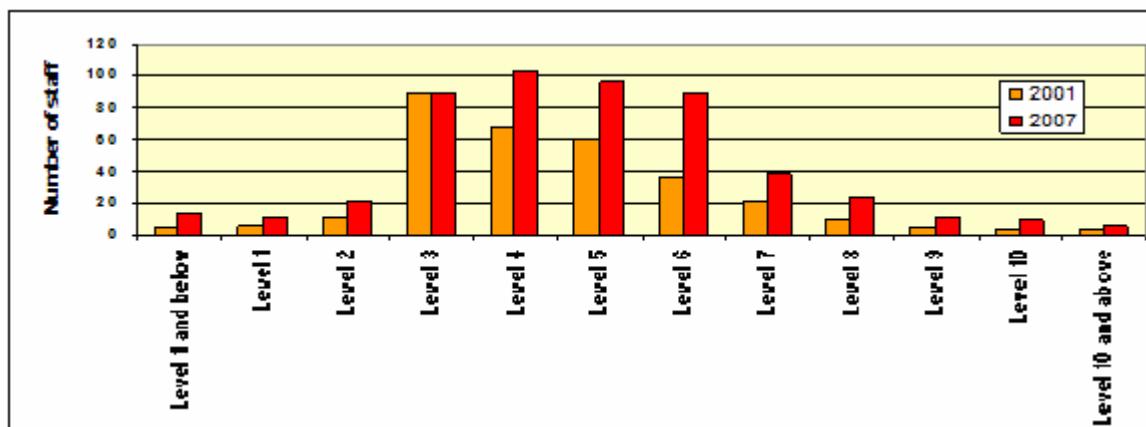
Without significant increases in the numbers of Indigenous staff as well as Indigenous graduates there won't be a viable Indigenous higher education workforce to provide the leadership, knowledge, skills and experience needed to maintain current programs, address unmet needs and develop into the future.

**Figure 1: Number of Indigenous academic staff by function, Australia, 2001-2007**



Source: DEEWR (2008) Data provided to IHEAC.

**Figure 2: Number of Indigenous non-academic staff by level, Australia, 2001-2007**



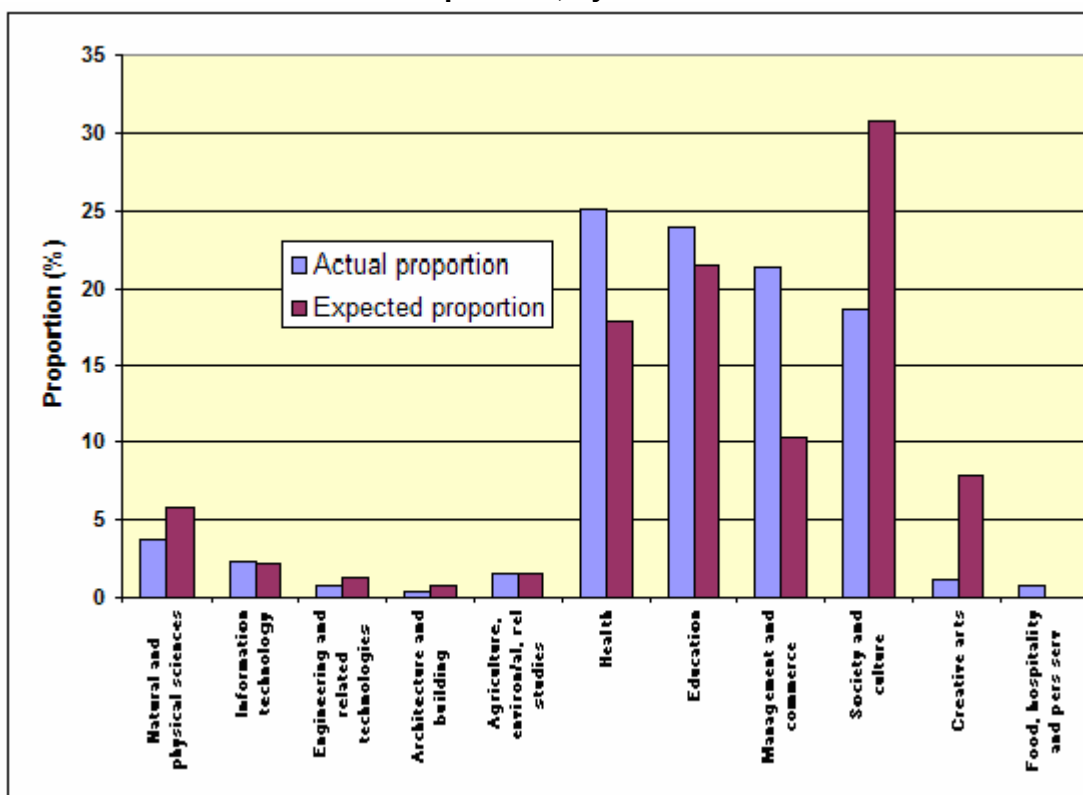
Source: DEEWR (2008) Data provided to IHEAC.

### The Indigenous Professional Workforce

Data in Figure 3 is from the Graduate Careers Australia (GCA) Survey of 247 Indigenous respondents. The results show that most Indigenous graduates enter the fields of education, health, management and social occupations and that expected graduate employment fields largely reflect what would be expected from their field of study. However, the GCA data also indicates that while Indigenous graduates are flowing into key professions, they are not represented in anywhere near large enough numbers to either meet the needs of the nation or of Indigenous people. For example, of

the sample of 247 graduates, thirty entered nursing; seven entered medicine, three entered physiotherapy, two entered dentistry, five entered social work and eight entered law.

**Figure 3: Proportion of Indigenous graduates entering a full time occupation and expected proportion based on award course completions, by field of education: 2007**



Source: DEEWR (2008) Data provided to IHEAC.

Higher education is critical for training graduates in key professions such as health and education, but there is increasing demand for Indigenous graduates across all fields particularly science and engineering. The impact of Indigenous professional graduates in their field can be readily seen through, for example, the work of the Australian Indigenous Doctors Association, which encompasses the medical profession, medical education, Indigenous health and communities as well as directly impacting on young people in raising educational aspirations. A National Workforce Strategy can enable us to determine such questions as; how we increase the number of Indigenous professional graduates across all fields of study, what are the critical gaps, what priorities and resources are needed, and how do we build scientific and mathematical literacy to underpin entry to professions that require them?

### **A National Professional Workforce that is Culturally Competent**

In addition to the productivity benefits of improving outcomes for Indigenous students and staff in our universities, there are productivity gains to be had from the Indigenous knowledge systems that are a unique and currently untapped resource of the Australian higher education sector. A skilled national professional workforce should be in possession of cultural competency, and as universities seek to build this skilled national workforce, they should strive to develop cultural competency as an attribute in all graduates.

The underlying principles of cultural competency are to the abilities to be able to:

- interact and communicate effectively with Indigenous Australians, and

- to serve Indigenous communities effectively so that differences and diversity are respected and valued.

This in turn leads to better services to and outcomes for Indigenous people particularly on critical health, education, social justice and economic indicators.

The requirement for Indigenous cultural competence of all graduates also has positive outcomes for Indigenous students in higher education including:

- Cultural relevance, cultural affirmation and cultural safety within curriculum
- Issues of racism addressed on campus and the
- Attendant improvements in access and retention success.

While it is clear that cultural competence is essential in fields such as health education and social work and that these courses must be a priority, Indigenous studies have wide applicability and should become core curriculum in all fields of study. The cultural competency of professionals is increasingly required to meet regulatory compliance in local, national and international research, employment and development areas. Native title for example is a critical area for 'cultural competency' in Australia, particularly in related industries such as mining, where companies require expertise in the areas of law and legal studies, business, archaeology, anthropology, geology, engineering, as well as other areas such as architecture, landscape architecture, and town planning.

Improving the cultural competency of students in relation to Indigenous culture increases the capacity of students and graduates in their professional practice by giving them a greater repertoire of skills and knowledge, and by better equipping them to work in an increasingly global environment.

The medical curriculum at The University of Western Australia (UWA) provides one best practice model of cultural competence in regard to Aboriginal health, where medical students undertake a range of core and elective units across all year levels that include historical and cultural factors as well as professional practice.

The wider value of Aboriginal curriculum can be seen in the evaluations of Medical students: <sup>1</sup>

'... the best aspect of studying Aboriginal health has been how different it is to the rest of the medical course ... it really makes you think more deeply about issues ... this course has put me more in touch with my own thought process ... the thing is, although passing anatomy, biochemistry, epidemiology, etc, is what will get me through the medical course, its the ideas, knowledge and thought processes that I've gained from the Aboriginal health unit that will stand me in stead for years to come, both as a doctor and simply as a member of an Australian society that needs to be better informed' (student reflection 2006)

'It seems that the medical aspect of a patient is easy to treat but the difficulty lies in helping the patient' (Fourth Year student 2007)

'Over all the unit has been extremely beneficial. Some of the skills and principles I have learnt in this unit will be beneficial throughout my entire course and I think I will be a better doctor because of it'. (Second Year student 2008)

Cultural competence requires a transformation of the curriculum in universities. To deliver this on a grand scale, an increased cohort of Indigenous academics (teachers and researchers) is required, however the expertise required to begin developing a cultural competency framework already exists. Council has already commenced work on this with Universities Australia.

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<sup>1</sup> Source:unpublished data provided by the Centre for Aboriginal Medical and Dental Health, University of Western Australia, collected as part of standard course evaluations from Medical Students studying Aboriginal health curriculum within the Medical Course. .

#### 4. Indigenous Students: Closing the Gap by addressing Student Finance

The under-representation of Indigenous higher education students is directly related to poor educational outcomes of Indigenous students in both primary and secondary schooling. To change this and increase the pool of potential Indigenous students for higher education, a coordinated approach across the different sectors of the education system is required.

##### Education Pathways and Intersections

The educational backgrounds of Indigenous people vary by age groups and regions, but the underlying pattern of educational attainment is well below that of the non-Indigenous population. The evidence of an education gap is apparent at multiple levels across the school years and into tertiary participation. This disparity is especially significant given the very young demographic profile of the Indigenous population. Between 2001 and 2006 Australia's Indigenous population grew by 11 percent compared to only 5.8 percent overall population growth and around 38 percent of Indigenous people are below the age of 15 compared to around 19 percent of the non-Indigenous population (ABS, 2006). Educational inequality for young Indigenous people will, therefore, have on-going negative social and economic consequences for decades to come.

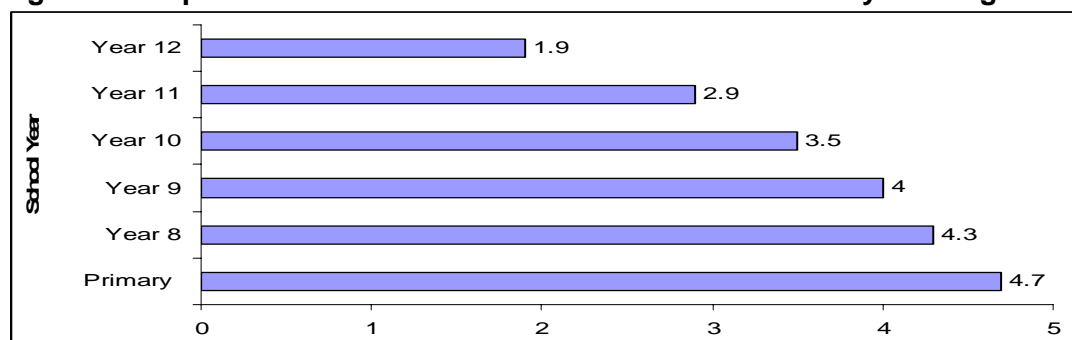
##### National Benchmarks

In 2004 only 71 percent of Year 7 Indigenous students achieved national reading benchmarks compared to 91 percent of non-Indigenous students. On literacy benchmarks 82 percent of non-Indigenous students achieved the benchmark compared to 52 percent of Indigenous students (MCEETYA, 2006).

##### Retention

Attrition of young Indigenous students from the schooling system occurs steadily over the secondary years. At senior schooling level, three times as many Indigenous students as non-Indigenous students leave school between Years 10 and 11 (MCEETYA, 2006). As shown in Figure 4, while in primary school, Indigenous students are represented at around the same rate as the proportion of the population who are Indigenous, the proportion drops each year into secondary school. By Year 12 only 1.9 percent of students are Indigenous although around 4-5 percent of young people aged 16-18 are Indigenous (Habibis and Walter, in press).

**Figure 4: Proportion of Australian school students that identify as Indigenous**



Note: Year 7 not included as in some states year 7 students are counted as primary students

Source: ABS (2006) Schools: 17

At senior schooling level, the apparent Year 12 retention rate of Indigenous students increased from 33 percent to 39 percent between 1994 and 2003, but this rate is still only about half that of non-Indigenous students. While approximately 90 percent of Indigenous young people are enrolled at

school in Year 10, only around 60 percent progress to Year 11 and 40 percent to Year 12<sup>2</sup>. In contrast 95 percent of all Australian youth are at school in Year 10, approximately 85 percent progress to Year 11 and 75 percent progress to Year 12.

### ***Year 12 Achievement***

In relation to achievement, just under half of Indigenous students who progress to Year 12 achieve a Year 12 certificate (or approximately 30 percent of the age cohort) compared to 85 percent of non-Indigenous students (or approximately 60 percent of the age cohort).

Indigenous students are seriously under-represented in 'academic' courses in Years 11 and 12. In 2005, only 35 percent of Indigenous students in government schools undertook a Year 11 or Year 12 course aimed at gaining university entrance compared to 80 percent of non-Indigenous students. Of these Indigenous students only 12 percent attained a tertiary entrance or equivalent score (TES) that would gain them university entrance, compared to 47 percent of non-Indigenous students. Of all students commencing higher education in 2006, the proportion of Indigenous students with a TES was 8.6 percent (up from 5.3 percent in 2001) compared to 35 percent for non-Indigenous students (DEEWR paper provided to IHEAC, 2008).

### ***VET participation***

Compounding the problem is the high proportion of Indigenous students undertaking vocational education and training (VET) studies which do not create direct pathways to higher education. By age 17 there are more Indigenous students in VET than school<sup>3</sup> and at age 18, only around five percent of Indigenous people commence a higher education course. The picture for non-Indigenous students is very different: VET participation in this age group is far lower than school participation, and at the age of 18, twenty five percent of all Australians commence higher education courses. These disparate outcomes are summarised in Figure 5.

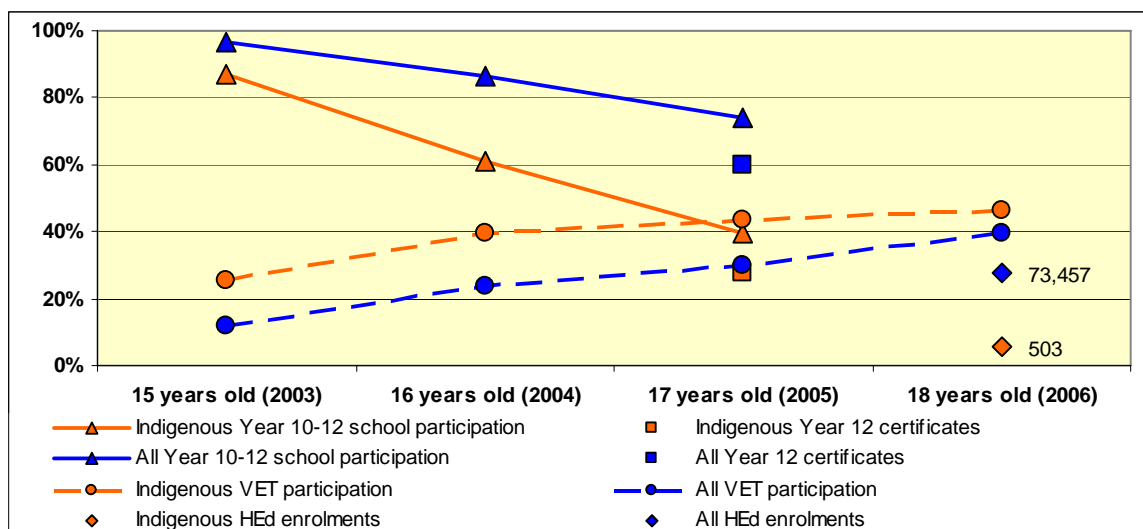
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<sup>2</sup> The school participation rate is calculated by dividing the number of all Year 10 students in 2003, Year 11 students in 2004 and Year 12 students in 2005 by the number of 18 year olds counted in the 2006 Census (i.e. the age cohort most likely to be in the Years of schooling in the years stated: 17 in 2005; 16 in 2004; and 15 in 2003).

The percentage of people who received Year 12 certificates is calculated by dividing the number of students who received a Year 12 certificate in 2005 by the number of 18 year olds counted in the 2006 Census (i.e. people who would have been 17 in 2005).

<sup>3</sup> Students may be counted more than once as they may be enrolled in VET in schools or other short VET courses while at school.

**Figure 5: Transition of a cohort of students through secondary school ,VET, completion of a Year 12 certificate and commencement of higher education**



Source: DEEWR Paper provided to IHEAC, Feb 08

Between 2002 and 2006, there was a decline in the number of Indigenous enrolments at Diploma level and above, but growth in Certificate I and III enrolments. In 2006, 90 percent of Indigenous VET students were studying part-time (DEEWR paper provided to IHEAC, 2008).

The potential pool of Indigenous students with the appropriate qualifications to enter higher education through the mainstream pathway of a Year 12 completion or Year 12 certificate is, therefore, small. Further impacting on the level of Indigenous higher educational outcomes are the high rates of Indigenous student participation in VET at the Certification I and II levels. The overall result is that less than five percent of Indigenous Australians hold a Bachelor degree or higher compared to 18 percent of non-Indigenous Australians. The relatively low educational level of Indigenous people within Australia does not bode well for current closing the gap policy ambitions and measures.

As a result, Council sees the need for the development of a **National Indigenous Teaching and Learning Network or Centre** within the higher education sector to strategically develop national level strategies and programs to support and increase the number and capacity of Indigenous students in higher education. A key role of this body will be to oversight the progress of improving Indigenous student outcomes across all sectors and to coordinate the strategies and programs within universities with the work being undertaken in schools, both primary and secondary, VET and government. Further work on the feasibility of such a concept needs to be undertaken.

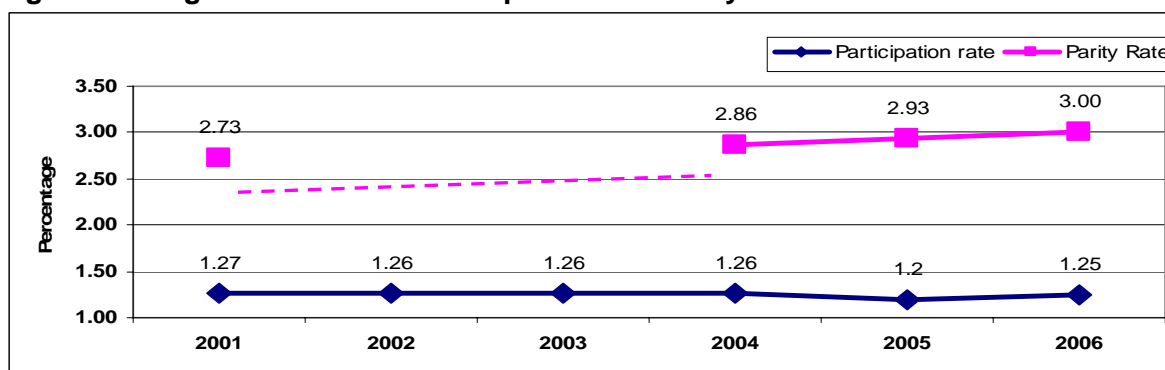
### Indigenous Students in the Higher Education Sector

Current data from the Higher Education Statistical Collection on Indigenous student commencements, enrolments, and completions does not indicate trends toward improvement.

- In the period 2001-2006, some 4000 Indigenous persons commenced higher education studies each year resulting in an annual enrolment of between 8300 and 9000 Indigenous students.
- Proportionate to population these participation rates are less than half those of non-Indigenous students.
- Between 2001 and 2006 the gap between actual participation rates and what would be expected on population level (parity) increased from 1.46 to 1.75 percentage points. The gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous participation is widening.

Movements in the Indigenous participation rates from 2001 to 2006 against population parity rates are summarised in Figure 6.

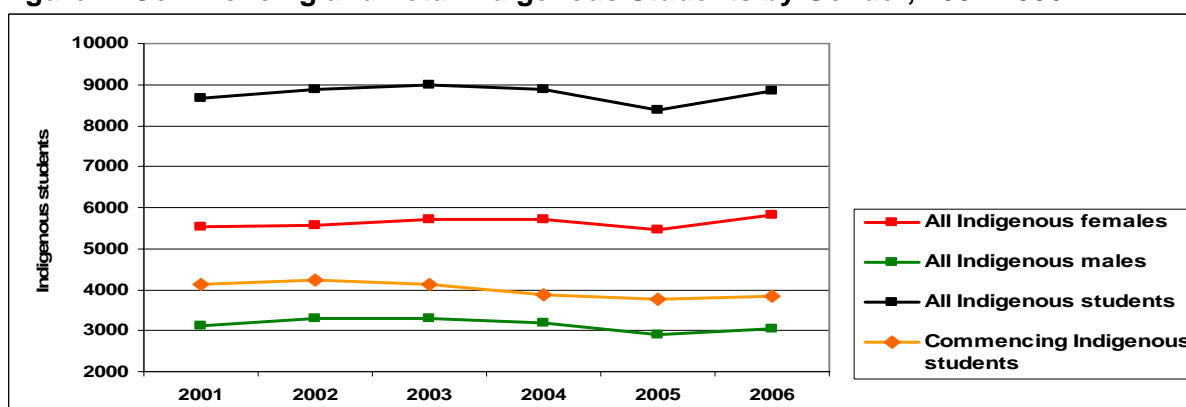
**Figure 6: Indigenous Student Participation and Parity Rates**



Source: DEEWR National Higher Education Statistics Collection; 2001-2006

Participation numbers are outlined in Figure 7. While there were signs of improvement in 2006, the overall trend is static. Of particular concern is the overall decline in commencing Indigenous students and the number of Indigenous male students.

**Figure 7: Commencing and Total Indigenous Students by Gender, 2001-2006**



Source: DEEWR National Higher Education Statistics Collection; 2001-2006

### Student progress rates (SPR)

SPR are the proportion of units passed in a year compared with total units in which students were enrolled. A success ratio of 1.0 would indicate parity for Indigenous students with non-Indigenous students. As shown in Table 3 despite a five percentage point increase by Indigenous students between 2001 and 2006, Indigenous SPR remain significantly below those of non-Indigenous students. Similarly, while the success ratio shows a welcome improvement, the difference remains large and even if levels continue to rise at the same rate, it will take at least 30 years before parity of success is achieved.

**Table 3: Student progress rates and Indigenous success ratio, 2001-2006**

	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006
<b>Indigenous SPR (%)</b>	63.6	65.5	65.8	67.3	69.7	68.6
<b>Non-Indigenous SPR (%)</b>	87.1	87.4	88.1	88.5	88.4	88.6
<b>Success ratio</b>	<b>0.73</b>	<b>0.75</b>	<b>0.75</b>	<b>0.76</b>	<b>0.79</b>	<b>0.77</b>

Source: DEEWR National Higher Education Statistics Collection; 2001-2006

Collectively these data indicate that Indigenous students remain both under-represented and have poorer overall outcomes than non-Indigenous students. The reasons for this gap are complex. For Indigenous students, participating in higher education is not simply a matter of deciding whether or not to go. Indigenous students who make it through to enrolment choices are the survivors of a long process of attrition and research confirms that even among those who make it to first base, the progression and completion barriers are formidable.

### **Indigenous Student Finances: A Case For Closing the Gap**<sup>4</sup>

Council submits to the Review Panel that in its examination of “the future direction of the higher education sector, its fitness for purpose in meeting the needs of the Australian community and economy, and the options for ongoing reform”,<sup>5</sup> a thorough investigation of Indigenous student income support must be part of its assessment.

Council recommendations in this submission have been laid out to assist the Review Panel in such an assessment, and in line with three specific themes: “effective and efficient investment”, “underpinning social inclusion through access and opportunity” and “enhanced quality and high standards”<sup>6</sup>.

Indigenous students do have the possibility of qualifying for some minor additional allowances. However, given that proportionally more Indigenous students come from low SES backgrounds, a larger proportion of the Indigenous student body relies on this income support to study. Research has shown that 67.2 percent of Indigenous students had some form of income support, whether it be Youth Allowance, Austudy, ABSTUDY, unemployment benefits, pension, family parenting allowance, scholarship or stipend, government or private cadetships, other government or university support (Universities Australia 2007). 19.5 percent of Indigenous income support was from scholarships and cadetships and this is the only area where Indigenous students are advantaged over non-Indigenous students. These figures would seem to indicate that 37.8 percent of Indigenous students surveyed had to rely on income from employment or parents/partners and received no form of government or scholarship support.

It has also been reported that 25.8 percent of Indigenous students received ABSTUDY in 2006 compared to 19.2 percent of non-Indigenous students on Youth Allowance (Universities Australia 2007). Given that the assessment criteria for eligibility are the same for the two income support measures, the higher proportion of Indigenous students on income support indicates lower levels of income for Indigenous students. It is not clear however how many Indigenous students receive the maximum payment amounts. Indigenous families on moderate incomes, who may well have, through their own efforts positioned their children to be more likely to succeed in schooling and higher education, are most at risk of not receiving full ABSTUDY support.

It has been well documented that the provision of government income support (and most scholarship support) for higher education students does not come anywhere near meeting the costs of living and study (University of Melbourne 2004, University of Queensland 2004).<sup>7</sup> The level of income support provided presupposes that recipients have other forms of financial support. For example, an eligible Indigenous student who is under 21, living away from home and receiving the maximum ABSTUDY rate will receive \$9240 per annum. As an example of costs, the University of Melbourne estimates that living expenses for an individual student in a shared house within six kilometers of the university costs anywhere between \$16,500 and \$24,200 per annum. A residential college for 40 weeks costs

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<sup>4</sup> This section is an edited extract from a larger study on Indigenous Student Finances by M. Nakata, adapted for the IHEAC Review submission.

<sup>5</sup> See Terms of Reference at <http://www.dest.gov.au/NR/rdonlyres/E447DAE5-E64F-4302-A356-0ACE0BD2A1C5/20706/HERReviewToR1.pdf>

<sup>6</sup> Ibid

<sup>7</sup> See [http://www.services.unimelb.edu.au/finaid/planning/cost\\_of\\_living/summary.html](http://www.services.unimelb.edu.au/finaid/planning/cost_of_living/summary.html).

between \$22,900 and \$31,300 per annum<sup>8</sup>. This does not include costs associated with study which can add up to \$2000 per annum. While ABSTUDY-eligible students can receive allowances to help with study costs, those who are ineligible do not (University of Melbourne, 2004).

For both Indigenous and non-Indigenous students, paid employment was the highest proportion of income (University of Melbourne 2004). This means that along with many other Australian students, many Indigenous students must work to increase their income to be able to cover their living and study expenses. Students can only earn \$6,136 per annum before their ABSTUDY allowance begins to be cut back. A student under 21 can thus bring in a combined total of \$15,376.40 gross. To earn more, ABSTUDY allowance is cut back at the rate of 50c for every dollar earned. Students who begin with less than the full amount because of parental incomes receive a double whammy when they attempt to work, as both amounts affect ABSTUDY entitlements.

Importantly, then, it has to be noted that the educational challenges Indigenous students face in higher education, recognised in policy as the ongoing legacy of a range of past Australian governments' policies, do not appear to register in student income support programs. To lift retention, progress and completion rates, Indigenous students need to spend more time at study to surmount the challenges arising from previous educational, language and skills shortfalls. More able Indigenous students should be focused on study and learning in order to lift the quality of their degrees and progress to post-graduate degrees.

Further, the ongoing legacy of past government policies impacts wider than individual students - it places few resources in the hands of families and the wider Indigenous community to assist those in study. Indeed, the Universities Australia 2006 survey indicates that Indigenous higher education students were quite significantly more likely to have a disability, be a sole parent, have children, be over 30 and less likely to rely on parents or partners for financial assistance, than other students. The expectation of students, from households already under well documented housing, health, and income pressures, to work to support themselves while they study continues the historical injustice. More notably, it impacts on the quality of their learning.

A major concern, which is shared with other Australian students and documented in other reports, is the stringency of the conditions attached to government income support provided to students (University of Melbourne 2004). Three areas of conditions for eligibility are of particular concern:

- Firstly, the erosion of government income support through the categories of assessable income, beginning from a parental gross income base of \$31,400 per annum and a scholarship or personal income base of \$6130 per annum.
- Secondly, the conditions for independent status where it is easier for a student to achieve independent status through prison time rather than time spent in work trying to accumulate money to study. A student who takes time to work and achieve independent status risks forfeiting any serious savings through a waiting period before benefits will apply.
- Thirdly, there is an absurdly small differential between living at home and living away from home rates. The difference in rates equates to \$121 per fortnight before tax.

Together these conditions ensure Indigenous students have to work to support themselves to study and at the same time live in poverty. Furthermore, students who work are penalised in the process, ensuring that they cannot, through any means, get beyond a level of income that is insufficient to live on. To get to this level of income, Indigenous students must compete for casual, insecure work and give up critical time that they need for study. They must compete for housing in a discriminatory and expensive housing market, especially in inner-metropolitan situations. Students are faced with a disincentive to study, given that, after all their effort, in dire poverty, with well reported social and health issues, and with reduced statistical chances of success, they must then repay a debt to the society historically responsible for their educational and social disadvantage.

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<sup>8</sup> See [http://www.services.unimelb.edu.au/finaid/planning/cost\\_of\\_living/summary.html](http://www.services.unimelb.edu.au/finaid/planning/cost_of_living/summary.html).

Many students who win scholarships are similarly penalised for high achievement because the income from the scholarship is assessable as income for income support purposes. Private and government scholarships and cadetships make an important contribution to Indigenous students and more so than for other students. However, many scholarships are minor and/or count as assessable income and thus reduce government income support. Cadetships are a good alternative for ABSTUDY ineligible students because they are not means tested. They are however competitive and often not given to first year students. During semester time, students receive no more than ABSTUDY rates and do depend greatly on the work experience wage component to cover debts incurred throughout the year. Cadetships do have added benefits including HECS payments and sometimes textbook and travel allowance.

The complicated sliding scales and conditions for different allowances add to the time burden on students who must report variations in income and live with uncertainty about future income support, delays in payments, and Centrelink recoveries of often accidental overpayments. The intersection with Centrelink is particularly fraught for students. University staff, in Indigenous centres, equity units and scholarship offices struggle to keep abreast of what the rules mean for different student circumstances, such as the variations in both rules and circumstances.

The effects of work and of student poverty are well documented (Universities Australia 2007, University of Melbourne 2004, University of Queensland 2004, DEETYA 1996, 2000, Malcolm and Rochecoste 2002). The literature and anecdotal reporting through student contact with Indigenous Education Support Centres in universities documents

- adverse effects on study because of an inability to attend classes,
- not enough time on study and assignments,
- students in need of extra tutorial assistance but who cannot access it because they are extremely time poor,
- students who regularly go without food,
- students without satisfactory accommodation, and
- students without money for transport, texts, computers and so forth.

Students in financial and/or domestic crisis are dealt with daily and crisis always impacts on study. Indeed financial and domestic crises are a significant contributing factor in course failure and withdrawal.

The debt burden of Indigenous higher education students through HECS, interest-free, and interest bearing loans is a future burden with direct impact on the next Indigenous generation and consequently on the entire Indigenous community. The higher education debt accumulation of Indigenous students is not clearly or publicly reported. The cost of the debt as well as the opportunity cost to the broader Indigenous community that repayment of debt incurs needs to be assessed and considered. It seems a new injustice to transfer this debt burden to the Indigenous community, when educational disadvantage is a direct historical legacy of previous Australian policy. Universities Australia reported Indigenous students had slightly lower levels of HECS-debts compared to non-Indigenous students but higher levels of interest-bearing debts. This debt is likely to be particularly burdensome in terms of students who do not complete their studies as they may not have achieved improved income prospects as a result of their years at university. Removing current HECS liabilities on Indigenous students as well as removing HECS requirements for future students would help address ongoing historical injustices.

A deeper restructure of Indigenous student finances should be more accountable to the educational challenges that Indigenous students face and the range of well-reported barriers that impinge on their success. This would provide a better rationale for calculating realistic living and study support that allows Indigenous students to focus on learning and study. A strategic output by the Federal Government at this time would enable universities to focus on the quality of learning experiences and academic support. Clear differentiation between the role of universities in providing educational

support and government agencies providing income support would produce efficiencies that would go a long way to closing the educational gap.

To address the urgent gaps in Indigenous student finances, Council recommends the following actions be taken:

- That all Indigenous students be classified as independent and eligible for ABSTUDY upon entry into university.
- That government income support is raised to reflect the true costs of study, especially for students who must live away from home. That the rate for all Indigenous students enrolled in university full-time is at the very least the current Australian Postgraduate Award (APA) rate and that, like APAs, it is classified as non-taxable.
- That Indigenous students be supported financially to be discouraged from work while studying, or to limit work to minimum, so that the focus of their effort is on progress in and completion of courses.
- That a strong case be made to remove HECS liabilities and requirements on Indigenous students.
- That merit scholarships for high Indigenous achievers are classified as non-assessable income so that they operate as rewards for achievement and incentives for maintaining excellent progress through studies by eliminating the need to work.
- That following universal access to higher rates of ABSTUDY, some cadetships and private and university scholarships consider shifting their emphasis to payment of supplementary fees and study expenses (for example text books, laptops, software, etc.), the opportunity of fewer weeks of holiday work experience, and other forms of top-up funding for students. These should also be non-assessable forms of income.
- That discipline based scholarships continue to operate to encourage the development of Indigenous professionals in needed fields and that they too be classed as non-assessable income.
- That more effort be made by universities to secure accommodation closer to universities for Indigenous students.

## **5. Governance: Making Indigenous Business University Business**

Council considers that higher level and broader Indigenous participation in the governance structures and practices of the Australian higher education sector is a central element to improving Indigenous higher education outcomes. Indigenous students, staff, academics and community elders and leaders have a significant contribution to make in the area of governance as well as ensuring that Indigenous participation and success at all levels of the higher education sector remains a fundamental sector priority.

Indigenous governance issues should not be quarantined, in for example Indigenous Education Support Centres. Although these Centres are tasked with the important role of bringing Indigenous students into our universities, the university as a whole must take responsibility for Indigenous business. Many universities have made progress in terms of the Government's national priorities to 'close the gap' on Indigenous disadvantage. This progress has been a result of universities as a whole taking responsibility for Indigenous issues and increasing Indigenous representation at all levels of their governance.

In the 2007 Indigenous Education Statements<sup>9</sup>,

- 25 of 39 universities reported that they have an Indigenous member on the University Council or Senate, an increase of about one third from 2005;
- 30 out of 39 universities reported that they have an Indigenous advisory committee to advise senior institutional management on Indigenous matters; and

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<sup>9</sup> Obtained from DEEWR - 2007 Indigenous Education Statements

- almost all universities report Indigenous representation on academic and management committees.

Universities as institutions need to contribute to successful Indigenous leadership and governance. The reliance on specific Indigenous supplementary funding does not support a spirit of equitable governance. Based on examples of governance working for Indigenous students and staff, Council has identified the following national principles for effective Indigenous governance in higher education.

- Indigenous governance should be integrated as a core element of university governance at all layers and at all levels.
- Indigenous business is core university business.
- The university has responsibility to its Indigenous community.
- Indigenous participation in university governance is standardised, that is, moved in from the periphery.

Specific good governance practices that reflect these principles include the following:

- meaningful career paths for Indigenous academics
- university recognition of Indigenous specific workloads
- university development of Indigenous leaders
- community representation on university councils and boards
- Indigenous senior academics on executive committees.

## 6. Resourcing Indigenous Higher Education: Achieving Success by Funding for Success

Indigenous higher education has had many successes and these achievements need to be acknowledged. There is now a visible Indigenous presence in universities and Indigenous graduates in many fields and professions. Indigenous Education Support Centres in universities have been integral to this success.

However, it must also be acknowledged that overall growth and progress has slowed and in some cases stalled. Central to this problem is the fact that Indigenous higher education funding has not kept pace with changes in the sector and the changing needs and demands of Indigenous people within the sector. Indigenous higher education funding now needs to take a quantum leap with significant additional investment

To achieve success, Indigenous higher education must be ***funded for success*** - there must be a long term, systemic and coordinated national plan supported by appropriate levels of funding. In the past Indigenous higher education funding has been reactive, one-off and piecemeal. Many projects, even now, continue to be funded for the short term. This discontinuity in funding and funding only the 'parts' rather than the 'whole' can limit success for Indigenous people in higher education. Currently much of Indigenous higher education is effectively ***funded for failure***, that is funding is marginal to need, not related to actual cost and while principles are endorsed funding does not automatically follow policy, strategic planning and program decisions. This occurs at the national, sector-wide and individual university level.

Indigenous higher education funding should represent ***an equitable share of total higher education funding*** and include: an increase in overall funding, flexibility and simplification of funding, the establishment of an Indigenous research budget, funding for the development and maintenance of Indigenous knowledge systems and funding for teaching and learning.

## **Principles for funding Indigenous higher education for success:**

- Funding should be based on high expectations, have clear goals and take a long-term strategic view.
- Funding should address the 'whole' as well as the individual parts, and be designed to take the whole community, as well as individuals, forward.
- Funding should be over a ten year period, with real performance measured over five years, rather than annually.
- Funding should represent an equitable share of higher education funding and individual university budgets – Indigenous higher education is both a national and a local responsibility.
- Funding should be flexible and responsive to differences between universities, diversity in Indigenous communities and local needs.
- Funding growth needs to be planned and able to respond to change.

## **Investing in Indigenous Higher Education Knowledge Infrastructure**

Higher education in Australia needs to make a paradigm shift to formally recognise and value Indigenous knowledge systems at the same level as western knowledge systems. This shift is fundamental to committing to a more equitable distribution of the sector's funding resources. We need to rethink the nature and level of the resourcing needs of Indigenous higher education and make the major investment now to ensure significant future return. A significant part of this investment needs to be in building the infrastructure of Indigenous higher education that is key to long term and sustained achievement across all indicators of success. This too is a long-term investment in Australia's *total* knowledge capital, with significant future returns for Australian higher education in an international context.

In the immediate term, investment in Indigenous higher education infrastructure should take the form of funding the establishment and recurrent costs of the *Indigenous Learned Academy* and establishing and meeting the recurrent costs of the *Indigenous Centre for Research Excellence*. (Predicted total combined costs at \$5 million for the first year and \$2-3 million annually thereafter).

## **Funding Indigenous Students and Student Support**

It is estimated that increasing Indigenous student participation and success to parity levels will require an additional \$205 million per annum. This is calculated on the basis of Table 3 and Figure 6 which outline the requirements of 2.4 times increase for participation parity and 1.3 times increase for successful completion parity based on 2006 figures. A spreadsheet of calculations of 2008-09 Indigenous specific higher education funding, and the additional funding required to attain these parity goals is provided at Table 4.

**Table 4: Estimates of additional funding required to reach parity in Indigenous higher education student participation and successful completion.**

	<b>2008-09 expenditure</b>
<b>Indigenous Support Program</b>	\$34,417,000
<b>ABSTUDY tertiary</b>	\$50,751,000
<b>Away from Base</b>	\$12,190,000
<b>Indigenous Tutorial Assistance Scheme - Tertiary</b>	\$7,420,000
<b>Commonwealth Scholarships (Indigenous Access, Indigenous Enabling and Indigenous Staff Scholarships)</b>	\$6,925,000
<b>Indigenous Youth Leadership Program</b>	\$5,500,000
<b>Indigenous Youth Mobility Program</b>	\$3,290,000
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>\$120,493,000</b>
<b>Estimated number of Indigenous students (2008)</b>	<b>9,000</b>
<b>Current Additional Indigenous-specific investment per student</b>	<b>\$13,388</b>
<b>Additional Investment for parity of success (per student)</b>	<b>\$4,016</b>
<b>Additional Investment for parity of success (total)</b>	<b>\$36,148,057</b>
<b>Additional Investment for parity of participation (per student)</b>	<b>\$18,743</b>
<b>Additional Investment for parity of participation (total)</b>	<b>\$168,690,200</b>
<b>Total additional investment (for parity of success and participation)</b>	<b>\$204,838,357</b>
<b>Total investment for parity of success and participation</b>	<b>\$325,331,257</b>

## **CONCLUSION**

In this paper, Council has identified key strategies to begin building a stronger future for Indigenous Australians through higher education. These national strategies are core to providing an integrated approach to addressing the major disparities that exist in the higher education system for Indigenous students and staff and to fully engage Indigenous people as equitable partners in higher education in Australia.

The issues need to be tackled simultaneously across a number of interlinked fields and a summary of key actions that should be taken in each field is:

### **1. Indigenous Higher Education in Australia**

The establishment of the Indigenous Learned Academy will value, support and sustain Indigenous Knowledge Systems in higher education and increase and enrich Australia's knowledge capital.

### **2. Research and Innovation**

Establishing and supporting the Indigenous Centre for Research Excellence will close the gaps regarding Indigenous post-graduates and Indigenous research leadership

### **3. Productivity**

Developing a National Indigenous Workforce Strategy will build the capacity and skills of Indigenous Australia to meet the needs for an Indigenous higher education workforce and the Indigenous professional workforce.

The inclusion of cultural competency as a graduate attribute for all Australian graduates will increase the skills and capacity of Australia's professional workforce.

### **4. Indigenous Students**

Closing the gap in Indigenous student finances will substantially assist in closing the gap in educational outcomes for Indigenous students.

### **5. Governance**

Good governance means making Indigenous business core University business.

### **6. Resourcing Indigenous Higher Education**

Indigenous higher education must be funded for success such that funding formulas are based on achieving participation and success parity and such that Indigenous knowledge systems are accorded appropriate prominence and respect on campus.

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