

‘Can’t be what you can’t see’:

The transition of Aboriginal
and Torres Strait Islander
students into higher education

Final Report 2014



Fremantle

Broome

Sydney

Cover Artwork: **'Seeing Country'** by Yangkana Laurel

Yangkana Laurel is a Walmajarri artist and educator from the Kadjina Community in the Kimberley region of Western Australia on the edge of the Great Sandy Desert - part of Millijidee Station. Along with her sisters, brothers and mothers, Yangkana advocated to set up the remote Wulungarra Community School. Yangkana's commitment to education in this small community is replicated across the many universities we visited and encapsulated in the innovative models that support more Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students to transition to higher education.



‘Can’t be what you can’t see’: The transition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students into higher education

Final Report 2014

The University of Notre Dame Australia (UNDA) (lead institution)

Southern Cross University (SCU)

Batchelor Institute of Indigenous Tertiary Education (BIITE)

Project Leaders: Professor Lyn Henderson-Yates (UNDA), Professor Patrick Dodson (UNDA), Professor Marguerite Maher (UNDA)

Project Management: Bruce Goring (UNDA), Sue Thomas (UNDA)

Project Team Members: Sue Thomas (UNDA), Dr Judith Wilks (SCU), Katie Wilson (SCU), Terri Hughes (BIITE), Stephen Kinnane (UNDA), Professor Neil Drew (UNDA), Dr Keith McNaught (UNDA), Dr Kevin Watson (UNDA)

Report Authors: Stephen Kinnane (UNDA), Dr Judith Wilks (SCU), Katie Wilson (SCU), Terri Hughes (BIITE), Sue Thomas (UNDA)



Support for the production of this report has been provided by the Australian Government Office for Learning and Teaching (OLT). The views expressed in this report do not necessarily reflect the views of the Australian Government Office for Learning and Teaching.



With the exception of the Commonwealth Coat of Arms, and where otherwise noted, all material presented in this document is provided under Creative Commons Attribution-ShareAlike 4.0 International License
<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/4.0/>.

The details of the relevant licence conditions are available on the Creative Commons website (accessible using the links provided) as is the full legal code for the Creative Commons Attribution-ShareAlike 4.0 International License
<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/4.0/legalcode>.

Requests and inquiries concerning these rights should be addressed to:

Office for Learning and Teaching
Department of Education
GPO Box 9880,
Location code N255EL10
Sydney NSW 2001

[<learningandteaching@education.gov.au>](mailto:learningandteaching@education.gov.au)

2014

978-1-74361-374-0 PRINT
978-1-74361-375-7 PDF
978-1-74361-376-4 DOC

Contents

| | |
|--|----|
| List of Tables | 4 |
| Acknowledgements..... | 5 |
| List of Acronyms..... | 6 |
| Foreword..... | 8 |
| Executive Summary..... | 9 |
| Chapter 1: Introduction | 18 |
| Background | 19 |
| Aims and research questions | 21 |
| Project participants..... | 21 |
| The project's method..... | 22 |
| Online collaboration tools..... | 24 |
| Ethical clearance | 24 |
| Project deliverables..... | 25 |
| Related research supported by the OLT | 25 |
| The project's findings..... | 26 |
| Chapter 2: Project Findings Part 1 | 28 |
| The Literature Review: Key Themes and Current Context of Indigenous Student Transitions into Higher Education..... | 28 |
| Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander student population statistical profile..... | 28 |
| Indigenous Engagement in Universities..... | 32 |
| Indigenous Education Units | 33 |
| Current enabling program profiles | 34 |
| Other programs/support provided to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students..... | 35 |
| Under-represented cohorts within the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population . | 37 |
| Women who are primary carers | 38 |
| Young men | 38 |
| Young people not making the transition from VET | 39 |
| People with disabilities | 39 |
| People in the prison system seeking higher education outcomes | 41 |
| Rural and remote Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students | 43 |
| Discipline profile for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students across Australia | 44 |
| Chapter 3: Project Findings Part 2 | 52 |
| (1) Challenges and Constraints to the Successful Transition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Students into Higher Education..... | 52 |
| (i) Financial constraints | 54 |

| | | |
|------------|--|----|
| (ii) | Subjugating Indigenous Knowledges and Indigenous Education Units (IEUs) in a silo culture..... | 55 |
| (iii) | Monitoring and evaluating student progress..... | 56 |
| (iv) | Expectations upon Indigenous students | 56 |
| (v) | Combinations of personal factors | 56 |
| (vi) | Lack of cultural competency among university staff members | 59 |
| (vii) | Diversity of demography—students living in remote areas..... | 61 |
| (viii) | Specific issues for identified cohorts | 62 |
| (ix) | Traditionally low ATAR—low rates of secondary school completion | 64 |
| (x) | A ‘tick-a-box’ culture, low expectations and the question of entitlement | 65 |
| (xi) | Difficulties associated with the Indigenous Tutorial Assistance Scheme—Tertiary Tuition (ITAS—TT)..... | 67 |
| (2) | Current successful initiatives and key elements of programs and institutions supporting the Transition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students into higher education | 69 |
| (i) | Future models for Indigenous Knowledge centres at universities | 69 |
| (ii) | The importance of cultural competency training..... | 71 |
| (iii) | A new focus on mentoring for success and monitoring for targeted support..... | 72 |
| (iv) | The offer of cadetships and the life-cycle approach to student outcomes from higher education | 76 |
| (v) | Pathways to higher education for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students via VET/TAFE | 77 |
| (vi) | University—community—school outreach programs: “You can’t be what you can’t see” | 80 |
| (vii) | Tertiary preparation courses and pre-orientation courses | 84 |
| (viii) | Improving the operation of ITAS | 86 |
| (ix) | Changing university cultures | 87 |
| (x) | Valuing Indigenous Knowledges..... | 88 |
| (xi) | Whole of university approach—integrated governance..... | 89 |
| (xii) | Indigenous enabling centres and centres of Indigenous Knowledge for the whole university population | 90 |
| (xiii) | Targeted strategies based in evidence | 90 |
| (xiv) | Monitoring and evaluating student performance and program delivery—case management..... | 91 |
| (xv) | Continued mentoring and relationship building | 92 |
| Chapter 4: | Current Models Supporting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Students’ Transitions into Higher Education | 94 |
| | Identified models of transition operating in Australian universities..... | 95 |
| | The Standard Model | 96 |
| | The School Model | 98 |

| | |
|--|-----|
| The Governance Driven Model (IEU) | 100 |
| The Governance Driven Model (Executive) | 102 |
| The Indigenous Knowledge Centre Model..... | 105 |
| The Mainstream Enabling Support Model | 107 |
| Summary—Models | 108 |
| Framework of Leading Practice | 110 |
| Chapter 5: Summary of Key Issues and Opportunities | 122 |
| References | 126 |
| Appendices..... | 135 |
| Appendix 1: | 135 |
| Appendix 2: | 143 |
| Appendix 3: | 147 |
| Appendix 4: | 149 |
| Appendix 5: | 152 |

List of Tables

| | |
|--|----|
| Table 1: State and territory figures for all Indigenous university students in 2012 (Australia. Department of Industry Innovation Climate Change Science Research and Tertiary Education, 2013)..... | 29 |
| Table 2: AQF (Australian Qualifications Framework) qualifications completed by Indigenous status 2011 (National Centre for Vocational Education Research, 2013)... | 30 |
| Table 3: State and territory figures for all Indigenous VET students in 2012 (National Centre for Vocational Education Research, 2013)..... | 31 |
| Table 4: State and territory figures for all Indigenous apprentices and trainees in 2011 (National Centre for Vocational Education Research, 2012)..... | 32 |
| Table 5: Percentage of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander student enrolments in universities by geographic region, 2011 (Richardson & Friedman, 2011, p. 42). | 43 |
| Table 6: Numbers and percentages of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander student enrolments in VET institutions by geographic region, 2011 (National Centre for Vocational Education Research, 2012)..... | 44 |
| Table 7: Indigenous applicants by age, 2012. (DIIRSTE Undergraduate applications, offers and acceptances, 2012). | 46 |
| Table 8: Offer rates by Indigenous status by state and territory 2012. (DIIRSTE, Undergraduate applications offers and acceptances, 2012). | 46 |
| Table 9: Indigenous student participation rates by type of university in 2011. (Widening Participation in Australian Higher Education, 2013)..... | 46 |
| Table 10: Direct applications to universities by state and territory, 2012 (DIIRSTE Undergraduate applications offers and acceptances, 2012). | 47 |

Acknowledgements

The authors wish to thank the Office for Learning and Teaching for making this project possible and for its ongoing support and advice during the life of the project. We would also like to thank the many people working in numerous capacities of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander student support who took part in the research, and also the students who did likewise. A number of other Key Aboriginal people with extensive experience in universities contributed to our understandings through informal conversations and testing our findings. We would like to thank members of the Indigenous Reference Group convened for this project who included Ms Sandra Brogden, Ms Erica Bernard, Mr Frank Pearce, Ms Sharon Davis and Ms Jane Weston. We would especially like to thank the project's reference group; Paul Chandler University of Wollongong (UOW); Heather Clarke (UNDA); and Ainslie Robinson (UNDA). Many thanks also to Dr Bronte Somerset and Richard Parker.

'Can't be what you can't see':

The transition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students into higher education

List of Acronyms

| | |
|----------|---|
| ABS | Australian Bureau of Statistics |
| ACIKE | Australian Centre for Indigenous Knowledges and Education |
| AECG | Aboriginal Education Consultative Group |
| AEP | National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Policy |
| AIME | Australian Indigenous Mentoring Experience |
| ANU | The Australian National University |
| AQF | Australian Qualifications Framework |
| ASGC | Australian Standard Geographic Classification |
| ATAR | Australian Tertiary Admission Rank |
| ATAS | Aboriginal Tutorial Assistance Scheme |
| ATN | Australian Technology Network |
| AWB | Away From Base |
| BIITE | Batchelor Institute of Indigenous Tertiary Education |
| CDU | Charles Darwin University |
| CLS | Commonwealth Learning Scholarships |
| COAG | Council of Australian Governments |
| CQU | Central Queensland University's |
| CSU | Charles Sturt University |
| CUT | Curtin University of Technology |
| DSC | Disabilities Service Centre |
| MU | Monash University |
| DEEWR | Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations |
| DEST | Department of Education, Science and Training |
| DIICSRTE | Department of Industry Innovation Climate Change Science Research and Tertiary Education |
| DIISRTE | Department of Industry Innovation Science Research and Tertiary Education |
| Go8 | Group of Eight Universities |
| HECS | Higher Education Contribution Scheme |
| HREC | Human Research Ethics Committee |
| IBA | Indigenous Business Australia |
| ICT | Information and Communications Technology |
| IES | Indigenous Education Statement |
| IEU | Indigenous Education Unit |
| IHEAC | Indigenous Higher Education Advisory Committee |
| HEPPP | Higher Education Participation and Partnerships Program |
| IHER | Indigenous Higher Education Review |
| IRU | Innovative Research Universities |
| ISF | Indigenous Support Funding |
| ITAS-TT | Indigenous Tutorial Assistance Scheme – Tertiary Tuition |
| KPI | Key Performance Indicators |
| MAP | Melbourne Assessment Prison |

‘Can’t be what you can’t see’:

The transition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students into higher education

| | |
|---------|---|
| MATSITI | More Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Teachers' Initiative |
| MOU | Memorandum of Understanding |
| NAEC | National Aboriginal Education Committee |
| NAPLAN | National Assessment Program – Numeracy and Literacy |
| NCVER | National Centre for Vocational Education Research |
| NWRN | National Welfare Rights Network |
| OLAA | Open Learning Agency of Australia |
| OLT | Australian Government Office for Learning and Teaching |
| PD | Professional Development |
| QUT | Queensland University of Technology |
| RAP | Reconciliation Action Plan |
| RUN | Regional Universities Network |
| SCU | Southern Cross University |
| SES | Socioeconomic Status |
| SSI | Stronger Smarter Institute |
| TAC | Tertiary Admissions Centres |
| TAI | The Aspiration Initiative |
| TAFE | Technical and Further Education |
| TER | Tertiary Entrance Rank |
| TTPP | TRACKS Tertiary Preparation Program |
| UAC | University Admissions Centre |
| UNDA | The University of Notre Dame Australia |
| UNE | University of New England |
| UoN | University of Newcastle |
| UOW | University of Wollongong |
| USYD | The University of Sydney |
| UTS | University of Technology Sydney |
| UWA | The University of Western Australia |
| VET | Vocational Education and Training |

'Can't be what you can't see':

The transition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students into higher education

Foreword

This report into transitioning Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students into Australia's higher education system is timely. Despite significant effort and public policy attention, Australia's tertiary education institutions attract Indigenous students at alarmingly low rates. In addition there is a disproportionate high Indigenous dropout rate from universities and places of higher learning as well as comparatively low levels of achievement.

This negative overview does not diminish the commendable achievements of many Indigenous people across Australia who have gained tertiary education qualifications and professional skills in recent decades. But the data outlined in this report speaks for itself. Much more must be done in the vital area of Indigenous participation and achievement in higher education if the shocking economic and social disparity between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people is to be overcome at the national level.

The strength of this report is that it captures the findings of previous reviews and turns them into plans for action. It reveals a host of partnerships, strategies, and new pathways that have been developed within the past three years to enhance the transition of Indigenous students to higher education. Fundamentally this report bases much of its direction on the 2012 Review of Higher Education Access and Outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People. The report identifies best practice action and policies for tertiary education institutions to embrace Indigenous students onto their campuses so that they graduate with formal qualifications that has the potential to immeasurably improve their lives and the lives of their families and communities.

The fourteen elements of leading practice which the report proposes as a framework can be used by Indigenous Educators working with Vice Chancellors, Deans and Heads of Schools to transform the old paradigm of assumed Indigenous deficit in need of support to enhancing Indigenous excellence and opportunity by working with people's assets and strengths. This report can therefore be seen as a blue print for action. Its intended audience are those who have influence and make decisions about Indigenous education at every level of universities and places of higher learning ranging from Indigenous educators within Indigenous Education Units to Vice Chancellors. The report also has relevance for policy makers within governments for the right public policy settings are fundamentally important to support the much needed work within universities.

A key element of the report has resonance with a larger story about the Australian nation reconciling its relationship with its First Peoples. The position of Indigenous students at universities should not be ghettoised with policies and practices that entrench victimisation and under-achievement. This report identifies the emergence of ground breaking initiatives being implemented at leading Australian universities led by senior Indigenous educators working in new ways through partnerships and strengthened governance to ensure that responsibility for Indigenous education is everybody's business.

Professor Patrick Dodson (Adjunct Professor – UNDA)

'Can't be what you can't see':

The transition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students into higher education

Executive Summary

This report presents the findings of an investigation into the processes, the data, the key issues, the pathways, the enablers, the constraints and the opportunities regarding the transition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students into higher education by the Project Team (Chapter 1: Project Participants). Through an examination of qualitative and quantitative evidence, the report explores the nuances, dimensions and different perspectives of what constitutes successful transition to higher education from a range of Indigenous community contexts and diverse university settings. Six specific groups of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population were also identified as being under-represented in relation to higher education: women as primary carers, young men, young people not transitioning from VET, people in the prison system, remote Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students and people with disabilities. Issues affecting these specific groups and specific efforts to enhance their transition to higher education are also discussed where appropriate (Chapter 2: Project findings Part 1 and Chapter 3: Project findings Part 2 of this report).

An accompanying literature review for this project examined relevant research, policy and programs in peer-reviewed, non-peer-reviewed and grey literature relating to the transitioning of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students into higher education, including case studies of promising practice models nationally and internationally. A summary of key findings of the literature review is provided in Chapter 2: Project findings Part 1 of this report. The literature review has been published as a separate outcome of this project and is available via the [dedicated project website](#) created to disseminate the project findings.

A total of 65 personnel and students either working or studying across 26 universities in a range of Indigenous support and education capacities were surveyed by way of a structured interview either by phone or via Survey Monkey online, where respondents elected to complete the questionnaire. Of the 65 individuals who participated in the project, 60 (92%) were Indigenous. University students (all of whom are Indigenous) within this cohort of 65 were also interviewed on a one-to-one basis, as were key Indigenous educators working in the higher education sector. The considered and experienced views of the (majority Indigenous) higher education professionals interviewed for this report informed the identification of enablers and constraints to successful transition (Chapter 3: Project findings Part 2); the defining of models of Indigenous Education Units (IEUs) and a framework of leading practice (Chapter 4: Current models supporting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander student transitions to higher education); and, the final summary of findings (Chapter 5: Summary of key issues and opportunities). In this context, the report is strongly informed by personal, community and professional educational experiences of the Indigenous majority of the interviewees.

‘Can’t be what you can’t see’:

The transition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students into higher education

In regard to what constitutes a successful transition for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students into higher education, it became clear from the evidence that success exists on a spectrum defined by individual (personal) and collective (community) terms, as well as a range of measures utilised by universities and government departments. The report identifies that individual family and community relationships are vital determinants of successful transitioning for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders into higher education. Targeted pathway programs that rely on family and community support, while mutually enhancing wider community relationships through breaking down myths and barriers and achieving outcomes, are increasingly effective. Collectively, respondents spoke of success not being measured by the transition, retention and completion of one Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander student, but by the ripple effect of many small successes and a diversity of effective support mechanisms and pathways. The majority of respondents identified early intervention and targeted skills development as crucial enablers of successful transition.

The Project Team found a growth of new investment in student success through pathway development and community engagement with the higher education sector. These initiatives remain primarily engaged through IEOs, but increasingly involve a regionally and contextually responsive mix of partnerships between universities, Indigenous community leadership, philanthropic and not for profit organisations, and new policy developments at the university executive level. A new and key development is the engagement of new technologies and Indigenous youth culture in the dissemination of information, development of mentoring programs and sharing of skills and knowledge in readiness to undertake university studies.

In regard to the identified under-represented groups (women as primary carers, young men, people in the prison system and people with disabilities), the Project Team found a number of specific programs in operation or development, but little real focus on these groups as separate identifiable cohorts with special needs within universities and the wider transition sector. All respondents identified the need for more targeted programs for these groups; yet few were able to implement such programs to meet this need, relying instead on mainstream support mechanisms. These issues are discussed in Chapter 2: Project findings Part 1 and Chapter 3: Project findings Part 2.

Overall, the report finds that a diversity of new technologies, targeted programs, pathways and models are becoming available to enhance Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander student opportunities to transition to higher education. The Project Team chose not to identify a single model of best practice as was tasked in the original terms of reference for this project based on respondent evidence. Through an examination of the constraints and the enablers to achieving successful transition, as well as past, current and transforming models of IEOs, the report identifies 14 elements of leading practice (a framework of leading practice) that can be utilised to achieve successful transition (Chapter 4: Current models supporting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander student transitions to higher education).

‘Can’t be what you can’t see’:

The transition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students into higher education

Specifically, the report finds that the identified elements of leading practice should be regarded as core elements of evolving and changing patterns of opportunity that, when implemented appropriately across the diversity of student, community and university contexts and opportunities, will enable and enhance successful transitions to university (Chapter 5: Summary of key issues and opportunities).

Key findings of the literature review (Chapter 2)

In 2010, students who self-identified as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander on enrolment made up 1.4% of all university enrolments, yet 2.2% of the working age population was Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander (Behrendt, Larkin, Griew, & Kelly, 2012). In 2012 the total number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students in university increased by 7% from 2011 but were only 1% of all enrolments (Australia. Department of Industry Innovation Climate Change Science Research and Tertiary Education, 2013). These statistics place Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students well below the population parity rate applied by various agencies.

However, the measurement, collection and reporting of statistics relating to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples' engagement in higher education has varied over time and continues to vary. Flux, change, and ideological motivations in methods of measurement and reporting are noted by several authors and statistical sources, including questions about levels of self-identification by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in higher education enrolment practices and in other circumstances. The measurement of statistics from different baselines renders analyses and trend predictions difficult. Such variations in reporting practices and requirements, population categorisation, data gathering and representations mean it is difficult to portray an accurate statistical reality of the higher education experiences of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students.

Enrolment of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students in Vocational Education and Training (VET) is higher than in university higher education, although there are variations in this pattern around the states and territories, especially those with a dominant mining sector. However, from VET to higher education is not a strong pathway with 4.9% of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students making the transition in 2012.

There has been a lack of ongoing funding for programs designed to encourage successful transitions for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students into higher education. Many are short term, often pilot programs with limited follow up, and not integrated, holistic or coming from an evidence base, and are often one-off research projects.

With one or two exceptions, university course completion rates are lower among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students than for non-Indigenous students, signalling a need for targeted investment in skills, knowledge and support if they are to negotiate higher education cultures successfully. The literature also reveals that the

'Can't be what you can't see':

The transition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students into higher education

recent new growth of pathway and aspirational programs is likely to reverse this trend if the partnerships underpinning the development of these targeted programs can be appropriately supported. Continued success will require dedicated and agreed terms of engagement over the long term to enable the wedge to become a growing cohort toward the norm of parity with non-Indigenous student transitions to higher education.

The key constraints and challenges to successful transitions articulated during the research were: (Chapter 3)

- Financial constraints: accommodation; the direct costs of studying; child care; public transport; running a car; financial debts.
- A siloing, or separation, of IEOs from input into mainstream university governance.
- IEOs identified as the go to places for all things Indigenous leading to over burden of responsibilities and other sectors not taking appropriate responsibility for Indigenous student support.
- Sidelining of Indigenous Knowledges by mainstream university practices leading to an underutilisation of Indigenous knowledge assets.
- Absence of monitoring and evaluation systems for student progress: often too little too late.
- Too many expectations on Indigenous students: Students feeling that they are expected to know and represent all things Indigenous.
- Combinations of personal factors: interplays of various things in a student's life (crisis in families; homesickness; poverty in communities; ill-health; deaths in extended families), often resulting in students getting 'sucked out' of university.
- Lack of cultural competency amongst university staff members: Students experiencing a deficit model of low expectations or alienation from the overall university culture.
- Particular experiences of students living in remote areas in engagement in courses and course resources.
- School to university transitions: Low Australian tertiary admission ranks (ATARs); low expectations; absence of family experience of university participation.
- A tick-a-box culture: Issue of self-identification, definition and follow-through.
- Difficulties associated with the Indigenous Tutorial Assistance Scheme (ITAS): An important scheme hindered by inflexibility.

Successful initiatives and programs for successful transition and their important elements: (Chapter 3)

- A new focus on relationship building, and on mentoring for success and for targeted support: For example the Australian Indigenous Mentoring Experience (AIME); the Aurora Project.
- Cultural competency: For professional and academic staff members as university-wide programs.
- Life-cycle approaches: The offer of financially supported pathways into higher education—cadetships and other partnership initiatives. Creative and synergistic

'Can't be what you can't see':

The transition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students into higher education

pathways programs to higher education via VET and Technical and Further Education (TAFE).

- Monitoring of student performance: Targeted strategies based in evidence.
- University—school—community engagement: Outreach programs; community involvement; Elders in Residence programs.
- Tertiary preparation and pre-orientation courses: helping to alleviate anxieties around transitioning into the unknown world of university.
- New approaches and perspectives on the operation of the ITAS scheme.
- Driving change across university cultures: for example the valuing of Indigenous Knowledges; integrated governance; whole of university approaches.

Leading Practice Framework: (Chapter 4)

The report provides a framework of leading practice in the form of key elements of leading practice either currently being employed or recently initiated in Australian universities. Key aspects of this framework are:

| No. | Issue | Elements of Leading Practice |
|-----|---|--|
| 1. | Early Indigenous student engagement | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Targeted programs such as the More Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Teachers' Initiative (MATSI) which seeks to increase the number of Indigenous teachers in schools • Strengths based approach to Indigenous student participation (Stronger Smarter Institute) |
| 2. | Outreach and aspirational programs | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Early testing and positive experiences of university through summer schools and winter schools • Specialist outreach information sessions and awareness raising programs that define pathways early • Dedicated outreach programs underpinned by industry and philanthropic support • Changing community perceptions to assist the likelihood of university participation |
| 3. | Targeted student and community outreach programs | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recognising and valuing the role and assets of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities in integrated practical and symbolic ways to strengthen community ownership and involvement • Engaging with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities to create transition pathways • Adopting a holistic approach to community engagement • Creating high profile centres that support Indigenous students and community engagement |
| 4. | Preparedness pathways and enabling programs | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Aspirational programs linked to community and student outreach • Indigenous youth based mentoring programs (e.g AIME) • Merit based programs that support and enhance the skills sets of talented students (Aurora) |
| 5. | Targeted student case management and | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dedicated skills assessment, programs of support and skills development and monitoring of progress • Employment of a dedicated student case management team |

'Can't be what you can't see':

The transition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students into higher education

| No. | Issue | Elements of Leading Practice |
|-----|---|--|
| | skills development | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Early intervention and development of an academic skills base |
| 6. | Mentors and tutorial assistance | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Development of a dedicated student enabling and support unit within IEUs • Continued engagement with programs such as AIME and The Aspiration Initiative • Providing ITAS to all Indigenous students in the first year of study • Involving elders and community leaders to foster community and family support |
| 7. | Blended delivery for remote student access | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Development of dual sector outreach • Blended delivery models providing consistent and successful pathways • Programs that identify knowledge strengths for regional and remote students • Additional programs within VET and dual sector institutions that specifically target university readiness • Assisted travel and accommodation |
| 8. | Finances and employment pathways | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Targeted philanthropic and non-government scholarships that enable Indigenous women who are primary carers appropriate resources that enable flexible solutions to parenting responsibilities • Targeted student support for relocating Indigenous students either through mainstream commercial accommodation and other services or through dedicated community college places • Linkage with the growing range of Indigenous scholarships and cadetship programs |
| 9. | Life cycle approach | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Development of student pathways to employment through cadetships and commercial partnerships |
| 10. | Policy contexts and strategies | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Evidence based programs that engage Indigenous Knowledges • Implementation of regularly reviewed Indigenous Education Strategies |
| 11. | Governance – Whole of University approach | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Development of dedicated Indigenous Education Strategies • Development of integrated governance • Targeted Key Performance Indicators |
| 12. | Indigenous Education Unit foundations | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Building on the foundations of IEUs to develop strategies • Transforming governance to include senior Indigenous representation in governance |
| 13. | The value and role of Indigenous Knowledge Centres | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Development of IEUs into Indigenous Knowledge Centres • Development of business models for the transition of IEUs |
| 14. | Cross cultural competency | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop targeted programs of cultural competency • Provide opportunities for continued cultural competency |

‘Can’t be what you can’t see’:

The transition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students into higher education

Summary of Key Issues and Opportunities (Chapter 5)

On the evidence of numbers alone, there has been a steady increase in Indigenous student numbers over time and this has led to a general increase in the overall Indigenous student population. Enhancing transitions for all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, and for other under-represented groups, will require a greater focus on targets for increasing student higher education completions and the appropriate resources and governance to work with community based and IEU based assets that are already in place. The research finds that there is significant scope for increasing and enhancing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students into higher education by building on the assets already in place and supporting IEUs to be able to engage in leading practice actions toward this end.

‘Can’t be what you can’t see’:

The transition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students into higher education

‘Can’t be what you can’t see’:

The transition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students into higher education

Chapter 1:

Introduction



Chapter 1: Introduction

“Can’t be what you can’t see: The transition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students into higher education” (SI11-2138) was instigated by the Indigenous Higher Education Advisory Committee (IHEAC) in 2011 to support the work of the Indigenous Higher Education Review (IHER), the findings of which were published in September 2012 (Behrendt et al., 2012). The University of Notre Dame Australia (UNDA) led a successful Expression of Interest (EOI) in partnership with Southern Cross University (SCU) and the Batchelor Institute of Indigenous Tertiary Education (BIITE). The project’s purpose was to identify key enablers and constraints for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students in transition to higher education with a specific focus on models of successful transitions relating to access, participation, retention, and completion. Wherever possible, within the constraints of data and information availability (refer project’s literature review for more detail), special consideration was given to ‘under-represented groups’ identified by the IHEAC including: women who are principal carers; students with a disability; young men; remote Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students; and prisoners.

The target audience for the research is university staff members engaged in supporting successful transitions for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students into higher education. This includes those employed within IEs within universities, as well as senior managers and executive staff members of universities seeking to implement models of success for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander student transitions. The findings are also of value to government, non-government and commercial groups engaged in supporting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander student success. The project engaged student perspectives, but was not primarily aimed at a student audience as a related project of the same title (SI11-2137) was funded concurrently by the Office for Learning and Teaching (OLT) predecessor agency and focused on student perspectives of making a transition into higher education. The project’s findings will be disseminated via: a dedicated project website; the literature review¹ with its various components; publications arising from the findings; the final report including the identification of the key elements and principles of leading practice in this area for uptake across the sector; and conference and workshop presentations.

The report builds on the work of the literature review which documented (from academic literature; reports; grey literature [unpublished documents or highly relevant reports]; university websites, etc.); existing knowledge—and the knowledge gaps—relating to the key enablers, constraints, and current initiatives to support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students and certain of the under-represented groups to transition successfully to higher education. This report also builds on the recent *Review of higher education access and outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people: Final Report (IHER) (2012)* which reviewed and made recommendations on higher education access and outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres

¹ The Literature Review is provided as an accompanying document to the Report

‘Can’t be what you can’t see’:

The transition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students into higher education

Strait Islander people. Through documenting the findings of interviews with academic and professional staff members working across Australian universities at all levels of the university hierarchy, this report substantially builds on this existing body of knowledge. It identifies elements of leading practice toward the development of leading practice models for the transition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students to higher education.

Background

The Indigenous Higher Education Advisory Council (IHEAC) was established in 2005. Professor Richard James and Professor Marcia Devlin of the Centre for the Study of Higher Education, University of Melbourne prepared its first report: "Improving Indigenous outcomes and enhancing Indigenous culture and knowledge in Australian higher education". It included the IHEAC Strategic Plan 2006-2008 which presented seven key priority areas for collaborative action including pathways with schools and TAFE; increased Indigenous student enrolment, retention, and research; enhanced roles for Indigenous culture, knowledge and studies; increased Indigenous employment; and Indigenous participation in university governance. The document also called for an "...independent study of the roles of Indigenous Education and Support Centres. ..." reviewing their "missions", naming, reporting lines, outcomes, relationships with funding support initiatives and Indigenous academic curricula development. This work laid the foundations for the instigation of the Indigenous Higher Education Review (2012).

The *Review of Higher Education Access and Outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People (IHER)* (2012), commissioned in 2011 by the Australian Government following a recommendation by the 2008 Bradley Review of Higher Education, is the first review to address the full scope of provision of Indigenous higher education, aiming to examine "...how improving higher education outcomes among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people will contribute to nation building and reduce Indigenous disadvantage" (p. ix). The IHER found that, although Indigenous Support Program (ISP) funding has been successful in providing an incentive for universities to enrol Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, there have not been the same incentives concerning retention and completion (Behrendt et al., 2012, p. 75). The IHER also found that there are inconsistencies, and great variability among universities as to how they account for, report on, and deliver Indigenous Support Program (ISP) funding.

The IHER made 35 recommendations to the Federal Minister for Tertiary Education, Skills, Science and Research in relation to the following six main themes:

1. Achieving parity for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students and staff members in the higher education sector.
2. Unlocking capacity and empowering choices (for example the role of schools and university-school outreach; other pathways; enabling programs; and access to information).

'Can't be what you can't see':

The transition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students into higher education

3. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander student success (provision of support through to completion by Indigenous Education Units and the faculties; and building professional pathways and responding to community need).
4. Provision of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander-specific support to universities (the ITAS; support for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students from regional and remote areas; financial support for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students); Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Knowledges and support (Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspectives; higher degrees by research and research training; Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander research capability).
5. Supporting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff members.
6. Issues of university culture and governance.

At the time of publication the Federal Government's response to the recommendations of the IHER included \$ 18.1 million of Higher Education Participation and Partnerships Program (HEPPP) allocated to nine priority projects of national significance which can be viewed online at (<http://www.education.gov.au/nationally-significant-projects-addressing-behrendt-review>). Priority projects taking place from 2013 to 2017 include;

- Performance Framework (Curtin University)
- Indigenous Academic Enrichment Program (University of Melbourne)
- Indigenous Engineers: Partners for Pathways (University of Melbourne)
- National Center for Cultural Competency (University of Sydney)
- Aurora Academic Enrichment Camps (Canberra University)
- Breadwinners Project (University of Sydney)
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Higher Education Social Marketing Strategy (Queensland University of Technology)
- Higher Education Portal (Queensland University of Technology)
- Australian Indigenous Mentoring Experience (AIME) (Curtin University, University of South Australia and University of Wollongong)

(Nationally Significant projects addressing the Behrendt Review, <http://www.education.gov.au/nationally-significant-projects-addressing-behrendt-review>).

Other significant projects supporting Indigenous, remote and low SES communities to transition to higher education, were funded under the HEPPP Competitive Grants round for projects occurring between 2013 and 2015 (Higher Education Participation and Partnerships Program (HEPPP) Competitive Grants projects funded: <http://www.innovation.gov.au/highereducation/Equity/HigherEducationParticipationAndPartnershipsProgram/Pages/default.aspx#4.1>).

The current project, addressing the transition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students into higher education (SI11-2138), builds on the work of the IHER (2012),

'Can't be what you can't see':

The transition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students into higher education

particularly focusing on enablers and constraints to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander student transitions and models of successful transition. This project was guided by appropriate recommendations of the IHER (2012) that related to transitions to higher education and examined current and new models being employed to successfully transition Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students into higher education. Key elements of the different models were assessed with respect to target catchments for respective universities so that key drivers of change could be identified for the consideration of IEUs, university administrators and policy makers.

Aims and research questions

The project addressed the four key objectives as outlined in the OLT request for expressions of interest:

1. What are the key enablers and constraints to successful transition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students into higher education? Particular consideration, where data and information was available, was given to 'under-represented groups' identified by OLT which included:
 - women who are principal carers
 - young men
 - young people not transitioning from VET
 - people with disabilities
 - people in the prison system, and
 - remote Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students.
2. What are the best practice models or frameworks that can be utilised to achieve successful transitions of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students to higher education?
3. Why are current initiatives, intended to support under-represented groups, not delivering intended outcomes?
4. What strategies will assist potential Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students to transition successfully into higher education?

Project participants

Chief Investigators:

- Professor Lyn Henderson-Yates (UNDA)
- Professor Patrick Dodson (UNDA) and
- Professor Marguerite Maher (UNDA).

Professor Lyn Henderson-Yates led the project in collaboration with Research Coordinator, Mr Bruce Goring (UNDA) and Project Manager (Ms Sue Thomas).

'Can't be what you can't see':

The transition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students into higher education

Project team:

- Dr Judith Wilks (SCU)
- Mr Stephen Kinnane (UNDA)
- Ms Katie Wilson (SCU)
- Ms Terri Hughes (CDU)
- Professor Keith McNaught (UNDA)
- Professor Neil Drew (UNDA) and
- Associate Professor Kevin Watson (UNDA).

The project's method

Nulungu is based at The University of Notre Dame Australia, Broome (Yawuru buru) Campus in the Kimberley region and beyond. It focuses on research, teaching, cultural outreach and cultural training across the region. Nulungu is widely recognised as a research institute that meets the local, regional and national research requirements of Indigenous people and their communities. Since its inception in 2008, Nulungu has been a highly regarded centre of Indigenous research excellence that has built its reputation on a successful record of high quality work on complex issues for a range of clients. The underlying approach of Nulungu's research programme is 'right country, right people, right way', which positions Indigenous people and communities at the centre of its research endeavours and ensures that the value of community-based Indigenous Knowledge is recognised and applied to meet its clients' objectives.

Dr Judith Wilks (SCU) and Katie Wilson (SCU) completed the literature review with review and feedback from all project team members. The literature review provided an accurate estimate of the current statistics regarding the higher education population of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, key constraints and enablers to higher education and models being employed to transition Indigenous students into higher education. It included a review of current policies, programs, practices and models to support the transition of Indigenous students, including identified under-represented groups into higher education. It also identified knowledge gaps, current initiatives to support under-represented groups, strategies to assist potential students to transition successfully into higher education, and best practice examples for deeper analysis of factors affecting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders' transition to Australian universities.

The *Review of higher education access and outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people: Final Report (IHER)*, published in September 2012 (Behrendt et al., 2012), reviewed and made recommendations on higher education access and outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. The literature review both preceded and built on some of the results of the *IHER* after its release, in investigating the transition to higher education of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students.

'Can't be what you can't see':

The transition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students into higher education

Weekly steering committee meetings occurred during the life of the project, with a core group of project team members including Professor Lyn Henderson-Yates, Ms Sue Thomas, Mr Bruce Gorrington, Mr Stephen Kinnane, Dr Judith Wilks and Professor Neil Drew. An Indigenous Reference Group was established to provide critical advice to the project team and members of this group were consulted throughout the life of the project. The Indigenous Reference Group included Ms Sandra Brogden, Ms Erica Bernard, Mr Frank Pearce, Ms Sharon Davis and Ms Jane Weston. The Chief Investigators met three times throughout the life of the project; at the conception, at completion of the literature review and in the finalisation of the project report and website.

The Project Manager and Research Coordinator provided three interim reports to the OLT reporting on project progress and the unfolding project findings. A project Evaluator, Mr Rod Little, was contracted near the completion of the project to evaluate the project management, methodology, findings and outcomes (Refer Appendix 1—Project Evaluation).

Primary data collection employed three surveys targeting IEUs, students and key informants. Preliminary phone and email contact was followed with interviews with project participants. Information gathered during this stage focused on the role of aspirational and outreach programs and additional supports (structural and financial) and the specific transition and support needs of under-represented groups. All information was integrated and analysed to identify key constraints, key enablers and leading practice elements of successful Indigenous student transition to higher education.

The literature review provided the evidence base from which to frame questions for qualitative interviews with the key informants, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students and staff members working within the university system, which in turn helped to form the principles and frameworks (Refer Chapters 3 and 4) for effective models to successfully transition Indigenous students into Australian universities. The literature review also proved useful in identifying potential interviewees who were working and studying in Australian Universities and relevant representative organisations and government authorities. These people and organisations were contacted by telephone and email and provided with information about the project as per the requirements of the UNDA Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC) clearance. Managers of IEUs, relevant staff members, students and other key informants were then contacted for either telephone or face-to-face interviews (Refer Appendix 4).

Three separate Interview schedules were created to capture a cross section of views regarding transitions of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students to higher education. Interviews were developed for:

‘Can’t be what you can’t see’:

The transition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students into higher education

- staff members of IEUs in universities
- key informants (including within universities, non-government organisations and government authorities, and
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students (Refer Appendix 5).

Members of the project team who conducted the Interviews included Dr Judith Wilks, Ms Sue Thomas, Ms Terri Hughes and Mr Stephen Kinnane. These interviews, the literature review and analysis of recent relevant reports were utilised to address the research questions and arrive at the findings for this report. Interviews were completed with 65 individuals who were working or studying within 26 Australian universities and a range of aspirational programs in all states and territories. (Refer Appendix 3). Of the 65 individuals who participated in the project, 60 (92%) were Indigenous. This data was then analysed by all members of the project team utilising online platforms for sharing of information via online collaborative tools (discussed below). A writing team comprising Dr Judith Wilks, Mr Stephen Kinnane, Ms Terri Hughes, Ms Katie Wilson, and Ms Sue Thomas, completed the drafts of the final report and provided content for the completion of the website. All project materials and outcomes were evaluated within the final phase of the project's completion.

Online collaboration tools

Working between UNDA (Broome, Fremantle and Sydney Campuses), SCU (Coffs Harbour), and the BIITE of CDU (Alice Springs) presented unique challenges for the team. An initial project team meeting was held in Broome in November 2011 to enable the completion of a two-day workshop to define, refine and develop the project methodology and outcomes.

Subsequent group meetings utilised a combination of teleconferencing, Skype conferencing and the use of Edmodo, an online platform enabling real-time sharing of information, files, providing critique, commentary and advice. Endnote files of papers, articles and other information were created and embedded within the Edmodo platform. Surveys were shared utilising Survey Monkey online. Most surveys were completed via interviews and people gave permission for their use in the project as per UNDA Human Research Ethics Committee HREC guidelines. A small number of respondents completed the interview questions via Survey Monkey.

Ethical clearance

The project received ethical clearance from the Human Research Ethics Committee of the University of Notre Dame Australia. Appropriate ethical clearance procedures were followed with the partner institutions of SCU and BIITE. Ethics reports were provided to the Ethics Officer of UNDA throughout the life of the project and in the Final Report.

'Can't be what you can't see':

The transition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students into higher education

Project deliverables

Published project outcomes include, but are not limited to:

1. Literature Review: The transition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students to higher education <www.nulungu.edu.au/transitions/litreview/>
2. Final Report: *Can't Be what you can't see: The transition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students to higher education* <www.nulungu.edu.au/transitions/report/>
3. Website: *Can't Be what you can't see: The transition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students to higher education* <www.nulungu.edu.au/transitions/>
4. Published journal articles and conference papers; workshops.

All interview notes, interim reports and project correspondence will be retained by the Nulungu Research Institute in a secure facility for five years in accordance with the Terms of Agreement with the OLT and in line with the requirements of the UNDA HREC.

Related research supported by the OLT

A similar project with the same title but different focus (SI11-2137) was funded by the OLT at the same time as the current project and led by Curtin University of Technology (CUT) in partnership with CDU, Monash University (MU) and the University of New England (UNE). It focused on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander student experiences in transition to university. A key output of this project involved the development of an online resource for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students seeking to enrol in university. Content was generated utilising a web-based survey and completing targeted interviews with a discrete number of students of UNE, CDU and CUT (including video testimonials). Similar to the UNDA, SCU and BIITE Project (ID SI11-2138), the CUT-led research project focused on enablers and constraints to transitions to university but was primarily concerned with student experiences, perspectives and examples of success.

The two project teams met at the commencement of their projects in early 2012 to ensure that there was no direct overlap in deliverables and to ensure maximum benefit for the OLT investment in two projects on the same theme. Once outcomes and terms of reference were clearly defined, each team operated separately and independently. Each project provides a unique window of opportunity to enhance Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander student transitions to higher education within the respective Terms of Agreement and via dissemination of project findings via a diversity of reports, websites, academic and non-academic education networks, and analyses of enablers and constraints to transitions to higher education

'Can't be what you can't see':

The transition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students into higher education

The project's findings

The project's findings have been presented in the report as follow:

Chapter Two: Project Findings Part 1

1. The literature review: Key themes and current contexts of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander student transitions into higher education

Chapter Three: Project Findings Part 2

1. Challenges and constraints to the successful transition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait students into higher education
2. Current successful enablers and key elements of programs and institutions supporting the transition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students into higher education

Chapter Four: Current models supporting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander student transitions into higher education

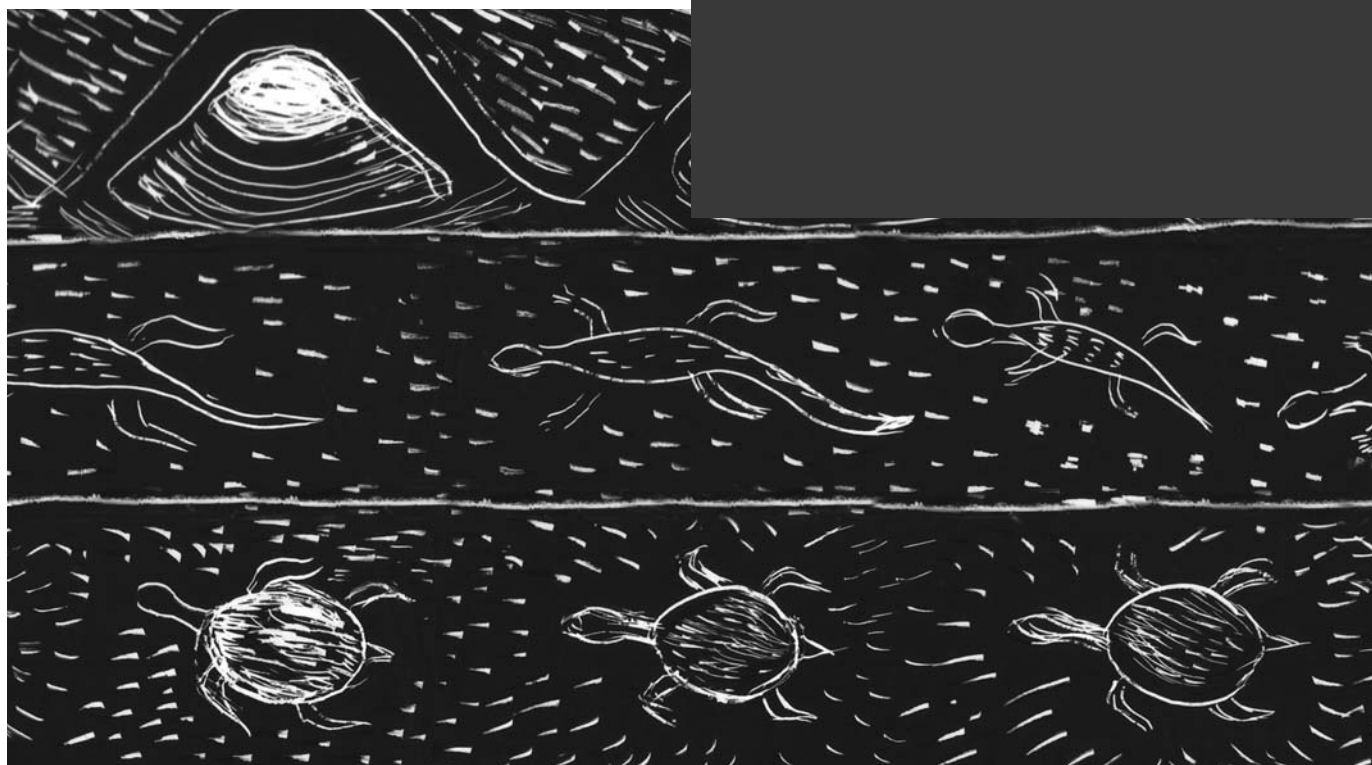
Chapter Five: Summary of key issues and opportunities

'Can't be what you can't see':

The transition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students into higher education

Chapter 2:

Project Findings Part 1



Chapter 2: Project Findings Part 1

The chapter is based on the findings of the literature review. The findings make appropriate reference to the recommendations of the IHER (Behrendt et al., 2012). A copy of the literature review is available via the OLT website at (<http://www.olt.gov.au/project-transition-aboriginal-and-torres-strait-islander-students-higher-education-2011-0>). For further detail and deeper analysis of issues discussed in this section of the report.

The Literature Review: Key Themes and Current Context of Indigenous Student Transitions into Higher Education

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander student population statistical profile

One of the aims of the *Review of Higher Education Access and Outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people (IHER)* (Behrendt et al., 2012), was to examine the appropriate parity rate to be used in comparative statistics with the non-Indigenous population, such as those identifying an achievement ‘gap’.

- The *Bradley Review of Australian Higher Education* (2008) and the *IHER* use a population parity rate of 2.2%, reflecting the proportion of the population between 15-64 years of age that is Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander (based on 2006 ABS population statistics).
- The Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations (DEEWR)² used a parity rate of 3.1% to estimate the proportion of Australian students expected to be Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander “. . .if Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples were represented according to their proportion of the higher education aged population” (Panel for the Review of Higher Education Access and Outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, 2011, p. 3).

University students

Thirty eight established Table A universities are eligible for funding programs defined in the Higher Education Support Act (HESA) 2003. Three recently established smaller, privately funded Table B universities have limited access to Commonwealth funded student places, and significantly, are not eligible for Commonwealth funding. The following section provides a brief statistical profile of Indigenous student numbers, enrolment by state and completion rates from 2010 to 2012.

² DEEWR was transformed into the Department of Education and the Department of Employment in December 2013 following the Federal Australian Election in 2013.

‘Can’t be what you can’t see’:

The transition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students into higher education

- In 2010, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students made up 1.4% of all enrolments in university and 1.1% of higher degree students, well below the parity target of 2.2% of the working age population (Behrendt et al, 2012).
- In 2011, Pechenkina, Kowal and Paradies (2011, p. 59) observed that Indigenous university commencing numbers had increased slowly since 2005, but “completions have fluctuated”.
- Students who self-identified as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander on enrolment made up 1.0% (12,642) of all university enrolments in 2012 (1,257,722), an increase from 11,807 in 2011 of 7.0%, and 1.1% of all commencements (509,766), an increase of 8.2% (5,381) from 2011 to 5,824 (Australia. Department of Industry Innovation Climate Change Science Research and Tertiary Education, 2013b).
- The *IHER* noted that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students experience a one in three dropout rate from university compared to one in five for all domestic students, and that overall completion rates were 22% less than for non-Indigenous (Behrendt et al., 2012, p. 87).

Table 1 lists the number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students enrolled at Australian universities in 2012 by state or territory.

| State/ Territory | Number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students enrolled at university in 2012 |
|------------------------------|---|
| New South Wales | 4,304 |
| Victoria | 1,557 |
| Queensland | 3,152 |
| Western Australia | 1,136 |
| South Australia | 777 |
| Tasmania | 364 |
| Northern Territory | 656 |
| Australian Capital Territory | 323 |
| Multi-state (ACU) | 373 |
| Total | 12,642 |

Table 1: State and territory figures for all Indigenous university students in 2012
(Australia. Department of Industry Innovation Climate Change Science Research and Tertiary Education, 2013).

Vocational Education and Training (VET)

An analysis of VET statistics on enrolments and on qualifications achieved (Ainley, Buckley, Beavis, Rothman, & Tovey, 2011, p. 42) during the period 1996-2008 showed

‘Can’t be what you can’t see’:

The transition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students into higher education

a far higher rate of increase for Indigenous compared to non-Indigenous persons (700% compared with 227%). The data also showed that Indigenous young people aged between 15-19 years are more likely to be enrolled at Certificate II level than in higher qualifications. The following section provides a statistical profile of Indigenous student numbers, enrolment by state and completion rates for VET from 2010 to 2012.

- In 2010, there were eight times as many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students enrolled in VET compared to those enrolled in university (Taylor, Gray, Hunter, Yap, & Lahn, 2011, p. 9).
- In 2010, there were 8 times as many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students enrolled in VET compared to those enrolled in university (Taylor, Gray, Hunter, Yap, & Lahn, 2011, p. 9).
- In 2012 Indigenous VET students numbered 89,878 or 4.6% of the total national VET student population (1,943,195) and 15.3% of the total Indigenous population. (National Centre for Vocational Education Research, 2013).
- In 2012, 6.4% of students who had completed training were studying at university (National Centre for Vocational Education Research, 2013).

A breakdown of 2012 figures by state and territory indicates that the Northern Territory has the largest percentage of the total Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population undertaking VET studies (41.7%), while New South Wales has the largest number overall. Table 2 provides details of VET qualifications completed in 2011 with regard to certificate levels. Certificate IV can be a pathway into university, but in 2011, 79% of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander VET completions were for Certificate I—III.

| Qualifications | Numbers of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students who completed VET in 2011 |
|-----------------------|--|
| Diploma or higher | 1 228 |
| Certificate IV | 2 733 |
| Certificate III | 5 865 |
| Certificate II | 6 155 |
| Certificate I | 2 963 |
| Total | 18 944 |

Table 2: AQF (Australian Qualifications Framework) qualifications completed by Indigenous status 2011 (National Centre for Vocational Education Research, 2013).

Table 3 provides a breakdown of number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students enrolled in VET by state and territory and the percentage of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students in each state and territory in 2012.

‘Can’t be what you can’t see’:

The transition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students into higher education

| State/ Territory | Number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students enrolled in VET (and percentages) in 2012 |
|------------------------------|--|
| New South Wales | 32,695 (5.5%) |
| Victoria | 7,728 (1.2%) |
| Queensland | 17,268 (5.9%) |
| Western Australia | 12,814 (7.7%) |
| South Australia | 6,392 (4.5%) |
| Tasmania | 2,010 (4.7%) |
| Northern Territory | 10,120 (41.7%) |
| Australian Capital Territory | 851 (2.8%) |
| Total (Average) | 89,878 (10.8%) |

Table 3: State and territory figures for all Indigenous VET students in 2012 (National Centre for Vocational Education Research, 2013).

Apprenticeships and traineeships

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander enrolments in VET in the NT accounted for 41.7% of NT enrolments in 2012 (see Table 3). Yet, Indigenous apprenticeships in the NT account for only 6.6% of the national population of Indigenous apprenticeships in 2011 indicating lack of connection between VET and apprenticeships in the NT. NSW (32.7%) and QLD (29%) led the nation in terms of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander apprenticeships in 2011 compared with their respective enrolments for VET being 5.9% (NSW) and 5.5% (QLD) in 2012 (see Table 4), indicating the pathway through apprenticeships is less likely to lead to higher education, with these students following the pathway to direct employment.

- Indigenous people commencing apprenticeships and traineeships numbered 12,554 in 2011, an increase of 8.1% from 2010 (12,008), and 3.9% of all 2011 commencements (318,421) (National Centre for Vocational Education Research, 2012).
- Indigenous completions in 2011 were 5,304, a growth of 9.5% from 2010 (4,683), and 2.9% of all completing apprentices and trainees (National Centre for Vocational Education Research, 2012).

‘Can’t be what you can’t see’:

The transition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students into higher education

The total number of Indigenous apprentices and trainees in 2011 was 15,039, and is shown below in Table 4 by state and territory (with percentages of total Indigenous enrolments):

| State or Territory | Number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander apprentices and trainees 2011 |
|------------------------------|---|
| New South Wales | 4,912 (32.7%) |
| Victoria | 1,372 (9.3%) |
| Queensland | 4,359 (29%) |
| South Australia | 761 (5.1%) |
| Western Australia | 1,788 (11.9%) |
| Tasmania | 600 (4.0%) |
| Northern Territory | 998 (6.6%) |
| Australian Capital Territory | 249 (1.7%) |
| Total (Average) | 15,039 (12.5%) |

Table 4: State and territory figures for all Indigenous apprentices and trainees in 2011 (National Centre for Vocational Education Research, 2012).

Year 12 students

Statistics reveal that retention of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students to Year 12 is increasing, with a small but increasing percentage qualifying for university. In 2008, 10% of Year 12 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students gained a university entrance score compared to 46% of non-Indigenous (DEEWR 2008, cited in Behrendt et al., 2012, p. 6). More recent figures have been difficult to locate.

- During the period 2002-2012, retention from Year 7/8 to Year 12 for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students increased from 38% to 51.1% (compared with 76.3% to 81.3% for non-Indigenous students) (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2013b).
- In 2012, the apparent retention rate from Year 7/8 to Year 12 was 52.9% for female Indigenous students and 49.2 % for male Indigenous students (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2013b).
- The rate of change is very positive and indicates movement toward the COAG Target to halve the gap in equivalent attainment rates with non-Indigenous students by 2020. However, this rate of change, “is insufficient if the COAG targets for 2020 are to be reached” (Ainley et al., 2011, pp. 41-42).

Indigenous Engagement in Universities

The Commonwealth Department of Industry, Innovation, Science, Research and Tertiary Education (DIISRTE) took over responsibility for tertiary education from DEEWR in mid-2012. Following the federal election in September 2013, the department was renamed the Department of Industry (see Literature Review Appendix B for details of federal government programs and responsibilities). The department requires all higher education institutions to work towards advancing the goals of the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Policy (AEP) (Australia.

‘Can’t be what you can’t see’:

The transition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students into higher education

Department of Education Employment and Workplace Relations, 2012c). It provides funding for programs to support Indigenous students in areas such as: study skills, counselling and cultural awareness; employment of Indigenous staff members; and the operation of Indigenous education centres.

Table A Universities are required to submit an annual Indigenous Education Statement (IES) providing information on outcomes, achievements and constraints for the previous year, with details of plans to meet ongoing responsibilities for Indigenous student achievement in higher education. This information is used to determine ISP funding; to enable the department to assess and report on progress towards improving educational outcomes for Indigenous Australians as defined in the AEP; and to assess the effectiveness of government programs which support higher education providers in achieving improved outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students (Australia. Department of Education Employment and Workplace Relations, 2011b).

- From 2011, the IES also requires details of expenditure of the previous year's ISP grant, including the amount of the grant directed to the IEU "where one exists" (Australia. Department of Education Employment and Workplace Relations, 2011b).
- As at November 2013, 26 university websites displayed direct links to Indigenous or Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander education, services, support, commitment statements or Acknowledgements to Country on the opening homepage (see summary of university engagement in the Literature Review, p 9), compared to 15 in April 2012, although links on the front page vary according to changes throughout the academic year.
- The *IHER* found that, although ISP funding has been successful in providing an incentive for universities to enrol Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, there have not been the same incentives targeted at retention and completion (Behrendt et al., 2012, p. 75).

Indigenous Education Units

IEUs with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff members began to be established in teacher education colleges and institutes of technology in the 1970s and 1980s, primarily through the efforts of the National Aboriginal Education Committee (NAEC) (Whatman & Duncan, 2005, p. 123). Originally established to provide "enclave support" (Patton, Hong, Lampert, Burnett, & Anderson, 2012, p. 13), IEUs and their impact have been the centre of recent debate:

- IEUs are seen by some as central to Indigenous support, for determining strategies for education and leadership in higher education (Indigenous Higher Education Advisory Council, 2008), and for the provision of a culturally safe environment for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students.
- Nakata (2013) has criticised the widespread application of the notion of cultural safety in higher education which he sees as potentially diminishing and/or underestimating Indigenous students' resilience and agency, and promoting the idea of Indigenous students as victims.

'Can't be what you can't see':

The transition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students into higher education

- Trudgett (2010) highlights the need for more proactive advocacy, “welcoming and approachable” staff members (p. 13), and more Indigenous staff members to have tertiary qualifications.
- Langton is critical of the centres, commenting that the “enclave” aspect of the units can be too comfortable for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, not encouraging “high achievement and excellence as the goal”, and that they “tend not to attract high quality staff with professional expertise” (Trounson, 2011).
- Bunda, Zipin and Brennan (2012) call for Indigenous support or education units to be fully resourced knowledge centres that connect across disciplines and the whole university, that they be staffed by Indigenous people and recognise “community-qualified Indigenous Knowledges” (p. 14).

The *Indigenous Higher Education Review* (Behrendt et al., 2012) reported on a wide range of activities and characteristics of IEUs and found that “there is no single best practice model for the units. It was argued that support must be tailored to best suit the student profile of the institution and be designed in close collaboration with the faculties” (p. 63). Recommendation 10 of the *IHER* (Behrendt et al., 2012) acknowledged the need for the “provision of support through Indigenous Education Units and faculties” (p. xix), through “a whole-of-university approach to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander student success so that faculties and mainstream support services have primary responsibility for supporting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, backed up by Indigenous Education Units” (p. xix). Recommendation 11 of the *IHER* (Behrendt et al., 2012) was supportive of the continued work of IEUs but called for universities to conduct reviews to ascertain whether their IEUs “have appropriate objectives, funding, structures and accountability measures to ensure quality student outcomes” (p. xx).

Current enabling program profiles

Enabling courses and programs provide a pathway for students without the standard required university entry qualifications to enter award courses by undertaking preparatory study. Currently, most universities offer enabling courses, also known as ‘alternative entry schemes’, ‘access schemes’, ‘bridging courses’ and ‘preparatory courses’. Many courses are campus wide with a focus on teaching writing, computing skills and mathematical skills; negotiating the university culture; science or humanities specialisation; Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander/Indigenous studies; and liaison with staff members and other students. The courses may run over a session/semester, or a complete academic year, and may be specifically designed for Indigenous students, or offered to all prospective students. It is important to note that students currently undertaking such courses do not qualify for ABSTUDY unless the unit can be accredited to an undergraduate degree course.

- A 2004 review of Indigenous higher education enrolments and the impact of changes in ABSTUDY, the Australian Department of Education, Science and Training (DEST)

‘Can’t be what you can’t see’:

The transition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students into higher education

noted an increase in enabling courses in the first half of the 1990s contributed to overall rapid growth in Indigenous undergraduate enrolment figures³.

- Enabling courses were also found to have low rates of completion (30-40%), thus lowering the completion success rates of Indigenous students (Australia. Department of Education Science and Training, 2004, p. 16).
- Powell and Lawley cited evidence that Indigenous students who completed enabling courses were more likely to progress to and complete full award courses (AVCC, 2005; Farrington, DiGregorio and Page, 1999, cited in Powell & Lawley, 2008, p. 27).

The *IHER* recommends (Recommendation 8) that universities investigate their programs' effectiveness, government funding conditions, and the collaboration of VET, universities and government in order to extend the "reach and effectiveness" of enabling programs (Behrendt et al., 2012, p. xix).

Other programs/support provided to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students

Commonwealth Government

The Bradley Review (Australia. Department of Education Employment and Workplace Relations [DEEWR], and Bradley, 2008) recommended a range of improvements to funding for higher education students. The resulting 2011 Review of Student Income Support Reforms has recommended more funds for students most in need of financial support. The *IHER* notes that these changes are still being implemented but that from submissions received, it appears "that financial hardship remains an issue for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students succeeding at and completing university courses" (p. 89).

ABSTUDY provides a means-tested living allowance and supplementary benefits supporting study in order to enable eligible secondary and tertiary Indigenous students and apprentices to stay at school or make the transition to undertake further study. It is managed and delivered by Centrelink (Centrelink, 2012). ABSTUDY was restructured in 2000 to align with Youth Allowance and ABSTUDY. This change was seen by some as contributing to a decline in Indigenous higher education enrolments, although the Department of Education, Science and Training disagreed (Australia. Department of Education Science and Training, 2004; Powell & Lawley, 2008). In a submission to DEEWR on measuring the socio-economic status of higher education students, the Indigenous Higher Education Advisory Council (IHEAC) (2010) challenged the categorisation of most Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students as lower socio-economic. The IHEAC argued that not all Indigenous students are in the lower socio-economic category, but many are subject to "multiple and complex disadvantage". (2010, p. 2). It found that they require financial support in ways other than Centrelink

³ Detailed figures are not available in published sources for this period but can be obtained from the relevant department for a fee.

'Can't be what you can't see':

The transition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students into higher education

to assist their further study. However, because of the categorisation, only one-third of students received ABSTUDY support. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students must meet the same income support eligibility requirements as non-Indigenous students. Compliance to this requirement does not acknowledge their greater educational disadvantage as identified in educational policies (Indigenous Higher Education Advisory Council, 2011, p. 4).

In January 2012, a number of changes to ABSTUDY and Youth Allowance were made including changing the age of independence to 22 (no longer subject to parental means testing if not living with parents), and the extension of self-supporting or independent status to students from areas classified as Inner Regional Australia (Centrelink, 2012). This is an Australian Standard Geographical Classification of areas which may have limited access to a “wide range of goods and services”, such as Bunbury, WA and Wagga Wagga, NSW (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2011b). Additional factors determining independent status for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders include “. . .being 15 years or over and. . .considered an adult in a traditional community; have been in gaol for a cumulative period of at least six months” (National Welfare Rights Network [NWRN], 2012).

Mixed Mode Away From Base (AFB) for higher education institutes is a mixed-mode delivery tertiary study program for Indigenous students in remote and rural areas. Mixed mode courses combine distance education in local communities with some face-to-face teaching on campus. The Commonwealth Government provides funding for travel, meals, and accommodation for “eligible Indigenous students” studying with “eligible providers in the higher education sector” in approved programs. (Australia. Department of Education Employment and Workplace Relations [DEEWR], 2011, p. 35).

ABSTUDY AFB provides assistance including students’ travel costs to attend approved courses requiring travel away from their permanent home or study location for a short time and the reasonable costs of accommodation and meals while away from home. It is administered by Centrelink and paid to the student or to their institution. Students cannot receive funding from both forms of AFB.

Outcomes of AFB funding are reportedly difficult to assess because of the performance indicators used, limited tracking of students, and changes to student circumstances within institutions as students change courses, change between part-time and full-time or take leave of absence from study (Australia. Department of Finance Administration. Office of Evaluation Audit, 2005; Behrendt et al., 2012, p. 83). Published Federal Government higher education statistics do not always include the AFB statistics that providers submit (Pakeha, 2011).

The **Indigenous Tutorial Assistance Scheme—Tertiary Tuition (ITAS—TT)** provides funding for eligible Indigenous students for tuition in their areas of tertiary study (university award level courses). The ITAS-TT scheme was introduced in its original form in 1989 as the Aboriginal Tutorial Assistance Scheme (ATAS). ATAS was reviewed

‘Can’t be what you can’t see’:

The transition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students into higher education

in 2003 and renamed ITAS-TT in 2005. Tertiary education providers manage this program for students who may be at risk of failing or not achieving well enough to continue. Practices and issues associated with the current operation of the ITAS-TT scheme that render its operation problematic include under-utilisation of the scheme; the scheme's unavailability to students completing bridging courses and literacy and numeracy programs; and onerous and complex reporting requirements (Australia. Department of Education Employment and Workplace Relations (DEEWR), 2011; Bunda et al., 2012; Powell & Lawley, 2008; Trudgett, 2010; Whatman, McLaughlin, Willsteed, Tyhuis, & Beetson, 2008).

Universities report that the current operation of ITAS inhibits flexibility and innovation (Behrendt et al., 2012, p. 76). The implementation and development of the ITAS Scheme at QUT was reviewed by staff members of the Oodgeroo Unit Indigenous centre which is responsible for its management (Whatman et al., 2008). The review found the administrative, funding and reporting requirements to be onerous and inflexible, with an emphasis on statistical outcomes at the expense of the quality of teaching and learning. The authors suggest the scheme is based on a deficit model of Indigenous students' educational outcomes (p. 124), and works against its stated aims. They point out that QUT Indigenous students have high rates of completion and participation, yet only 25% use ITAS. Whatman et al. (2008) emphasise the need for further research and analysis of the uptake of ITAS, and the use of broader indicators such as students' understandings of success. However, the study identified the value of the ITAS scheme in building cultural awareness and understandings of Indigenous perspectives, and enhancing pedagogy among ITAS tutors. Funding is not provided for training and professional development of ITAS tutors.

An urgent need was identified in the *IHER's* Recommendation 13 to redesign and improve the delivery and efficacy of the Indigenous Support Program and the Indigenous Tutorial Assistance Scheme—Tertiary Tuition (ITAS—TT), across the Australian higher education sector (Behrendt et al., 2012). Specifically, it was recommended that significant reform of the ITAS-TT scheme in the form of a new funding model was necessary. Crucially, it also recommended that the scheme be redesigned to be more flexible; tailored to the needs of individual students; more locally relevant and targeted; have a greater emphasis on retention and completion rates; and be more inclusive of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students who are not eligible for assistance under the scheme's existing funding guidelines.

Under-represented cohorts within the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population

Six specific groups of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population have been identified as being under-represented in relation to higher education: women as primary carers, young men, prisoners, students from remote areas and people with disabilities. It should be noted that many students belong to more than one of these specific groups. Experiencing the multiple layers of disadvantage associated with

'Can't be what you can't see':

The transition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students into higher education

belonging to more than one group often compounds their challenges. Targeted data for these groups are limited and inconsistent, indicating the need for further research and analysis. Although literature relating to the experiences of these groups is scant, a discussion follows. In recent OLT-funded research, Oliver, Forrest, Rochecoste, Bennell, Anderson and Cooper (2013) used volunteer student participants at four Australian universities to study the transition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students to higher education. Their research did not identify these groups.

Women who are primary carers

In 2010, females comprised 66% of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander enrolled students (Behrendt et al., 2012, p. 8). The rate of participation of Aboriginal women in further education from their mid-thirties is higher than Aboriginal men or non-Aboriginal men and women (Doyle & Hill, 2012, p. 25). A profile of Aboriginal women indicates they are often single mothers who may defer education until their children have completed schooling. Care costs and availability, access to information, peer and family networks, IEs, enabling courses and away-from-base courses contribute to Aboriginal women's decisions in making the transition to further education.

Enabling Aboriginal women to maintain cultural and family connections is given as an important factor in achieving educational success (White, 2007, cited in Doyle & Hill, 2012, p. 36). Larkins et al. (2011) studied a small group of disadvantaged Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young mothers in Townsville, Queensland, and found some of the women to be already disengaged from education or with low expectations, limited future plans, and who regarded pregnancy as an option that "might provide some advantages" (p. 554).

Young men

A number of studies (refer to Literature Review, pp 22-23) have identified a preference for vocational training over academic education among young Indigenous men from rural and regional areas (Craven & Marder, 2007; James, 2000; Larkins et al., 2009).

Larkins et al. (2009) also found a higher percentage of young men (19.5%) felt they would be "happy/proud" to be teenage fathers than young women (9.1%) (p. 15) as this would follow traditional family roles. To counter the impact of government policies which place responsibility at the individual level, and do not consider implicit inequalities and power imbalances, the authors recommended assistance for families and students in mapping pathways; changes in pedagogy and policy; and co-operation between vocational and educational sectors (p. 17). Recommendations 3, 4, 6, 8 and 9 of the IHER (Behrendt et al., 2012, pp. xvii - xix) emphasised the importance for collaboration across educational sectors, with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander bodies and organisations, and government agencies, to enhance Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander student pathways between VET and higher education and to "improve the reach and effectiveness of enabling courses for disadvantaged learners" (p. xix).

'Can't be what you can't see':

The transition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students into higher education

The mining industry actively supports and recruits Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in some areas of Queensland and Western Australia, in conjunction with VET, universities and private providers. Indigenous enrolments are higher for males and tend to be in short “enabling” courses, or at the lower end of the certification spectrum (Taylor & Scambary, 2005, p. 87). Tiplady and Barclay (2007) identified inconsistent standards in mining companies’ reports of the numbers of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders that they trained, educated and employed.

Young people not making the transition from VET

In 2010, only 3.8% Indigenous students enrolled in university study six months after completing VET training. This percentage has decreased from 6.5% in 2002, although it has not been a steady decline (National Centre for Vocational Education Research, 2011a). In 2009 only 6% of Indigenous students entered university on the basis of a VET Award course which compared closely with the 7% of non-Indigenous students who followed this pathway (Panel for the Review of Higher Education Access and Outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, 2011), indicating that this is not a strong preference for Indigenous or non-Indigenous students. Dual-sector institutions RMIT and Swinburne University had the highest transition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students from VET in 2010 (*IHER*, p. 44), indicating a stronger pathway.

Transition from VET to university has been problematic for more than 25 years because of incompatibilities in “curriculum, pedagogy and assessment” (Australia. Department of Education Employment and Workplace Relations [DEEWR] & Bradley, 2008, p. 179). The *IHER* (pp. 39, 44) identifies the continued problems and limited transition from VET, and recommends clearer definition of pathways to higher education.

People with disabilities

An accurate picture of the educational achievement and aspirations of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander persons with disabilities is difficult to obtain because of variations and limitations in definitions and statistics. The Australian Bureau of Statistics has defined disability since 1998 as “any limitation, restriction or impairment which restricts everyday activities and has lasted or is likely to last for at least six months” (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2011a).

In 2009, over 4 million people, or 18.5% of Australia’s population, reported having a disability (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2010). In 1996, university students with disabilities comprised 1.9% of the student population, and in 2006, enrolment of students with disabilities in higher education rose to 3.6%, a figure that Ryan (2011, p. 74) suggests is low in terms of the whole population, and is most likely underreported. Figures for disabled students are reported in higher education statistics, but they are not differentiated by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander status.

‘Can’t be what you can’t see’:

The transition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students into higher education

Statistics for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians with disabilities are limited (O'Neill, Kirov, & Thomson, 2004). Before 2002, there were no surveys of the extent and nature of disabilities among the Australian population. The Productivity Commission (2011) based its inquiry report, *Disability care and support*, on the 2006 Census and the 2008 National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Survey, although it claimed the statistics may be understated. Reasons suggested for this under-representation include non-response rates to census and surveys, and a difficulty for Indigenous people to relate to the concept of disability (Productivity Commission, 2011, p. 532).

The Productivity Commission estimates there are 26,000 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians with a “profound or severe core activity limitation”, with the highest level of disability in remote areas. Although the numbers indicated by the statistics are considered to be underestimated, they are higher than those for non-Indigenous Australians, and barriers to support are greater for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples (Productivity Commission, 2011, p. 533). The most recent detailed ABS statistics show that in 2008 across Australia, 162,943 or 50% of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people aged 15 years and over had a disability or long-term health condition. These are broken down into categories of sight, hearing, speech (34.2%), physical (65.5%), intellectual (15.4%), psychological (15.7%), and type not specified (49%). Around one in 12 (8%) had a profound/severe core activity limitation: sight, hearing, speech (41.2%), physical (83.6%), intellectual (27.2%), psychological (27%), and type not specified (70%). These proportions do not add up to 100% because people may report more than one type of disability (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2011c).

In 2008, approximately 42% of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people with a disability or long-term health condition had left school at Year 9 or below compared with 26% of people without a disability and 18% of people with a disability had completed school to Year 12, compared with 27% of those with no disability. Further, 26% of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people aged 25—64 years with a disability or long-term health condition had a post-school educational qualification at a Certificate III level or above in 2008, compared with 32% of those with no disability or long-term health condition. Indigenous persons with a disability and living in non-remote areas had a higher rate of post-school qualifications (30%) than those with a disability and living in remote areas (14%) (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2011c).

In 2010, 42,111 students with a disability were enrolled in higher education courses across Australia, or 4.5% of the higher education population (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2010). However, these figures are not differentiated by Indigenous status. Year 12 school completion tends to be lower as the rate of completion for people with disabilities aged between 15 and 64 was 33.3%, compared with 54.9% for the whole population. In 2010, 110,088 students with disability were enrolled in VET courses across Australia, which equals 6.1% of all VET students (around 1.8 million) (Council of Australian Governments [COAG], 2011, p. 40).

‘Can’t be what you can’t see’:

The transition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students into higher education

It should also be noted that a number of IEUs had developed strong relationships with mainstream disability services within the universities and played a significant role in connecting students with appropriate services by ensuring Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students were aware of the services available to them on campus and were supported to access them. This is another situation where the onus of identifying a disability or sharing details is upon the student who may choose to disclose at their own discretion.

The study found a common lack of specific programs or services being provided to Indigenous students with disabilities with students being referred immediately to mainstream disability and equity services once identified. For example, at UTS, students are advised to self-identify if they have any issues that need to be supported and this is provided by the specialty support unit within the university in collaboration with Jumbunna.

At The Australian National University (ANU), the Disabilities Service Centre (DSC) has the resources to provide special equipment, tutoring with specialist devices or to make provision with student services:

We do pretty much whatever is needed to be done to support a student's needs such as special equipment, or accessing scholarships and dealing with the mainstream mechanisms and processes of the university.

The majority of IEU responses reiterated that this is the domain of disability services and, while most had a strong relationship and clear communication with disability services, the IEU did not replicate existing services but connected students and ensured they were supported. As an example, one student with mental health issues was unable to meet course requirements and was incurring debts and failing while hospitalised. Once he disclosed this issue to IEU staff members, they were able to negotiate on his behalf to reverse the debt. This example demonstrates that students need to be aware of their rights and the importance of the roles of university staff members within IEUs.

People in the prison system seeking higher education outcomes

At June 2013, the Australian Bureau of Statistics reported 8,533 average daily full-time adult prisoners identified themselves as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2013a), or just over one quarter (28%) of the total prisoner population, and 2% of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population over 18 years of age. The figure consisted of 7,754 (91%) male and 779 (9%) female prisoners with median ages of 30.4 years and 31.6 years respectively. This compares with 30,814 (71%) non-Indigenous full-time prisoners—28,466 (92.4%) male and 2,346 (7.6%) female prisoners. The ABS cautions that these figures are dependent on the

‘Can’t be what you can’t see’:

The transition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students into higher education

prison population self-identifying as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander (not all identified), and may not be fully accurate representations.

Limited data are available regarding higher educational aspirations, participation levels and achievements of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander prisoners. Correlations between low levels of education and high levels of incarceration among Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander Australians are complex. The potential value of education in reducing imprisonment rates is recognised, although it is acknowledged that this is only one contributing factor (Australia. Senate Select Committee on Regional and Remote Communities, 2010, p. 31). The Senate Committee identified limited research into this area in Australia, citing mainly international literature in its paper, highlighting a need for further investigation and evidence-based data driving policy and practice to enhance opportunities for prisoners seeking higher education opportunities.

Recommendation 185 of the 1991 *Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody* recommended the development of a national strategy to “improve the opportunities for the education and training of those in custody” (Aboriginal Deaths in Custody, Volume 2, p. 705). In 1999, the Department of Education, Science and Training produced *A national strategy to improve education and training outcomes for adult Indigenous Australians in the custody of correctional authorities*. All State and Territory Governments agreed to this national policy (Australia. Department of Education Science Training, 1999). Specific recommendations included access to funding through the Indigenous Education Strategic Initiatives Programme (IESIP), and the “lawful custody allowance” to assist Indigenous people in custody with full-time study costs, excluding tuition fees (Centrelink, 2008). This allowance still exists but there appears to be little evidence of its use (Australian Broadcasting Commission (ABC), 2011). The Open Learning Agency of Australia (OLAA) was appointed to trial the delivery of educational services to Indigenous people in correctional services but, although the trial was completed, there is no evidence of its further application. Furthermore, Miller (2007) reported there was no evidence that “relevant government departments” endorsed the national strategy, or that there was any systematic monitoring or evaluation of the strategy (p. 206, n. 6).

Miller’s (2007) review of the provision of education for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in correctional services across all of Australia indicated limited data were available regarding the number of Indigenous prisoners undertaking education and training, nationally and in states and territories, and limited research into this area. The report noted inconsistencies in the provision of education and training for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in prisons nationally (Miller, 2007, p. 226). Currently, in most jurisdictions, VET organisations work with correctional services departments to provide education and training for prisoners. However, provision continues to be inconsistent, varying by jurisdiction and by institution. Some universities offer distance learning for prisoners. Nulloo Yumbah, CQ University’s Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander learning, spirituality and research centre delivers its Tertiary Entry Program in correctional centres, and supports inmates enrolled in other CQ University programs. The TRACKS Tertiary Preparation Program (TTPP) from

‘Can’t be what you can’t see’:

The transition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students into higher education

the University of New England, delivers distance education to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander men at the Woodford Correctional Centre in Queensland (*IHER* (2012), pp. 172-3).

Limitations on the subject areas in which degrees can be undertaken, access to computers for online learning, and practical classes are some of the barriers encountered for inmates who are studying (*IHER*, p. 173). Other barriers include poor or unsupportive attitudes of staff members. A 2005 study of VET and recidivism in Queensland correctional services found that, while the value of education in reducing re-offending and improving employability of prisoners is recognised by policy-makers, this attitude was not shared by all correctional services staff members (Callan & Gardner, 2005, p. 36). In 2010, Aboriginal teachers made up only 6% of correctional educators in New South Wales, with an Aboriginal population of 26%. TAFE Correctional Educators called for a minimum of one Aboriginal teaching position in every NSW correctional facility (Usher, 2010, p. 17).

Recent research by Carnes (2011) identified a lack of independent research into Indigenous prisoner education worldwide, and specifically in Australia. Carnes' post graduate study of Aboriginal prisoner education in Western Australia highlighted five gaps: "provision of adequate resources and infrastructure; access to current technology; innovative training programs; a focus on cultural education; access to education" (p. 5), a situation that prevails despite multiple recommendations and committees of inquiry.

Rural and remote Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students

Universities

A study focusing on aspects of student characteristics and experiences in Australia's regional universities (Richardson & Friedman, 2011, p. 41) found that Indigenous people are far more likely to enrol in regional universities than in metropolitan ones, a pattern that is replicated across the whole of Australia. Indigenous enrolments as a percentage of total enrolments increases with distance from the major population centre as follows:

| Geographic region | Percentage |
|-----------------------------------|------------|
| Very remote area | 2.8% |
| Outer provincial area | 2.2% |
| Inner provincial area | 1.5% |
| Provincial city (25,000 – 50,000) | 1.9% |
| Provincial city (50,000 – 99,999) | 1.3% |
| Major urban area | 1.5% |
| State capital city | 0.7% |
| Average | 1.7% |

Table 5: Percentage of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander student enrolments in universities by geographic region, 2011 (Richardson & Friedman, 2011, p. 42).

'Can't be what you can't see':

The transition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students into higher education

Vocational Education and Training

In 2011, the geographic location of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students undertaking vocational education and training (and the percentage of total numbers) was as follows:

| Geographic region | Numbers | Percentage |
|----------------------|---------|------------|
| Outer regional area | 24,179 | 27.6% |
| Major cities | 22,483 | 25.6% |
| Very remote areas | 15,969 | 18.4% |
| Inner regional areas | 16,227 | 18.5% |
| Remote areas | 7,553 | 8.6% |
| Total (Average) | 86,411 | 19.7% |

Table 6: Numbers and percentages of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander student enrolments in VET institutions by geographic region, 2011 (National Centre for Vocational Education Research, 2012).

Discipline profile for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students across Australia

Entry Pathways for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Students

In 2010, 47.3% of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander commencing students entered university on the basis of their prior educational attainment (higher education course, secondary education, or VET award course). The remaining Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students' entrance was based on mature age special entry, professional qualifications, or other reasons involving an institution's assessment of a prospective student's individual circumstances (the largest percentage). For example, the University of Western Australia (UWA) uses "special ATAR [Australian tertiary admission rank] provisions, enabling courses, and course specific intensive preparatory courses", and 75% of Indigenous students gained entry to this university's undergraduate degrees in this way. By contrast, 83% of all commencing domestic students entered university based on previous educational qualification (Behrendt et al., 2012, p. 49).

Entry via VET

Statistics show that the number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students continuing on to higher education through the VET system has declined since 2006. In 2012, 33.6% of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students were enrolled in further study six months after completing VET training (35.9% in 2006): 4.9% in university study (8.8% in 2006), and 7.8% for non-Indigenous students (7.4% in 2006); 19.9% at a TAFE institute; and 11.3% with private providers (National Centre for Vocational Education Research, 2013). The *IHER* (2012) highlighted that VET enrolments better reflect Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander "population parity" (p. 40), and suggested reasons for the higher VET levels of study at university such as "method of study, its

'Can't be what you can't see':

The transition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students into higher education

curricular content, or the career options”, and the need to earn money. Geographical location is given as another potential reason, with only 44% of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples living within one of the 49 cities and towns with a university campus (p. 41).

Reasons given by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander graduate students for undertaking VET training in 2011 were: “employment related outcomes” (81.1%); “further study outcome” (4.4%); and “personal development outcome” (14.5%). However, it appears that VET to higher education is not a strong pathway for most students as only 4.5% of non-Indigenous students indicated reasons for VET enrolment were for further study. In 2012, 4.6% of all TAFE students identified as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander (4.0% in 2006), 15.3% of the estimated resident Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population, compared with 13.1% in 2006. In 2012, 3.9% of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students were apprentices or trainees, compared with 3.6% in 2006) (National Centre for Vocational Education Research, 2013).

In 2011, 79.1% of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander VET students completed qualifications at Certificate I, II and III levels; while 20.9% completed qualifications at Certificate IV, diploma, graduate and advanced diploma, associate degree, undergraduate degree and graduate certificate levels (National Centre for Vocational Education Research, 2013). The pathway from VET to universities is complex, with many barriers, for students as well as for education providers, and is not well researched (Bandias et al., 2011; Behrendt et al., 2012). Reasons for selecting VET in preference to university vary, and collaboration rather than competition between sectors may be more fruitful. Dual sector universities (TAFE and university) show some success in ‘mapping’ TAFE goals onto university degree programs and in transition to university (IHER (2012), pp. 44, 47).

Entry via tertiary entrance

In 2012, 1.2% (3,341) of applicants to university via Tertiary Admissions Centres (TAC) identified as Indigenous (Aboriginal, Torres Strait Islander, or both), an increase of 407 or 13.9% compared with 2011. Offers were made to 2,520 Indigenous applicants, 311 (14.1%) more than in 2011. The 2012 offer rate for Indigenous applicants was 75.4% which was 6.1% lower than the offer rate for applicants who did not identify as Indigenous. Of those who received an offer in 2012, 71.6% of Indigenous applicants accepted, similar to the 71.8% acceptance rate among non-Indigenous applicants. Indigenous status is gathered from a self-identification question on the TAC form and it is believed that many applicants do not identify at this point (Australia. Department of Education Employment and Workplace Relations, 2011c, p. 57).

Analysis of application to university via TACs by age indicates a higher proportion of Indigenous applicants aged 40-64. Indeed, as age increases so does the percentage of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders applying to university as shown below in Table 7.

‘Can’t be what you can’t see’:

The transition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students into higher education

| Age | Proportion of applications from Indigenous applicants | Proportion of Indigenous people in the general working age population |
|----------|---|---|
| 15 to 19 | 1.0% | 4.2% |
| 20 to 24 | 1.3% | 3.2% |
| 25 to 39 | 1.8% | 2.4% |
| 40 to 64 | 2.4% | 1.7% |
| Average | 1.6% | 2,8% |

Table 7: Indigenous applicants by age, 2012. (DIIRSTE Undergraduate applications, offers and acceptances, 2012).

The spread of Indigenous offers by state and territory is shown in Table 8. The figures do not include applicants whose Indigenous status is unknown.

| State | Indigenous applications | Non-Indigenous |
|---------|-------------------------|----------------|
| NSW/ACT | 72.0% | 82.9% |
| Vic. | 76.4% | 82.2% |
| Qld | 80.5% | 80.8% |
| WA | 77.7% | 85.8% |
| SA/NT | 68.7% | 78.0% |
| Tas. | 79.9% | 71.3% |
| Average | 75.8% | 80.2% |

Table 8: Offer rates by Indigenous status by state and territory 2012. (DIIRSTE, Undergraduate applications offers and acceptances, 2012).

The type of university that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and non-Indigenous students applied to in 2011 is shown in Table 9, indicating more Indigenous participation with innovative research universities, and less with the Group of Eight Universities.

| Type of university | Participation rates (%) for Indigenous students 2011 |
|---|--|
| Group of eight (Go8) Universities | 0.73% |
| Innovative Research Universities (IRU) | 2.03% |
| Australian Technology Network (ATN) of universities | 1.18% |
| Regional Universities Network (RUN) | 2.37% |
| Non-aligned universities | 1.46% |
| Average | 1.54% |

Table 9: Indigenous student participation rates by type of university in 2011. (*Widening Participation in Australian Higher Education*, 2013)

Although the Group of Eight universities in each state have a lower share of applications, they claim to have “good success and completion rates” (submission no. 61, UWA, p. 1, in *IHER*, p. 49). However, as Pakeha (2011) pointed out, the reporting of completion rates is not standardised and varies across institutions.

‘Can’t be what you can’t see’:

The transition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students into higher education

Entry via pre-tertiary programs

In 2010, 4.7% of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students entered university on the basis of their prior educational attainment, compared to 83% of non-Indigenous and over half of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students who gained entry to university did so through enabling or special entry programs (DIISRTE, 2012 quoted in the *IHER*, p. 49). Most universities in Australia offer pre-tertiary or preparatory programs (see Literature Review for details).

A higher proportion of Indigenous applications were made directly to universities (2.5%), as opposed to applications through Tertiary Admission Centres. DEEWR (2011c) suggested that more applicants entered from Indigenous admission schemes, or pre-tertiary programs, and are therefore more likely to self-identify as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students (p. 62). The option of applying directly to universities was introduced in 2010. Table 10 shows the breakdown of applications made directly to universities by permanent home residence across Australia.

| State | Non-Indigenous | Indigenous | Total ** | % Indigenous |
|--------------------|----------------|--------------|---------------|--------------|
| NSW/ACT | 27,159 | 844 | 30,637 | 2.8% |
| Vic. | 13,211 | 259 | 16,282 | 1.6% |
| Qld | 8,888 | 345 | 10,218 | 4.0% |
| WA | 15,841 | 325 | 16,616 | 2.0% |
| SA/NT | 2,800 | 199 | 2,800 | 6.5% |
| Australia * | 67,899 | 1,972 | 76,553 | 2.7% |

All applications for the University of Tasmania are included in the Tertiary Admissions Centre (TAC) count.

*The Australia total includes data that could not be assigned to a state.

**Applicants with an unknown Indigenous status are assumed to be non-Indigenous and included in the total application count.

Table 10: Direct applications to universities by state and territory, 2012 (DIISRTE Undergraduate applications offers and acceptances, 2012).

Entry via scholarship programs

Scholarships to university are offered for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students from universities, governments, non-government and industry sources, for study across a range of disciplines at undergraduate and postgraduate levels (Aurora Project, 2011). Limited data are available on the full numbers of scholarships awarded or on completion rates for scholarship supported study, indicating a need for further research in this area.

There are five categories of Commonwealth scholarships, most of which have complex interactions with Centrelink, and the *IHER* (Recommendation 17) proposed that the variety, complexity and low take up rates of scholarships should be addressed, possibly by rolling the five categories into one (2012, p. 92). The aim of this amalgamation is highlighted by IHER Recommendation 13, which seeks to;

- “Allow universities greater flexibility to provide locally relevant, tailored support for

‘Can’t be what you can’t see’:

The transition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students into higher education

- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students and staff.
- Target available funding to achieve an improvement in current enrolment levels but also with a greater emphasis on retention and completion rates.
- Ensure that funding would be simple to administer.
- Ensure that funding would support clear outcome-focused accountability for universities” (Behrendt et al., 2012, pp. xx-xxi).

The Commonwealth Scholarships Program (previously known as the Commonwealth Learning Scholarships [CLS] Program) was introduced in 2004 to assist students from low socio-economic backgrounds, particularly those from rural and regional areas and Indigenous students, with costs associated with higher education. Since 2010, the Commonwealth Scholarships Program is only open to new students who are identified as being of low socio-economic status and Indigenous.

Commonwealth-funded Indigenous Access Scholarships provided eligible commencing students with a one off payment of \$4,659 in 2013. These scholarships assist Indigenous students from a regional or remote area (according to the Australian Standard Geographic Classification (ASGC) Remoteness Areas classification) to undertake an eligible enabling course, undergraduate course or graduate diploma (or equivalent post graduate course of study) in an area of National Priority (Australia. Department of Education Employment and Workplace Relations, 2012b).

To support and increase the number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander teachers in schools, the Governor-General’s Indigenous Student Teacher Scholarships are awarded to one teacher education student from each state and territory, offering \$25,000 per year in 2010, 2011, 2012 for up to four years, to assist with study costs. The More Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Teachers Initiative (MATSI) (2012) also provides teaching scholarships for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students.

A senior national Indigenous educator highlighted the value of MATSI in developing professional development for Indigenous teachers who in turn support student choices:

The MATSI Model aimed at enabling Aboriginal teachers in schools is an excellent model, as is increasing the availability and quality of Professional Development (PD) for teachers and pre-service teachers so you can get them and influence their thinking so they are aware of Aboriginal issues and aware of other pathways for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students. If you increase the quality of teaching overall and increase the number Aboriginal teachers in schools, this creates foundations for successful transitions for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students to university. Young people are often more committed to helping people in their own communities if they feel they have the skills and something to offer.

Industry areas such as mining offer tertiary scholarships, for example the AIEF-BHP Billiton Iron Ore scholarships to Indigenous students to study in mining-related

‘Can’t be what you can’t see’:

The transition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students into higher education

disciplines (Australian Indigenous Education Foundation, 2011). Indigenous Business Australia (IBA), a government body, provides scholarships for TAFE, VET and higher education study in the fields of commercial and economic management (Indigenous Business Australia, 2011).

The Aurora Project provides a directory and a website of Indigenous scholarships for study in Australia and beyond (Aurora Project, 2009, 2011). See Literature Review Appendix A for university website scholarship details.

Summary

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students entering university through mainstream high school entry represent less than half of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander university population. This can be increased through many of the available programs aimed at increasing pathways from secondary education. Those who are entering through enabling programs or bridging programs are not receiving ITAS (Indigenous Tutorial Assistance Scheme). There is also a quota system in place whereby enabling centres are only supported to a certain degree, yet appear to enrol larger numbers of students who then do not make a successful transition.

The VET Sector attracts more Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students but has a greater emphasis on training and does not provide significant pathway possibilities for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students to university. It could be engaged more effectively to create 'free' bridging programs within the VET sector.

Chapter 3 builds on the findings of the literature review by focusing on constraints (Section 1) and enablers (Section 2) to the successful transition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students into higher education. Section 1 identifies 11 key constraints to successful transitions. Section 2 identifies 15 key elements, types of programs and initiatives that are being applied and in development to enable and support Indigenous student transition to higher education. These sections draw primarily from project interviews and provide inside perspectives from a majority of Indigenous staff members of IEUs and students to enhance the evidence uncovered through the literature review with qualitative witness accounts and personal, yet anonymous experiences.

'Can't be what you can't see':

The transition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students into higher education

‘Can’t be what you can’t see’:

The transition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students into higher education

Chapter 3:

Project Findings Part 2



Chapter 3: Project Findings Part 2

(1) Challenges and Constraints to the Successful Transition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Students into Higher Education

‘Success’ can be defined in both individual and collective terms, and in relation to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people making a successful transition into higher education, family and community are vital. The key point made is that success does not end at the transition of one student, but rather, the changing of patterns of opportunity as more Indigenous students transition successfully thus creating a critical mass.

A senior manager in a leading practice IEU defined success in clear and bold terms:

Completion is essential. There should be no exception other than people's choices for personal reasons, to perhaps do something else. It should not be because of barriers or failure of support. If students have an aptitude to learn, even if they have not achieved a suitable ATAR, they can still complete university studies with proper support that is currently available.

A number of respondents raised the idea that success can also include failure. The point was made that success does not necessarily mean passing all units in the first year and can be about ‘sticking with it’ even when a student initially fails units of work. A number of respondents stressed that the first year is often very difficult while students negotiate a culture they are neither familiar nor comfortable with, and often question their place in university.

A senior Indigenous education policy maker identified the need to set Indigenous terms of reference for what constitutes success:

We need to identify the key success factors for transition to higher education. We need to define our own interpretations of what constitutes a successful transition to higher education. Numbers through or completions met does not always constitute a successful transition or a good experience.

A number of staff members working in enabling centres pointed to the large number of students who commence study with little understanding of the culture, expectations, policies and process of university. They noted that this often impacted on students’ initial success. However, it was also revealed that many continue in their chosen course, adjust to university life and academic expectations and will then often begin to do very well. It is about changing their expectations through experience. One respondent suggested that students “. . . often do better than they thought and then the story changes over time; they get addicted to distinctions”.

‘Can’t be what you can’t see’:

The transition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students into higher education

A raft of support strategies was raised in the interviews, such as academic enabling programs, tutoring, mentoring and orientation programs, which are all discussed in more detail in Chapter 2 Part 2 Section iii. On a more general basis, on-going support structures throughout a program of study also included assistance with understanding how universities work, navigating the systems and understanding the implications of decisions.

The provision of information via a one-stop shop process for students attempting to access university is key, as is upgrading of the my-university site to engage Indigenous students on issues of interest re Indigenous programs, scholarships, communities and knowledge centres. Many of the university's websites (refer Literature Review Appendix A – Indigenous engagement in Australian universities) and the My-University website (<http://myuniversity.gov.au/>) have little if any representation of the university as inclusive of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, although some have special sections which may or may not be linked to the 'landing' page (refer Literature Review Appendix A – Indigenous engagement in Australian universities).

Assisting students to know what to expect and addressing the issue of assumed knowledge is vital, as one student pointed out:

They think we understand how unis work, they ask you to choose your units. They need to sit down with people and explain it properly. People could be ticking anything and not knowing what they are doing.

A number of the higher education students who contributed to this research concurred with this observation.

Another student commented:

I wasn't aware of withdrawals and cut off dates and process for withdrawing so I incurred debt. . .no personal tutors etc. If I had that I might have stayed. I didn't know about HECS or any info on uni etc.

And,

Support services and faculty handballing basic understanding about what is required, I didn't know the language I didn't understand BA requirements: what does a major mean, what does a minor mean. . .

I don't know what the jargon is referencing, I don't know what a major is. I had to Google what is a 'major' because I couldn't engage in the uni start program (2 full weeks) that info needs to be accessible. My son is in Year 12 he taught me.

A motivator for one single mother was to be a role model for her children who were in secondary school. "If I can do it they can do it. They are so proud of me".

Students stressed the need for support strategies that build resilience.

'Can't be what you can't see':

The transition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students into higher education

The cultures and language of universities need to be integrated explicitly into orientation programs and enabling courses in a well thought out way. This also needs to include the specific support structures which are on offer across the university and which directly link to students completing an enabling course or an orientation program.

The following builds on the findings of the project's literature review and reports on some of the barriers to successful transitions to higher education articulated during the research by personnel working in a range of capacities in universities to support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students and by the students themselves. The major constraints and challenges identified by respondents were:

(i) Financial constraints

The financial constraints for students in choosing to invest in a university education are significant. Almost all respondents raised financial constraints as one of, if not the most significant factor impacting on the ability for Indigenous students to continue in higher education. As one respondent stressed, "the key constraint would have to be financial difficulties that students face and issues of accommodation and scholarship support". Financial stresses include things other than just the direct costs of studying, for example: childcare; public transport; running a car; and accommodation.

As previously mentioned, there is a significant amount of assumed knowledge of how universities work. The traditional mainstream orientation programs are underpinned by so much assumed knowledge that they are often of marginal value to many Indigenous students—especially students from remote and regional Australia. The unpacking of what is required needs to be explicit so as to ensure students are fully informed, and support mechanisms are available. Information is key. Students often begin with a single focus and without complete knowledge of support mechanisms and expectations. When fractures start to occur, students may well find that they could have chosen different pathways and alleviated impacts of costs associated with their study. Mature age students have pressures of family and finances, and also if they are at university, they are likely to be leaders within their communities and hold significant responsibilities. Jobs come up and with family financial pressures it is hard for students not to take a job, even if for a while.

Changes to ABSTUDY have affected student numbers. It was not means tested in the initial phases as an incentive to attract older people with experience to obtain degree qualifications. But now that it is, students have had a disincentive to study, particularly those mature age students with families. The focus appears to have shifted to high school graduates and also there has been a focus on means testing benefits.

Complexity of Programs is also an issue. ABSTUDY and other programs have become so complicated that this has led to some students amassing huge debts. They don't

'Can't be what you can't see':

The transition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students into higher education

realise that, when they drop a unit and if they don't tell ABSTUDY, they are still accumulating debt, or they may pull out but not let the university know and so end up accumulating large Higher Education Contribution Scheme (HECS) debts. They may even accumulate university penalties just by not being able to negotiate the system. This can be very problematic for many young students.

Some students are more aware than others of the financial debts they are accruing and the avenues of financial support available to them. During the research it was related that one student from a remote town in the Kimberley was studying at a secondary school in Perth when the income testing of ABSTUDY came into effect. Her mother had incurred a large unanticipated debt that resulted in her not being in a position to support her daughter to go from school to university, even though she was a university capable student with aspirations.

Another case involved a student who had repeatedly enrolled and re-enrolled in courses at a number of universities and incurred a \$63,000 HECS debt. This example was shared with the interviewer in a moment of despair just prior to withdrawing from their current course of study. While the student noted that they were probably not likely to have to pay the debt in full upon discussions with their university, it did weigh on the student as a heavy burden and as a severe impediment to accessing higher education and obtaining employment.

(ii) Subjugating Indigenous Knowledges and Indigenous Education Units (IEUs) in a silo culture

Siloing of Indigenous centres can lead to the kind of marginalisation and separateness that some centres have been accused of fostering, and many feel that they have become. It can be that universities unwittingly sideline Indigenous Knowledges and mechanisms by ingrained latent paternalism, or by not wishing to seem uninformed, or asking how best to collaborate.

Often Indigenous support centres are the 'go to' people for all Indigenous issues, and Indigenous staff members experience this aspect as an added burden. Some Indigenous support centres are blamed for any problems involving Indigenous students on campus. Indigenous students and Indigenous Student Centre staff members are expected to know all things Indigenous, including within a vast array of curriculum elements in a range of disciplines and units of work across the university.

Common and well-known misconceptions of Indigenous enabling centres include the notion that they keep students from participating in mainstream university life; cost too much for the outcomes they produce; and do not generate successful outcomes for Indigenous students. The view is that they were once but are no longer necessary and indeed are part of the problem by babying or hindering Indigenous students. In one university a staff member of a remote Indigenous support centre was unaware of the full range of higher education programs available, and of how to assist a

'Can't be what you can't see':

The transition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students into higher education

prospective student to complete the online application or how to enrol in units for the upcoming semester. Another example was given of how staff members in these Centres may not be included in key aspects of the institution as a whole: enrolling Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students in VET courses and assisting with ITAS tutoring was the expectation. However, the overwhelming reality is that Indigenous student support centres have played a significant role in achieving the numbers of Indigenous students attending university since the 1980s and their continuing role in attracting and supporting Indigenous students remains crucially important. Yet these centres are often overworked and under-resourced, with many respondents working in these centres relating that Indigenous aspects of community, culture and Indigenous Knowledges are not generally respected by the wider university.

(iii) Monitoring and evaluating student progress

Many students do not receive targeted support with assessments and nor is there an awareness of their needs early in their career. They are therefore placed on the back foot from the beginning, and students studying online or in remote locations especially experience these things. Alert systems that trigger supports are varied. Some provide individualised learning support from enrolment while others trigger communication to support services when a student doesn't respond or fails to submit work, or after they have failed when debts are incurred.

(iv) Expectations upon Indigenous students

Students can feel a sense of alienation from the wider student population when Indigenous issues are raised and they are expected to either know or represent all things Indigenous. Indigenous students are invariably 'identified' across a range of units, by choice or by awareness by lecturers and administrators. This can lead to unrealistic expectations: to know all things about Aboriginal issues relating to a discipline; to be involved in all and any community based actions tied to the campus; and to be providing advice, time and effort to a range of university activities relating to Indigenous themes. The burden of always performing and the increased pressures on small numbers of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students was noted as a significant issue. One young male student studying in a remote location remarked that:

. . .sometimes I feel under pressure to do well in university just because I am one of the few Indigenous people my age that have the potential to do it. It can be a great motivator but sometimes it feels like there is a weight on my shoulders and that there is too much pressure on me to succeed.

(v) Combinations of personal factors

For many students, a combination of many factors affect the success or otherwise of their transition into higher education. There are the common pressures of supporting

'Can't be what you can't see':

The transition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students into higher education

other family members or younger children, either directly or through sharing of caring responsibilities that Indigenous students often carry. Crisis in families and the poverty in communities, ill-health and deaths in extended families, can also result in students “getting sucked out of university”, as one respondent put it. There is a need to consider these common constraints as the following observations demonstrate.

One respondent commented that it is just assumed that if the university sends an email the student has received it. However, there are often communication issues around access to computers or printers and the Internet at home: “Many young undergrads don’t even set foot on campus and building relationships (via technology) can be hard”.

The difficulties associated with money, safe affordable housing, and family attitudes towards education, are important factors contributing to student success, or otherwise, especially if there is no prior experience of a family member having had a university education. One respondent has observed that:

. . .students get homesick they miss their family and their family doesn’t always understand that they need to go away to get an education, especially for families in remote locations and low socioeconomic status (SES). The families say they are being selfish by being away from them. There is not enough being done to engage Indigenous students in remote locations. Students in very isolated areas have no concept of what a university education is. The focus is too much on the urban kids.

One University has an Indigenous Student Ambassadors Program. Students are asked to participate in university functions and school visits with Support Centre staff members. The view was expressed that students needed to be more proactive and engage with wider university activities, yet students noted that this can put even more demands on their time than on non-Indigenous students as they often are expected to represent Indigenous issues or Indigenous communities across a range of activities.

Another respondent noted that there is a definite gender divide for Indigenous students:

We need to focus on men and increase male Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander participation in higher education. The key issue for many men is that they are the breadwinners for their families and so cannot forgo employment to complete study. We need to develop packages to motivate young men from an early age to see university as a future pathway.

One respondent in the Northern Territory noted that a recent increase in the number of Indigenous students enrolling in University was related to scholarships in Education (Teaching) and Health. Both of these industries are female dominated and so Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women mostly take up the scholarships.

‘Can’t be what you can’t see’:

The transition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students into higher education

Another respondent stated that: “For homesick students, we need to be creating space-building relationships, creating flexible study options to sustain learning and keep (the students) engaged”.

A senior educator engaged in developing pathways for Aboriginal students from secondary school to higher education stated:

There needs to be good education and information for families and communities so people know what the value of education is and what it will do for families, community and for themselves. If people feel it is just about them and family feel that way, they'll not have the support they need. Employment outcomes are also important, and people being able to work back in their communities. People need to see the positive benefits on personal and community levels. The responsibility for educating our young people needs to be seen as a cultural responsibility. If community can see how it ties back in to supporting culture they'll see the value of it and support students in their studies.

One Western Australian student from a remote Kimberley town raised the issue of not being able to stay in student accommodation on campus while completing a pre-law course, because she had a 13 month old child:

I had more money than the others because I had a child (kid money) though childcare is expensive and accessing it when you need it is hard. I stopped because travelling on a bus at 6am, juggling childcare and then getting home, feeding the baby and ready to study once she went to bed was too difficult. Unis are located in expensive areas. . . . My preference would be to live on campus.

Women receiving Jobs, Education and Training Child Care Fee Assistance (JET Child Care Assistance) are not entitled to child care when enrolled in a bridging program—staff members of one Indigenous academic support centre, operating on more than one campus, reported a number of women wanting to enrol in the Preparation for Tertiary Success course with The Australian Centre for Indigenous Knowledges and Education (ACIKE) but were unable to access childcare assistance and so were unable to study.

Beyond impacts of resources and circumstances of significant personal hardship, a leading national Indigenous educator cited the need to act from a base of family and community partnerships from an early age:

It is a big job getting families and parents to see the value of higher education and we need to move beyond that resistance to Western frameworks and knowledge that can be valuable and separate it from past policies that were not about enabling but about controlling. There is a lack of resources for institutions to support Indigenous students. There is a lack of resources for individuals and

‘Can’t be what you can’t see’:

The transition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students into higher education

family members to support their children. It also comes down to how an institution works to target and support Indigenous students. At times there can be scholarships and sponsorships, but these are small contributions. What can be done that focuses on student skills and the whole person, so that investment in people is seen as a worthwhile investment, in their abilities?

Echoing this view, a regional Indigenous education coordinator of student pathway programs highlighted the value of working with students and addressing their needs rather than focusing on mainstream measures of student ability:

Students are not asked what their needs are. We are all suppliers of education to students, but we never ask them what they think. There is too much reliance on National Assessment Program – Numeracy and Literacy (NAPLAN) and funding being based on NAPLAN results. We need to look at the optimal outcome that we want, and then work backwards from there. If we want children to be able to complete their studies well, be connected to their communities, contributing to university and providing for their community and families, we need to look at what that will take and what it will take as we track back through the foundations of their education. In NSW there are rarely family role models and a lot of the time people are very down on themselves. Key issues in this area are also money, away from home support and family support. Currently Dare to Lead has a program to identify teachers who can be targeted to become principals through a pathway approach. We need to see that applied to students across the board. Some IEs and support units also need some people who are making sure there is real support provided to students.

(vi) Lack of cultural competency among university staff members

Indigenous students experience the outcomes of the 'deficit' model of low expectations, racism and also assumed assimilation or lack of cultural legitimacy for being at university. A general lack of cultural competency for staff members and students was reported. Indigenous support centres have to re-invent the wheel too often due to lack of good policy up-take, changing staff and a general lack of engagement with identified issues including governance, transitions and mentoring. There is a broad and complex spectrum from cultural awareness to cultural competence and to cultural intelligence across Australian universities. Some universities have a one-off introductory session for commencing staff members, whilst others have an ongoing commitment to developing cultural competency in the belief that this is no longer seen as the remit of the centres but the core business of universities.

The lack of cultural competency of professional and academic staff members can lead to students feeling alienated, and this often impacts on the time they can spend on their studies. As one senior Indigenous academic remarked, "universities are a foreign

'Can't be what you can't see':

The transition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students into higher education

place to Indigenous and non-Indigenous students with no social capital around going to university”.

Changing methods of enrolment, for example the move to online enrolment processes, combined with limited experience of what to expect from studying, has led some Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students studying externally to be locked out of systems because of incomplete enrolments. One student, who was waiting for a package to arrive in the mail prior to commencing, was unaware that the onus was on him to go online, enrol, and commence studying.

If you don't feel like you belong and are adequately equipped, the first hurdle is enough to cause you to retreat. If you acknowledge your strengths and see yourself as resilient and entitled, you will be more likely to overcome issues confronting you (An Aboriginal academic working on building resilience of disengaged students).

Communication between university departments and students is invariably via email. At one university, it was related that one student, who is under review due to poor results in a semester, needed to respond to an email sent by the University within a given time or she would be discontinued for 12-months. Students may in fact speak with a lecturer or course coordinator in person or by phone about their progress and issues relating to their study program; however, unless they respond to the university-generated email (it does not come from a person but from a department) their enrolment is discontinued. A student alerted her lecturer that she had had no Internet access for eight weeks and was consequently disadvantaged as it took seven months for her enrolment to then be re-instated.

A university 'silo culture' can lead to a lack of engagement in Indigenous issues. Many universities are keen to engage in ceremonial events (for example Sorry Day), but not in more meaningful practical processes and events. Many respondents discussed the problems of implementing changes to increase student numbers and provide valuable input into university culture. Some felt hindered by a lack of resources and an inherent culture of seeing Indigenous students as being in need, rather than in their capacity to provide unique knowledge and contributions to university life.

One Indigenous academic thought their university lacked the confidence to engage at higher levels with the wider off-campus Indigenous community. She felt though that Indigenous people, Elders and knowledge were invisible in her university, that there was little trust between Indigenous communities and the University, and that Indigenous Elders should be '...recognised and paid as lecturers. . .' when engaged to deliver sessions or courses.

An environmental scan of the university websites was conducted for this project (refer Literature Review, pp 52-69). On some university websites, information about Indigenous support is easy to find or very obvious, promotes a variety of activities and showcases the universities' commitment to Indigenous education. It was challenging

'Can't be what you can't see':

The transition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students into higher education

to successfully navigate other universities' websites to locate relevant and up to date information on how to contact the appropriate people. In a couple of instances actually connecting with someone at the university would prove to be a lengthy process given the paucity of information on the website. In those instances locating contact information or trying to connect with the centre would be challenging for students. It may be that potential students are being deterred because their messages are left unanswered. Universities may not be capturing all the enquiries from potential Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students.

(vii) Diversity of demography—students living in remote areas

Many practical hurdles exist for students from remote communities aspiring to attend university. Universities have not traditionally engaged with remotely located students and are now encountering competition from other sectors, such as mining companies which are targeting communities and students in transition through VET courses and mine-related employment. One respondent remarked:

Geography counts. In NSW you could draw a line and say west of that line we're less likely to succeed in attracting students and community. This does not mean that these areas aren't focused on. . . in those areas. . . it is likely that people have not engaged with western society as strongly as other areas where kids come to university. . . where the foundations of dealing with places like a university are just not as developed, and so there is more work that needs to be done to address that.

One respondent commented that access to high school, and in particular Year 11 and 12, programs designed for university entry are rare in remote (and sometimes regional) NT [Aboriginal] schools. Many principals and teachers continue to have low expectations for Aboriginal high school age students in remote communities. There is a widely held assumption in the NT that students do not want, or are not interested in, university attendance. Students are directed into VET programs particularly through the VET in Schools courses—which may be successful at improving school attendance ('earn or learn'),⁴ but university study is not promoted. Interestingly many Kimberley students who go to boarding schools for secondary education are directed to VET programs and while they attain Year 12 they do not have an ATAR.

Technology is being utilised to overcome learning difficulties and some assistive technologies such as iPad accessibility features and 'dragon' voice recognition software were acknowledged as a means of supporting students. One respondent raised the point that the interface presented to students should be consistent across

⁴ Under the *Northern Territory Education Act*, it is compulsory for all Territory students to complete Year 10 and then participate in education, training and/or employment until they turn 17.

Learn or Earn for 15 – 17 years

Northern territory Department of Education

<http://www.education.nt.gov.au/rto/learn-or-earn-for-15-17-years>

'Can't be what you can't see':

The transition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students into higher education

interdisciplinary subject areas. It was stated that once a student masters one platform, there needs to be consistency across other areas of study. Unfamiliarity with a different computer interface adds more challenges and stress and is something extra that requires students to adapt.

The move to increased online delivery often disadvantages students living in remote areas of northern Australia. Where Internet services are available connections are often slow, intermittent or unreliable, and only available in particular centres, for example schools, which are closed for 12 weeks of the year. Students from remote areas are often not confident with the online environment but this improves greatly when on-campus workshops are held to introduce students to online learning.

(viii) Specific issues for identified cohorts

There is a range of specific issues relating to the experiences of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students with disabilities, for young men, for young women as single carers, and for prisoners. It is known that all of these groups are underrepresented although good, detailed data about these students is notably absent, and at best difficult to find (refer Literature Review).

Better profiling and data collection regarding these students is needed. Assumptions about these students need to be interrogated to develop genuine understandings about the varying characteristics of different cohorts of existing students, and for potential students who have not engaged with universities or seen themselves as not belonging to the university culture. Creating a relationship of trust and collecting this information in a culturally safe and sensitive way that does not further alienate these students is essential. Such a process would also involve schools and universities playing an ongoing role in collecting and sharing information, building a comprehensive profile, and working together to grow the higher education aspirations of all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, their families and communities.

All respondents noted the significant gap between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and men at university. One senior Indigenous manager of university programs noted:

There is a definite gender divide for Indigenous students. We need to focus on men and increase Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander male participation in Higher Education. The key issue is that many men are the breadwinners for their families and so cannot forego employment to complete study. We need to develop packages to motivate young men from a young age to see university as a future pathway.

When assisting students with a disability in the enrolment processes one respondent reflected:

‘Can’t be what you can’t see’:

The transition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students into higher education

I have asked this question and on at least two occasions the student has said while they do not have a disability, a family member who they care for does and they have asked about assistance managing the study blocks in the mixed mode delivery and care for this family member.

It was offered by one respondent that: “This is a tricky one. . .”, and he cited the example, of students with low literacy and numeracy being identified by lecturers as having a learning disability being referred to the IEU.

Indigenous academic support staff members largely rely on information provided by students on their course application forms to refer them to the disability office of the University. For one respondent this worked well so long as: “. . .the equity office have [sic] well trained and culturally competent staff”.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people need as many options as possible when they leave prison. Undertaking further study whilst in prison is a significant way to secure a range of options. The majority of universities do not have programs designed to engage prisoners in study. One university was invited to present at a careers day in a prison, whilst others identified partnership programs that they would like to develop, including offline programs that can be supported with on-site classes. However, it was noted that dedicated funding for such programs was not available and such initiatives often fell into the category of workloads that are not recognised by mainstream government funding guidelines.

One exception to this is the University of Newcastle where ‘low risk’ prisoners are given leave to go to campus to do some units of study. The university’s community engagement division is active in this program and plays a mentoring role with these students. The SCU has enrolled students who studied whilst incarcerated, who were allocated a contact person who was, wherever possible, culturally relevant. However it was difficult to collect specific Indigenous or non-Indigenous information on this program.

Another example involves Nulloo Yumbah, Central Queensland University’s (CQU) Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander learning, spirituality and research centre. This centre delivers its Tertiary Entry Program in correctional centres, and supports inmates enrolled in other CQU programs. TRACKS, a tertiary preparation program from the UNE, is delivered via distance education to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander men at the Woodford Correctional Centre in Queensland (IHER 2012, pp. 172-3).

All respondents involved in delivering courses to prisoners identified difficulties such as accessing online course materials, and fulfilling assessment criteria as Information and Communications Technology (ICT) use is strictly limited by institutional requirements. Media students for example were unable to complete assessment tasks that involved filming within the prison and were not permitted to create digital work for transportation back to the training institution for assessment and reporting purposes.

‘Can’t be what you can’t see’:

The transition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students into higher education

Disturbances by other inmates in the prison may consequentially interfere with students' access to computers and their ability to meet assessment deadlines.

One Indigenous academic support lecturer told of engaging regularly with prisoners some years ago; however, as courses and resources were published online, prisoners became excluded due to limited, and sometimes no access to the Internet: "...seems you can no longer study without such access". It was also noted that the regular contact which academic staff used to make with prisoners ceased as the workload of that IEU increased. Contact is mostly made now at the request of prisoners and sometimes as a part of a pre-release program. The Kangan Institute in Victoria provides training in secure custodial settings including at Port Phillip Prison, Metropolitan Remand Centre, Melbourne Assessment Prison (MAP), Parkville Youth justice precinct and centres at Deer Park and Fairfield. However the emphasis is on training, not on gaining access to higher education.

Interviews with staff members of IEOs confirmed the gaps in the delivery of education services to people in the prison system highlighted by Carnes (2011) in regard to the "provision of adequate resources and infrastructure; access to current technology; innovative training programs; a focus on cultural education; access to education" (p. 5). All respondents identified a willingness to provide services to people in the prison system, but noted the lack of clear direction and support to achieve these ends.

(ix) Traditionally low ATAR—low rates of secondary school completion

Initial increases in the number of Indigenous students accessing university in the 1990s fell in the early 2000s. Respondents observed that this shift occurred as the cohort of Indigenous student applicants transferred from a finite number of mature aged students to a smaller number of students who had completed secondary studies with tertiary entrance rankings sufficiently high enough to access the university. There has been a steady increase in the number of younger Indigenous secondary school graduates who are able to access higher education based on ATAR in the last 13 years, as discussed in Chapter 2. However, this growth has not significantly reduced the gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous student applicants directly transitioning from secondary school to higher education.

Staff members of IEOs and students interviewed for this project believed that many Indigenous students were not being directed to university as an option regardless of a range of outreach programs that had attempted to engage teachers, principals and students by individual universities. Some respondents noted the focus in recent years on Indigenous employment in the mining industry and a focus on pathways through VET to employment opportunities in this sector. Most believed that a continuing factor in poor student transition could be found in low expectations of teachers in secondary schools coupled with limited family experiences of higher education. Lack of community and family experience of the value of and opportunities created by

'Can't be what you can't see':

The transition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students into higher education

obtaining a university education were considered to be common in remote areas where university engagement with the community was considered to be minimal except in areas where some IEOs had generated direct pathways (such as UWA's and CU's focus on the Pilbara and BIITE's focus on the Northern Territory).

To counter this problem, a number of universities have designed internal processes whereby student merit beyond the value of an ATAR ranking is able to be taken into account when students apply for entry. The University of Sydney estimates, or re-calculates, Indigenous students' ATAR by removing the results of subjects that don't scale well, and makes recommendations to the various faculties based on the course preferences expressed in their University Admissions Centre (UAC) applications. The Cadigal Program enables The University of Sydney to reduce the course entry requirement (ATAR score) by five points, providing students who are marginally below the entrance rank an opportunity to be assessed for entry and the possibility of staged and supported engagement with their studies. If a student is still within eight points of the entry requirement, a recommendation can be made to the faculty to consider accepting a student with a reduced load until such time as enabling programs can be implemented to progress the student's ability to enroll full-time. The UNDA utilises a model for all student intake that includes consideration of ATAR and direct interviews with each student to assess their suitability for university. A UNDA Indigenous student reiterated the importance of moving beyond an ATAR and recommended that his university's "model of scores plus interview should be replicated for transition looking at whole person not reducing someone to a Tertiary Entrance Rank (TER) score".

One national Indigenous education coordinator noted the problems associated with focusing on mainstream measurements of student ability:

We need to focus earlier on educational skills as we're seeing kids get to Year 9, 10, 11, 12 and they just don't have the skills to progress to university. We need to have been aware of their basic skills sets from much earlier and to have supported appropriate educational environments that are challenging but also welcoming. This reveals that the gaps in student abilities are remaining far too hidden. NAPLAN won't reveal what foundational skills are not being developed or why. We need monitoring that is appropriate and leads us back to where the system is failing our kids and our kids start falling behind, but getting pushed forward just enough to keep widening the gaps to the point where they just don't have the skills they need.

(x) A 'tick-a-box' culture, low expectations and the question of entitlement

Most Indigenous students are keen to identify their heritage on university entrance forms in anticipation that this will help them connect with other Indigenous students. A number of students indicated they also saw this as ensuring that Indigenous presence on campus was recognised as they were all too aware of the need to reveal

'Can't be what you can't see':

The transition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students into higher education

Indigenous student success in attaining entry to university. Some also indicated they were keen to identify to ensure assistance for them and for the larger cohort of Indigenous students from the university was able to be adequately resourced.

There was some debate surrounding the tensions between the need to ensure that targeted support for students who require it is provisioned, with some Indigenous students stating they did not need such support, but valued being part of a larger cohort of students where such needs could be met. Many such students noted they were involved in official and unofficial activities to mentor struggling students and noted universities often overlooked this asset of an identified Indigenous student cohort. Some students choose not to engage with enabling programs on the basis that, by being Indigenous, it will be perceived that they automatically need extra help, which is not always the case. This mirrors similar debates in the US regarding affirmative action and the values and pitfalls of such programs. In some areas of Australia affected by the recent histories of the Stolen Generations and their dislocating impacts on personal histories, many students know they are Aboriginal but have little information about their own personal histories. The key issue raised by students was the value of being part of an Indigenous student body and the assets that this creates when appropriately supported, including direct enabling support programs for those students who require it.

The issues of identification and the provision of support services were not considered to be a major problem by staff members of IEUs. While students must be Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander to access Indigenous identified programs (beyond mainstream enabling programs that many IEUs now engage with) proof of identify was often easily resolved through utilising local knowledge and following basic protocols of assessment. The University of Sydney provides the Koori Centre with a list of people who have identified as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander. The Centre contacts everyone on the list to confirm their genuine identity as, in the past, some students ticked the box wrongly. Thus, Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander students are personally communicated with and their constantly changing information updated if required.

The University of Technology Sydney (UTS) provides information about Indigenous students to the Jumbunna House of Learning and students are then interviewed informally about their needs and their heritage confirmed. When students apply for enrolment each year, at the UAC cut-off the Tjabal Centre of ANU receives a list of Indigenous identified students. The Centre then contacts the students and makes them aware of programs of support. All students have to sign a statutory declaration confirming that they are Indigenous to receive some of the Indigenous specific support offered.

Personnel from most universities related that when Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students come through the mainstream admissions process, their enrolment includes confirmation of Aboriginality in interviews.

‘Can’t be what you can’t see’:

The transition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students into higher education

One respondent stated:

. . .we send students a letter to check that they are Indigenous, or if they haven't self-identified as Indigenous and we know they are, we will also contact them. There's a problem with the "Indigenous tick box" (on the enrolment form) as Indigenous students from other nations will also tick it even though they are not Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander.

Another university's respondent made this contradictory statement:

I don't check that they are actually Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander. If they self-identify we leave it at that. But if an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander student is applying for a scholarship or similar we will do extra checks.

While some students might acknowledge their heritage at the enrolment stage it doesn't automatically follow that they will always choose to access resources. One student declared she didn't apply for ABSTUDY and left it for students that needed it more than her.

(xi) Difficulties associated with the Indigenous Tutorial Assistance Scheme—Tertiary Tuition (ITAS—TT)

ITAS has been widely recognised as being a reliable and central means of engaging students successfully. A respondent from ANU commented: "ITAS is a key enabler of students". However, ITAS is also cumbersome in administration and implementation, and is in major need of an overhaul. While the value of ITAS was universally recognised by all respondents, tutorial support for Indigenous students is considered across the literature to be border-line or potentially at fail point. Universities report that ITAS inhibits flexibility and innovation (Behrendt et al., 2012, p. 76). It is important to note that ITAS is no longer available for students completing the bridging courses including literacy and numeracy programs. ITAS was originally designed for students as a way to ensure continuation of their studies, rather than to support Indigenous excellence in education.

As one respondent commented:

We would definitely support the government loosening up of the ITAS scheme so that it could be applied more directly and flexibly for better outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students.

ITAS often takes effect too late when students have already transitioned out of university after early negative experiences.

Another student response articulated the need to:

'Can't be what you can't see':

The transition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students into higher education

Change the paradigm from disadvantage to paradigm of excellence, driven by resilience and excellence. What have you achieved in the face of extreme disadvantage ITAS (should be) about enhancing and allowing people to do the best they can instead of focus on students at risk.

ITAS is less successful for students in remote and regional centres as there are often few potential tutors in these centres who meet the ITAS requirements, or who can be a tutor, and those who fit the criteria rarely have time to tutor all students in these areas.

According to one respondent, one of the biggest predictors of the success of an Indigenous university student:

...is their ITAS tutor in terms of when their tutor is assigned (i.e. as early as possible at the beginning of the teaching session), and the quality of their tutor irrespective of race. Aboriginal students want the best possible tutor whether they are Indigenous or non-Indigenous. It is also vital that the student and their tutor develop a good relationship. However, the ITAS reporting process is very time consuming, there is a huge amount of compliance paperwork.

One of the drawbacks in the way that the ITAS scheme currently operates is that an ITAS tutor has to be 2 years in the degree above the student being tutored. One respondent related that peer-to-peer tutoring would be better as per the UTS' U-path program as it would also boost the self-confidence of the tutor.

A senior manager of a Group of Eight (Go8)⁵ IEU noted:

ITAS is essential to supporting Indigenous students, but the problem with ITAS is that it is too restrictive and is only available for undergraduate students. Also, some PhD and Masters students could do with tutorial assistance, such as tutorial advice about how to create a good lit review. Even people who have achieved degrees can get lost as they develop new skills and a tutor can step in and help them resolve any issues they have. There just needs to be much more open and flexible use of ITAS.

As they were responsible for the centre's management, staff members of the Oodgeroo Unit reviewed the implementation and development of the ITAS Scheme at the Queensland University of Technology (QUT) (Whatman et al., 2008). The review found the administrative, funding and reporting requirements to be onerous and inflexible, with an emphasis on statistical outcomes at the expense of the quality of teaching and learning. The review's authors suggested that the scheme was based on a deficit model of Indigenous students' educational outcomes (p. 124). They pointed out

⁵ The Group of Eight (Go8) universities in Australia is a coalition of leading Australian universities. Membership includes: UWA; University of Melbourne; The University of New South Wales (UNSW); ANU; The University of Queensland (UQ); The University of Adelaide (UA); and The University of Sydney.

'Can't be what you can't see':

The transition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students into higher education

that QUT Indigenous students had high rates of completion and participation, yet only 25% use ITAS. The authors emphasised the need for further research and analysis of the uptake of ITAS, and the use of broader indicators such as students' understandings of success. However, the study identified the value of the ITAS scheme in building cultural awareness and understandings of Indigenous perspectives, and enhancing pedagogy among ITAS tutors. Significantly, funding is not provided for training and professional development of ITAS tutors.

All respondents considered the ITAS pay scale to be too low.

(2) Current successful initiatives and key elements of programs and institutions supporting the Transition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students into higher education

(i) Future models for Indigenous Knowledge centres at universities

Many respondents spoke of the need to develop Indigenous support centres and Indigenous Knowledge Centres so that Indigenous Knowledges and cultural competency are the focus and student support is one element of a central place (and academic space) where students, Indigenous and non-Indigenous, can engage with important Indigenous issues, share experiences and contribute to the wider life of the university. This would also enable Indigenous centres to operate as the drivers of change across a whole of university approach. These are some examples of Indigenous Knowledge centres.

The Australian Centre of Indigenous Knowledges and Education (ACIKE) is a partnership between Charles Darwin University (CDU) and BIITE and its role is to engage students, staff members and communities in education. However, it has only been in operation since 2012 and is still negotiating the partnership arrangements between the two Institutions and establishing its role and position within the community. A senior Indigenous educator noted that the University of Canberra's model of an IEU being embedded right across the university and the inclusion of Indigenous Knowledges Frameworks across the disciplines is excellent.

Respondents spoke of the need for the development of courses responsive to student and community need (for example, programs in Governance and Social and Emotional Wellbeing) as well as better support for the main disciplines students engage with, including integration of Indigenous Knowledges into curriculum.

At the University of Newcastle (UoN) course review committees each have an Indigenous representative to ensure Indigenous Knowledges are embedded in the various teaching programs. To support the academic staff members developing a new curriculum, personnel from the Woolotuka Institute meet with the various Heads of School to ensure that the Indigenous representative's recommendations are embedded into the curriculum. This approach ensures that Indigenous information is

'Can't be what you can't see':

The transition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students into higher education

not just “dumped” thoughtlessly into in courses, but is properly integrated with meaning, purpose, perspective, and context.

At The University of Sydney, a strong belief has been espoused that it is no longer effective to have just a first year unit in cultural understandings (e.g. a foundation unit). Such an arrangement relies upon just a few teachers, and doesn’t disseminate Indigenous perspectives throughout the basic structures of the university. This University is aiming to try to change “everyone’s cultural competencies so that they respect the ‘other’. If students just do one unit, there is no way of building on to it in later years of their degree. It’s also about lecturers having that understanding.” Indigenous staff members are being hired to assist faculties to achieve this; however, one respondent noted that “Education and Social Work have been working with us for years on these sorts of things”.

At one regional university, a respondent expressed a belief that a diversity of Aboriginal perspectives needs to be built into all courses rather than providing common foundation units in Indigenous Knowledges for all students. The respondent queried: “Can you really assume a common Indigenous perspective? Common foundation units can often lead to a hopeless dilution”.

The Indigenous Education Policy at UTS includes the valuing of Indigenous Knowledges as part of the Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) to be imbedded in promotion and development processes. UTS was completing an audit in 2011/2012, directly funded by the Vice-Chancellor, to evaluate to what extent Indigenous Knowledges are being applied and what Indigenous content is being included. Thus far UTS have avoided focusing on Indigenous Knowledge across the disciplines and have been focused on governance, targets and relationships to support students.

The key focus at UTS is to develop professionals who have cultural competency to apply the skills they develop at UTS and beyond. It was noted that this will vary in context but what they study needs to be directly related to what they will do with their skills, and so Indigenous Knowledges need to be utilised and facilitated in the specific ways it relates to these disciplines. Some elements, it is believed, will involve knowledge about country and environment or governance, while other aspects that are often called Indigenous Knowledges are actually about Indigenous history, politics and society.

UTS has created an Indigenous Studies Committee that could be utilised to facilitate the development of Indigenous Knowledges within separate faculties as it relates to the different disciplines; but it may also be more of an advisory body for a range of processes, such as course accreditation processes on the Academic Council. UTS is also currently (2013/14) conducting an audit of Indigenous content across the units of the university and a discussion paper is being developed at higher levels to inform key executive staff members within the university of these issues: A key respondent from UTS explained; “Our focus will be on improving people's professional competency

‘Can’t be what you can’t see’:

The transition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students into higher education

through Indigenous Knowledge that is relevant to each discipline and also through increasing cultural competency”

A student also referred to her recent experience of courses:

. . .that portray Aboriginal people as ‘living in the past’ as this has an incredibly alienating impact when you are already feeling like you don’t belong.

These issues highlight the need for Indigenous Knowledges to be understood and implemented in ways that enhance peoples understanding of how this knowledge applied to their discipline. For Indigenous students, it also requires consideration of the ways in which knowledge about Indigenous issues, themes, politics and history can impact on them if not framed within wider cultural competency and contextual frameworks so that non-Indigenous students are able to understand the complexities that arise when such knowledge is applied out of context.

(ii) The importance of cultural competency training

A number of respondents underlined the distinction that ‘cultural awareness’ is about the individual, whereas ‘cultural competency’ is about the system. Cultural competency training of both academic and professional staff members needs to be ongoing and tied to the embedding of Indigenous Knowledges across a university. This will help all relevant staff members keep up to date with key debates and issues relating to their disciplines, and that knowledge and competencies are embedded and developed across the curriculum (all faculties, all courses) in a scaffolded and progressive manner that aligns with the new AQF Levels of Learning.

At the University of Newcastle, all academic and professional staff members must take part in a cultural competency program (for academic staff members, it focuses on inclusive curriculum). The first stage is online and the second stage consists of face-to-face workshops. During the second stage, students talk to staff members about their university experiences, enabling staff members to share their journeys and how they got there. There is also a sharing between students and staff members of cultural safety aspects. The Elders in Residence assist in these processes and are guest lecturers across the University in a wide range of courses. There is university-wide discussion about these processes, including an overview of cultural competency across the university from the individual/team/faculty/whole of university perspective. Participants must develop action plans about the changes they will make in their own practices when they leave the workshop, and there is follow up via the University’s online learning environment.

At The University of Sydney there has recently been a major review of cultural competency aspects and currently a strategic plan is being developed. One aspect of this plan concerns not only increasing their numbers of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, but also increasing Indigenous cultural exposure for all students and staff members. All the Deans have agreed to put money into the Wingara Mura-bunga

‘Can’t be what you can’t see’:

The transition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students into higher education

Barrabugu integrated strategy, and are required to ensure that Indigenous perspectives are integrated across the entire curriculum in all faculties. Every faculty is writing a plan about how they will implement the strategy i.e. who will do what and when, and how to tie the funding to implement the actions described to the efficacy (focus and precision) of the plans. All academic and professional staff members (approximately 10,000 people) must at some point over the next four years take part in a cultural competency workshop or they won't be eligible for promotion. The university is setting up the National Centre for Cultural Competence. The slogan is "Aboriginal education is everyone's business". It is anticipated that this strategy will have beneficial effects across all areas of the university's curricula.

(iii) A new focus on mentoring for success and monitoring for targeted support

Mentoring Programs are having a significant impact on young Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students by lifting their expectations of higher education. Some of these programs include: AIME, AURORA, NASCA, and Stronger Smarter. Another significant program is The Toorong Marnong Higher Education Accord (TMHEA), a joint initiative of the Victorian Aboriginal Education Association Incorporated (VAEAI) and the Victorian Vice-Chancellors' Committee (VCCC).

The TMHEA is a support program across Victorian universities in which academic staff members give advice to prospective students on university acceptance as they understand the university processes and give university related advice to the community and students' families when required.

In addition to these programs, The Bridges to Higher Education program (Sydney, Follow the Dream, Partnerships to Success) and the National Centre for Indigenous Excellence (NCIE) contribute to improving Indigenous students' university experiences. These programs seek to change the culture from one of being helped as an individual student who stumbles into university, to being part of a culture of change in terms of outcomes and expectations, and as part of a generational change in Indigenous education and transition to higher education. Some details about these programs follow, but further information is also located in the Literature Review. "Bridges to Higher Education is a \$21.2m initiative, funded by the Commonwealth Government's Higher Education Participation and Partnerships Program (HEPPP), to improve the participation rates of students from communities under-represented in higher education" (Bridges to Higher Education 2013, <http://www.bridges.nsw.edu.au/>). The aim of this initiative is for all universities in Sydney and the University Admissions Centre, local government organisations, education offices, Indigenous organisations and other community, philanthropic and social enterprise organisations, to plan how to increase retention rates for lower socio-economic (LSE), mature aged and Indigenous students. Bridges will conduct a promotional road show of Sydney universities through regional NSW to encourage school leavers to enrol in university.

'Can't be what you can't see':

The transition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students into higher education

AIME (Australian Indigenous Mentoring Experience) is an Indigenous initiative that uses structured education-based mentoring to link university students in one-on-one relationships with Indigenous high school students from Years 7 to 12. The program partners with high schools and universities to increase progression of Indigenous students through to Year 12 and on to university. It includes mentoring sessions for Years 9 and 10; Years 11 and 12 leadership programs; tutoring in learning centres in schools; and outreach visits to universities for Indigenous students in Years 9 to 12 (AIME Mentoring, 2011).

AIME contacts coordinators at Indigenous Education Units at universities and requests permission to contact staff members and Indigenous students. AIME's goal is to share information and to enhance ITAS and other available programs. AIME is particularly keen to involve Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students as mentors within the program once they have settled into their own studies at university. In some instances IEUs can consider AIME as a competitor, which can impact on relationship building and also on the funding streams that IEUs rely on. Some IEUs might see the \$200,000 fee that universities pay to AIME as taking money away from them, but it is often separate funding that the university accesses through other streams of the Indigenous Support Funding (ISF) Program. As an example, AIME takes students into The University of Sydney with the support of the Koori centre after careful discussion and negotiation. They also take this approach with UTS where they have direct partnerships with the Jumbunna House of Learning. AIME achieves greatest success where an IEU collaborates with the faculties. The University of Sydney and Wollongong University (UOW) are examples of institutions that are support with this approach, including utilising their education faculties as venues. This is not to say that AIME is the best fit for all universities. Macquarie University has started a program similar to AIME.

A key AIME respondent described AIME as a high expectations program:

When reporting we say to the kids, 'you have to come to all the sessions. No use coming to a few'. Of the 780 who participated in 2012 about 566 students achieved the minimum 50% grade, so over half of the students were passing their exams and achieving where they may not have. We expect they can achieve and they learn that they can and do.

AIME is now at 21 universities and there are plans to develop online versions of AIME for students in remote areas. AIME continues to grow and is a very successful mentoring and aspirations building program. For example, at UOW in 2012 there were 2,000 enquiries from students and staff members to be mentors. At The University of Sydney, 200 students work with AIME.

The story of an AIME student currently studying at a Go8 university (who we'll call Cass) best describes AIME's methods and also its impact on younger Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Students:

'Can't be what you can't see':

The transition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students into higher education

Cass went to a regional rural High School. She came from a low SES background and the general message she received from the school was that she would likely leave early, become a teen mother and end up on welfare. Her teachers did not expect that she could or would achieve. She was an important member of her family who helped out with other siblings and with the house in general. She had no expectations herself other than believing she could achieve, but needed support to have people guide her and provide advice. If it was not for AIME, Cass would not have completed high school and would not have gone on to university where she is now studying Education with the dream of becoming a high school teacher and teaching in her home town and being able to help other Aboriginal students go through school.

Cass attended her first AIME workshop and was hooked. She suddenly felt there was a group of people who understood her issues and knew that she needed help to realise the abilities she knew that she had. She attended the AIME homework Centre every week. Instead of 1-2 minors it was subject specific so that students received full-on targeted support. She also attended University Admission Centre (UAC) sessions where people were asked where they saw themselves going in their lives, what universities they saw themselves attending and what courses they would enrol in. It also dealt with issues such as accommodation, money, scholarships and all the information people needed to know to demystify university. College was excellent as it gave a heads up about what was available. Cass applied and was successful in applying for scholarships that helped to overcome her problems of accommodation and resources. It also helped her to find a job so that when she started university, she had an income; otherwise she wouldn't have known what she would have done.

Without AIME, Cass would not have considered university an option. There was cultural support available in the town and at the school, but no real educational support that switched kids on to education, that made it understandable and responded to what they needed to know.

Racism was an issue that affected Cass' choices before AIME took off and low expectation amongst teachers at her high school was common. She went from a school environment where they expected that she could not do anything to having real support, a network and being part of something. Cass is now an AIME Mentor for other Aboriginal students in high school. AIME also involves people's families so that students get support at home and the community supports you doing something positive for your own education. Cass has now mentored 7-8 students individually as well as helped out with the AIME learning centres.

According to one respondent, AIME provides a two-way learning mechanism in the sense the mentors learn from the trainees, and the mentors will be the change agents through their own AIME experiences. AIME helps young Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students to become familiar with university and has been very successful in

'Can't be what you can't see':

The transition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students into higher education

meeting targets for participating students to finish Year 12. All prospective mentors receive training and the program manager speaks with them at the beginning of semester as part of a three hour cultural training program, after which they go through a selection process to choose the best people. Mentors are assessed on their grades before being admitted to the program, but more weight is given to their dedication and ability to engage with and support students.

A very important element of AIME's success is its focus on youth culture; of young people mentoring young people. One mentor noted that they were reaching their 'use by date' as they approached their mid to late twenties. They considered that the communication gap was widening for them and they could feel it with their students. Communication is considered key to AIME's success and in the 21st century, that means being online and being cool:

Facebook is a key to AIME's success. It speaks to how kids communicate and it is something they understand and use. They participate in it. They add to it with comments. The hoodies are cool. The Program Managers are cool. All the elements of the program are there and they can see it all there.

One AIME program manager described the key elements of AIME's success as:

- "being inspirational
- being motivated
- making it fun and something to enjoy participating in
- using social media and including new material all the time and new experiences and approaches for students
- including young people at every opportunity
- young people being together and working together - there is a magic
- embracing technology is essential
- relationships are key and young people use technology as part of their relationship with the world, so you have to embrace it too
- the flat brim hat, hoodie and hip-hop is also cool
- But it has to have a message and then, BAM"!

AIME has been tracking students from the mentoring program through to university since 2009. In 2011, a cohort of 48 Year 12 students were part of the program and 42 completed Year 12. From this group, 15 went to university. In 2012 there was a specific Year 11 and Year 12 program. On the first day, the students are told about the program and what is possible. On the second day they complete a resume with their mentor and it is uploaded to the online portal. It says what they want to achieve, what they believe they can do. This resume is targeted at employers as part of getting universities and employers to partner to support individual students through their

'Can't be what you can't see':

The transition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students into higher education

studies with a view to a job at the end. It lets employers have that direct contact with students and makes it about people, not just an idea of someone. AIME's Online Portal was launched on November 30, 2012, and AIME plans to expand its work in the areas of scholarships, employment, traineeships, and university partners. Feedback from AIME participants shows that they were unaware of these opportunities. They suddenly realise they can work for an airline, work in a bank, work in a university—anything. Originally AIME was focused on getting kids to university but AIME has found that it's about changing the conversation everywhere. Indigenous success is Australian success. The ultimate goal of AIME is to no longer need to exist, because there is no gap.

The Aurora Project was established to address the recruitment and retention of staff members working at Native Title Representative Bodies (NTRBs). It partners with the Castan Centre for Human Rights Law at Monash University, the Charlie Perkins Trust for Children & Students, universities, governments and philanthropic organisations. The Aurora Project also develops projects aimed at improving educational outcomes for Indigenous Australians. The Aspiration Initiative (TAI) is a residential academic enrichment program for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander secondary day students with high academic achievement and those with high potential but who may be at risk of underachieving.

Yalari is a non-profit organisation that provides scholarships for Indigenous students from regional, rural and remote communities throughout Australia to attend 29 boarding schools around Australia to complete their education to Year 12. Yalari is developing partnerships with universities and a number of its first round of Year 12 graduates in 2010 were offered full scholarships by the University of Queensland in 2010 (Annual Report 2010/2011, Yalari, 2010, p. 26).

DARE Program (USQ)

Each year the USQ runs a three-day camp of activities for Year 10-11 students and tours on campus focusing on leadership, culture, career guidance and planning. Parents and community members are also invited to award ceremonies.

- (iv) The offer of cadetships and the life-cycle approach to student outcomes from higher education

A number of examples of industry partnerships (cadetships) support students financially and offer pathways to employment and university. Examples include:

The **Indigenous Cadetship Support (ICS)** (formerly the *National Indigenous cadetship project*) is an Australian Government program which aims to improve the professional employment prospects of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. It links Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander tertiary students with employers in cadetship arrangements involving full-time study including negotiated work placements. The ICS provides up to \$7,050 per semester to employers to support cadets with a living

'Can't be what you can't see':

The transition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students into higher education

allowance and study-related costs and offset employer administration costs. Other forms of assistance, including travel assistance for cadets who are studying or undertaking their work placement away from home, are also available. Cadets are paid a wage by their employer during their work placement.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander ranger programs are offered through partnerships with schools, colleges, universities, government departments and VET institutions. The Commonwealth government program **Working on Country** provides funding for a combination of education, vocational training and employment for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples to undertake Natural Resource Management (NRM) work across Australia. Education and training is delivered in conjunction with Cultural Heritage Management Training Providers in higher education institutions and private organisations (R. Ryan, Wilczynski, Watkins, & Rose, 2012).

The **Indigenous Ranger Cadetship** pilot program is an Australian government project aiming to assist Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people complete school, and to encourage further study and training, leading to jobs and careers in land, sea and natural resource management. Twelve secondary schools in Western Australia, Northern Territory, South Australia, Queensland and New South Wales will receive funding to develop the skills of Indigenous students who are studying selected units from Certificate I and II in Conservation and Land Management in association with VET providers.

The Worawa Aboriginal College in Victoria offers a Cadet Ranger Program in conjunction with the Healesville Sanctuary and VET training, providing 'hands-on' and vocational training, incorporating cultural content from local Aboriginal Elders.

At ANU, Indigenous students can more easily access national cadetships in the public service. It is encouraged at ANU because all of the government institutions located in Canberra and they can have access to ANU students fairly easily. Once in a cadetship program students are paid a stipend to finish their degree and they are also paid to complete internships during the holidays and this helps them to support themselves in their studies. At ANU, students who get an ATAR of 90-95 receive a scholarship of \$6,000 and students who receive an ATAR of 96 or above, receive a scholarship of \$12,000 to help with their studies. That is an incentive to attract students to attend university and ANU in particular. In 2010, ANU had its first Indigenous student with an ATAR of 99.

(v) Pathways to higher education for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students via VET/TAFE

The focus on employment outcomes through TAFE can be at the expense of enrolments in university, although there are some notable exceptions to this where universities have developed creative synergies and pathways between TAFE and

'Can't be what you can't see':

The transition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students into higher education

university. Some high schools are incorporating VET into programs that prepare students for a number of pathways to higher education.

For example, the University of Newcastle recently signed a partnership agreement with TAFE for school-based traineeships to be undertaken concurrently with the HSC for students aspiring to enter primary school education and nursing programs, but who may not achieve the requisite ATAR. They will do the equivalent of a Certificate III involving on the job training at the same time as their HSC. There is also a Bachelor of Aboriginal Professional Practice (including a double major in Aboriginal Studies and the professional experience component), where students can study Health, Business, and Psychology concurrently. This degree is a device for a professional specialisation to be added to the Aboriginal Studies major. The same university also has a partnership with TAFE and is rolling out articulation programs for 1st Year Diploma of Aboriginal Studies. In this manner, TAFE and the university can be seen to 'cross-credit' each other, but there are long waiting lists for this program.

In the Northern Territory, VET pathways have been the traditional transition into higher education, especially in Teacher Education. A Certificate IV in Education Support or Out of School Care provides students with entry into a bachelor program; however, it does not prepare them for academic higher education courses. Language and literacy levels are one issue and the culture and expectations of universities are often significantly different from VET/TAFE sector.

While one Indigenous academic support lecturer believed VET was central to her own eventual success at university, because it provided her with opportunities to build skills over a series of courses, she also felt that there was a need for VET courses to better prepare students to go on to higher education.

The NT Education Department has commissioned work on an Advanced Diploma of Education (Paraprofessional Education Worker) designed for Indigenous Education staff members who play a leadership role within their school and community. The Advanced Diploma also includes units with specific outcomes to prepare graduates with the necessary knowledge and skills of higher education study if they choose to pursue a teaching degree.

Partnerships between universities, TAFEs, schools and communities can also play a central role in bridging the disconnection many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders experience between university study and employment. A number of respondents raised the fact that both during, and on completion of high school, their only thought was to either get a job or a TAFE qualification which would lead to a job. As one respondent pointed out:

Uni doesn't come up in conversation. The word university to me was what you see on TV, one big lecture room and big lectures, scary image. . . knowing what can be offered within a university that can be very different.

'Can't be what you can't see':

The transition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students into higher education

TAFE courses are often seen as being related to work tasks and job opportunities whereas university is often not. Another current higher education student explained:

When I first left school I was sure there was nothing at uni for me. Though I did know I wanted more than work (just a job) TAFE Cert I and Cert II security, forklift licence, blue card for working on construction sites.

University courses connected to internships, cadetships or work placements were all raised as key elements of maintaining motivation and continuing to connect courses to a workplace and careers, as indicated by the comment:

More cadetships in the Kimberley that would have helped me a lot I would stick to that course and stay in the organisation I want to be in.

Another student pointed to the value of:

Internships in your holidays with Indigenous professionals inspired research with Nulungu, hub for Indigenous stuff. Realizing what I do know !!! My lived experiences of being Aboriginal unique. Internship at Nulungu most important, made uni relevant, gave me a vision for the end. It was transforming.

And a further comment by another student:

I was questioning connecting what you are doing to the end goal. This makes it difficult. . .the goal of first year should be to inspire first year experience no idea - not connected.

Most especially felt by young Indigenous people in those states and territories impacted significantly by the mining boom is an expectation of employment as the short-term focus, as opposed to a longer term focus on education and foundational transitions. The mining industry actively supports and recruits Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in some areas of Queensland and Western Australia, in conjunction with VET, universities and private providers. Indigenous enrolments are higher for males and tend to be in short vocational courses, or at the lower end of the certification spectrum (Taylor & Scambary, 2005, p. 87). Tiplady and Barclay (2007) have identified a lack of consistent standards for reporting in this area, as not all mining companies report details of the numbers of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders trained, educated and employed through mining company sponsored programs, and not all collect such data (p. 71).

Workplaces and particular industries promote study and support employees to gain further qualifications—particularly indigenous organisations working in the health, education and social work fields. One respondent thought it was very important for universities to work more closely with Aboriginal controlled organisations and that work placements should be attached to all relevant university courses.

‘Can’t be what you can’t see’:

The transition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students into higher education

(vi) University—community—school outreach programs: “You can’t be what you can’t see”

Many universities collaborate with schools and communities to provide outreach to a greater number of Indigenous students. These programs are diverse and are making great strides nationally in raising the aspirations of young Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students about ‘going on to uni’. Valuing and engaging with family and community is a common theme of those universities with successful programs. Outreach to schools by introducing students to the opportunities of higher education is essential early in their schooling, and, as one respondent observed: “you can’t be what you can’t see”. Some universities have active community engagement divisions. Others use outreach programs as an opportunity to inform communities of what is involved in university education, as well as seeking information to take back to universities in relation to the needs of the community.

The ways in which communities have to, and continue to, engage with universities in their country are complex. While acknowledging that universities attract students from all over Australia based on their course material, there are important cultural, social and at times political relationships between Indigenous Australians and particular universities. Many universities work with communities in genuine and diverse ways. The Elders in Residence program at the University of Newcastle structures engagement processes such as co-chairing governance committees so as to ensure direct community input.

A senior Indigenous state-wide program manager highlighted the need for early intervention and a life-cycle approach:

There needs to be a focus early childhood and an approach that is about the life cycle of students from kindy to university. There needs to be a plan or strategy for that whole experience for students. There needs to be an understanding of these linkages down the line. Community engagement is essential to success. But, it depends on the definition of engagement. Targets are essential. Universities need targets so they can keep a focus on whether they are achieving or not.

At CSU many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students are first in family to attend university. Staff in the enabling centre related that they need the family’s support. If they have a strong identity in terms of who they are, they do well and if they don’t, they will struggle. If there’s not a lot of support from families and communities they will find it harder. ANU provides a pre-orientation program for Indigenous Students. This includes people from Disabilities Services, Equity, the Library and other disciplines. This is available in the week before O-Week to get students aware of the process and programs available.

At the University of Newcastle, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander success is about

‘Can’t be what you can’t see’:

The transition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students into higher education

providing a full framework of knowledge regarding expectations of the university experience, and the mutual responsibilities and expectations between the university and the student. It's also about having family and community aware of these responsibilities and having good knowledge about what is involved when attending a university. It's about a gradual building up of transitional knowledge through Year 7—12 outreach programs in schools and this University has just signed an agreement with the Aboriginal Education Consultative Group (AECG) in this respect.

At UTS, Jumbunna invests in student outreach through a range of programs. It utilises print, electronic and social media to attract students and almost all students who attend UTS have been attracted because of these outreach activities. Very few students simply come of their own accord. Jumbunna runs school outreach programs and also in-house awareness programs for students. The Ngagnmi (meaning 'To Dream' in Gadigal Language) is offered each year and consists of a day on campus attending workshops, visiting facilities and each of the different faculties for high school students. It had up to 250 students in 2012 attending and from this there were over 100 applications of which 69 were successful. Of these 69, 43 came from regional areas and the remainder from within Sydney.

The Faculty of Business at UTS runs an Adult Education and Community Management Degree, but this is being phased out and there have been no new enrolments in the past 2 years. It once had good numbers, but numbers dropped once other universities began to provide similar courses. It was also known that students who completed this course did not always then obtain employment, and so people did not undertake these studies. They are currently reinvigorating the program with a view to including core attributes and skills necessary to obtain employment and advancement within organisations. Jumbunna is responsible for recruiting Indigenous students to all faculties across the University.

The University of Newcastle considers it is important to have full Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander staff members in the IEU in order to achieve commonality and understanding of the journey of their students through the university. This University also has an Elders in Residence program, contributing to an overall culturally affirming environment including the use of culturally affirming language, providing and looking towards leadership, and providing support for students in positive terms which, as one respondent put it: "reinforces their culture of family—students—opportunity—country".

At The University of Sydney the Special Gadigal Program accounts for five points toward their degree and requires them to complete an academic skills course. Away from base students enrol directly from the Koori Centre after diagnostic tests and the university gives the Koori Centre a list of students who have identified as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander on enrolment. There is also the Gadigal New Pathway Program. Under this new program, careers officers target Indigenous students from schools in Year 9 and follow them through to university.

'Can't be what you can't see':

The transition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students into higher education

As mentioned, several participants in this research stressed the need for connections between universities and schools to begin in the very early years with one respondent strongly arguing for a university presence in primary schools. This is particularly so in rural and remote regions as one student suggested: “Going out to communities and tell [sic] people what is available”. Another student stressed the need to: “Start early. Don't leave it too late understand what you are getting yourself into, the commitment you are getting into. What you want to be in life”.

The Koori Centre at The University of Sydney targets students from Year 8 to bring them onto campus:

. . .to break down their ideas that university is a scary place. There are faculty-specific days as well. Law students go out to country areas to talk to Aboriginal kids from low SES, our catchment is Australia not just Sydney or NSW.

While support of family and community is central to most students’ success, many do not have an understanding of what is involved in university study, the demands on the student’s time, and the often inflexible timeframes and deadlines. Furthermore, there is often a disconnect between university study and subsequent employment opportunities which leads to ambivalence and sometimes hostility toward a family member who has chosen to study at university, as illustrated in one comment: “. . . my mob don't even know I do study . . . we don't talk about it in conversations. They know I work”.

Other Indigenous leaders engaged with national policy have highlighted the need to advocate for clear pathways:

We are not seeing a reflection of the Bradley Review in funding sources for Indigenous students and it appears there is an assumption that Indigenous students don't aspire to higher education, when in fact they simply don't have clear pathways. The problem with Bradley and Gonski is this focus on international competitiveness. If we're advocating success at all stages, we'll reach those targets anyway. Measuring in ways that marginalise Indigenous kids from the beginning only sets up further barriers.

Attitudes toward university studies are changing; as one respondent in a regional university suggested that:

Having support from family and community. There is less ‘politics’ attached to young Indigenous people going to university, it’s in their universe now, whereas not so long ago it used to be about leaving family and community and going too much the white fella way. It’s not just only the government any more saying ‘go to uni’, it's also the families and communities now saying ‘go to uni’. AIME is doing a great job, meeting targets and getting students to finish Year 12, and the students’ families are supportive and participatory in this framework.

‘Can’t be what you can’t see’:

The transition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students into higher education

The University of Newcastle's van travels to western NSW and people from the community engagement portfolio of the Wollotuka Institute take information out and bring information back, to keep other staff members aware of what's happening in remote communities. As well as creating effective information flows, this also enables researchers to be matched with the communities' needs and share their research findings with the communities in western NSW.

In this respect one respondent commented that:

. . .in universities, we need to put as much time into building relationships with Indigenous groups and communities as we can—in addition to doing all the 'right' things. This means the hard yakka of getting out and getting active, and putting time into relationships. It's also all about pro-choice and high expectations, these themes are very important.

A senior national Indigenous policy maker noted the value of information and early access to it as an essential element of enhancing opportunities:

Students need to have the capacity and the information necessary to be able to make decisions early on as school students so that they know what is on offer at university and can make informed choices. Targeted and well-presented information needs to be provided to students, families and wider community members so that they can support students to make successful transitions to higher education. If the work is done in the earlier development of student abilities, this will make transitions to higher education more relevant and likely.

Another respondent observed: "low expectations—the biggest enemy of young Indigenous people, and this is still endemic in school systems". A respondent at the same university commented:

. . .it is stating the obvious, but if you want community engagement with kids you have to engage with the schools because that's where you find kids! It's about building relationships with schools, teachers, kids and principals, which takes a lot of time and effort, and embedding capacity building and mentoring programs.

The University of Newcastle has a Commonwealth funded 'School to University' pathways program. The Year 7 and 8 version is called 'I Believe' and a Year 9 and 10 version, 'Insight'. The Years 7 and 8 version is about cultural empowerment and goal setting involving a range of traditional Indigenous games and well-being activities. In Years 9 and 10, the school students come onto campus and do activities with university staff members. Towards the end of Year 10, the students are encouraged to spend time in the disciplines in which they have an interest, and in Years 11 and 12, they have mentors from the various disciplines who also go into the schools. The Wollotuka Institute encourages its staff members to be part of community organisations and gives them the time to do this, e.g. joining AECG boards, land councils, etc..

'Can't be what you can't see':

The transition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students into higher education

SCU is targeting local Indigenous high school students (e.g. through AIME and Unibound). Unibound involves SCU project officers going into local schools and also bringing Indigenous students onto campus. This program has strong support from the school system in the north coast region of NSW.

CSU's schools division encourages students onto campus, via its 'My Schools' program. In another program, a team of academic and IEU staff members travel to remote communities to link up and engage with them.

CDU Indigenous Academic Support staff members are working closely with Schools and Community Education Centres (CECs) including working with students and teachers in the development of their 'Personal Learning Plans'.

(vii) Tertiary preparation courses and pre-orientation courses

Tertiary preparation programs and pre-orientation courses play a significant role in helping to alleviate some of the stress of students in transition into an unknown university world. Tertiary preparation courses, pre-orientation courses, and alternative entry schemes provide students who wish to study at university or TAFE (but are not confident or may not meet the entry requirements of their chosen course) with the opportunity to develop the academic skills required. These courses also have the potential to provide students with an understanding of lecturers' expectations and how universities operate in terms of their policies, course requirements, etc..

One lecturer who has developed and now delivers a tertiary preparation course believes that, in addition to building academic skills, enabling courses need to include exploration of the disciplines offered within universities and the opportunity to investigate the intersection of Western and Indigenous Knowledges within the particular discipline they are considering entering. These courses need to build confidence in students so that they know they belong in university and can succeed. This lecturer cited a particular program that begins by focussing on individual approaches to learning, on life-long learning, on being engaged in one's own learning, and on building the confidence to question what is being learnt.

Tertiary preparation courses provide a pathway into further study particularly for mature age students and those who have not studied formally for a number of years. One respondent indicated:

[I] found open uni really hard, leaving school and TAFE (very different expectations). No one prepares you for what is required for a Higher Education unit. I struggled with external studies, wasn't used to online learning. . . Online chats with group of 50, did well but struggled. . . (5 text books and lots of reading and research, extra bit to understand words (academic language) etc..

'Can't be what you can't see':

The transition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students into higher education

The need for more pre-orientation courses and longer orientation programs was also raised. It was argued that these programs provide a strong base for successful transition to university. Even students whose academic skills and previous study may mean a tertiary preparation course may be redundant would benefit from a better understanding of how the culture of universities supports success. Comments from respondents included:

. . .[universities should provide] some sort of orientation when you are going from Cert level to HE. It blew me away. I had no idea of the work load. You can stretch out a degree for years.

The Koori Centre at The University of Sydney delivers a two-week academic skills course before the start of each academic year and it has been found that this is better than building up academic skills over the first year for example, by way of First Year Experience (FYE) programs. During these two weeks, the students build up a strong support group and develop a lot of confidence, so much so that when the non-Indigenous students start classes, the Indigenous students are the orientation 'experts', which is very beneficial for their self-esteem.

One enabling program has had considerable success in setting up a Facebook page for all students—past and present. It has proven to be the most efficient way for lecturers to maintain communication and for students to experience peer support.

SCU has a 'Testing and Assessment' program where Indigenous students take a test similar to a Special Tertiary Admissions Test (STAT) to gain entry into a series of workshops run by Indigenous staff members who evaluate the students' university readiness and from this, it can be determined whether they enter a preparatory program or a six month program of Indigenous studies. If they pass this assessment, they are able to enrol in a course of their choosing. The Testing and Assessment process is an individual assessment and this works well because individual arrangements can be made with schools or faculties.

CSU tracks students coming through the various entry programs and identifies the students who are picking up supplementary programs (e.g. tertiary success programs). The Barramal program runs twice a year, working with faculties and local schools. A recommendation is made to the faculties for places, consisting of HSC students and also students doing tertiary preparation programs at CSU.

Tertiary preparation courses are more successful at some universities than others. In a recent presentation by Professor Steve Larkin at CDU, it was noted that the Tertiary Enabling Program (TEP) at his university proved the least successful of entry options for Indigenous students in terms of numbers completing the course. In 2009, 57 students enrolled, 2 (3.5%) dropped out, 48 (84%) did not participate, 6 (10.5%) graduated and 1 (1%) was still enrolled at the end of the year. However, the Preparation for Tertiary Success (PTS) course written and delivered by the same institute (BIITE as an ACIKE course) has had significantly better results in 2011 and

'Can't be what you can't see':

The transition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students into higher education

2012. In 2012, 55 students enrolled, 10 (18%) discontinued, 29 (53%) were continuing and 16 (29%) graduated.

While both programs can be described as ‘bridging’ or ‘enabling’ programs, the content and delivery models are significantly different. The TEP course is a mainstream program open to both Indigenous and non-Indigenous students who have the choice of studying externally or attending classes at either Casuarina Campus (Darwin) or Alice Springs. The PTS course includes core unit in ‘Learning Identity’, ‘Strength and Success’ and ‘Discipline Inquiry’. The approach includes both Western and Indigenous Knowledges and ways of learning and is delivered face-to-face in study blocks of one to three semesters.

(viii) Improving the operation of ITAS

Previous sections have documented some of the current strengths and weaknesses of the Indigenous Tutorial Assistance Scheme—Tertiary Tuition (ITAS-TT). To reiterate, ITAS provides funding for eligible Indigenous students for tuition in their areas of tertiary study (university award level courses). The program is managed by tertiary education providers and is aimed at students who may be at risk of failing or not achieving sufficiently to continue. It is not “usually available for basic numeracy, literacy, enabling and bridging courses” (Australia. Department of Education Employment and Workplace Relations (DEEWR), 2011, p. 36).

Despite some of the weaknesses and issues associated with the current operation of ITAS elaborated earlier in the report, a number of universities still view the scheme as one of the essential ingredients for successful transitions.

The manager of a Go8 University IEU stated that:

ITAS is a key enabler of students. ITAS Tutors are employed at a higher rate than is provided by the government so as to attract the best quality tutors and also to keep them so there is continuity of the relationship with students. We believed that we needed a well-educated group of people with particular high value skills to enable the students. We keep a register of tutors with specific skills sets and provide students with the list to see how we can marry them with the right tutor. We've been able to measure the success of this approach through our students achieving higher marks.

One respondent stressed that, at her university:

Communications in this program are good—a staff member makes calls to every Indigenous student at the start of every session. The Indigenous students are often initially reluctant to fill out the ITAS form as they think it’s another ‘systems thing’ they have to do, but when it’s explained to them they will avail themselves of this opportunity.

‘Can’t be what you can’t see’:

The transition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students into higher education

A number of respondents spoke of the need to overhaul ITAS but are adapting the scheme to their needs in the meantime. For example, at the ANU, ITAS tutors are employed at a higher rate of remuneration than provided by the government so as to attract the best quality tutors—and to keep them in order to ensure continuity with students: “We believe that we need a well-educated group of people with particular high value skills to enable the students. . .we have been able to measure the success of this approach”.

At UTS there is a focus on early intervention utilising ITAS as a central element. The early intervention program involves students who are identified and placed on an early intervention list to ensure they receive ITAS support and have regular meetings with academic coordinators. This program is very resource intensive, but in 2 years retention rates have risen by 17.8% to reach 81% retention in 2011 alone. Four years ago in 2008, the retention rate was 43%. ANU automatically gives every student ITAS support in their first year. This gets them on track early in their studies as it focuses on time management, assessments and essay writing. It helps students to plan for their studies, to know what is available and what is possible. At the majority of universities ITAS is often only provided when students are beginning to fail or have become desperate, and this is the wrong approach.

While higher education students regarded ITAS tutoring as a central component of their success at university, the actual support they described was as much ‘mentoring’ as it was ‘academic’. Developing a relationship with a single person, personal support and working with ‘mentors connected to work’ were all recurring themes. Tutors were also important in assisting students to understand university systems, to manage time and workloads and to gain specific academic skills in reading, writing and research. ANU first year students are encouraged to apply for an ITAS Tutor, but not all do. ANU finds that students become attached to their ITAS Tutor so they try and ensure that the tutors are permanent; people who are in for the long haul.

Developing confidence and having another person with whom to work through obstacles, develop and stay on a plan or return to it, get back on track, were, for many students, important to their success and remaining in the course. This relationship with a tutor was of particular importance to students from remote and rural regions. Students found large campuses and lectures of 100+ students overwhelming and were unlikely to ask questions or engage but were able to ask questions of their tutor and their confidence grew.

(ix) Changing university cultures

Attempts to change university culture are often resisted, as it may be perceived as one group being singled out for special consideration, rather than a unique opportunity to engage with continuing issues of national significance. IEUs are in many ways not regarded as change agents but as existing to ensure Indigenous students ‘fit into’ the

‘Can’t be what you can’t see’:

The transition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students into higher education

existing university practices and culture. However, some centres are initiating change across their universities and introducing dynamic challenges to the status quo.

One example of this is the ACIKE, a partnership between the BIITE and CDU. ACIKE offers a number of courses delivered by both CDU and BIITE staff members in various modes (external, internal and mixed-mode) but is largely administered by CDU (CDU is responsible to Tertiary Education Quality Standards Agency for all ACIKE courses). The two institutions have considerably different histories and cultures and each is struggling with change. One major difficulty has been the assumption that all students, regardless of their geographic location, language background or financial situation will engage in the online learning environment for all aspects of their study and administration. This assumption impacts on regional and remote students and particularly on older students. One respondent felt this change had the potential to decrease opportunities for Indigenous students to study courses and/or units specifically written for them and those living in their region.

(x) Valuing Indigenous Knowledges

As discussed, valuing Indigenous Knowledges and promoting cultural competency is a central theme of those universities which have not only broadened their engagement so as to embrace and enhance Indigenous Knowledges but also to value its application toward wider educational success. Acknowledgement of Indigenous Knowledges in relevant disciplines is also helping to target resources and actions required for successful transition, to enrich understandings, and to enhance programs by incorporating Indigenous Knowledges in nationally beneficial ways.

A number of Australian universities have begun to integrate Indigenous Knowledges and perspectives into relevant existing courses, but this is far from the norm. Most universities offer an Indigenous Studies Program and senior Indigenous leadership within IEUs have developed distinct relationships with other relevant disciplines to ensure that Indigenous perspectives are integrated into their own teaching. Those that are taking Indigenous Knowledge seriously are investigating ways to include Indigenous Knowledge as a core element of graduate attributes for their institution.

When asked how universities could improve support for Indigenous students, another student suggested: “Relevant curriculum including Indigenous perspectives and voices build a sense of Indigenous community on campus”.

One senior Indigenous academic noted:

It is interesting to see the way (some universities), are approaching the building of Indigenous cultural capacity at the moment. But the most successful programs come from the grassroots—they’re not just built into the KPIs of senior staff. For example, the role of the non-Indigenous mentors in AIME is creating a

‘Can’t be what you can’t see’:

The transition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students into higher education

powerful change agent among young people. The best strategic outcome for AIME is that there's eventually no need for it to exist.

(xi) Whole of university approach—integrated governance

The move to a whole of university approach regarding responsibility for Indigenous student success is gaining momentum and seeing greater responsibility being allocated within a range of disciplines, recruitment programs, curricula development and support programs. Those universities making the most progress with implementing a whole of university approach demonstrate strong leadership and governance principles. Good communication within institutions, tied to governance and key indicators of success, work to reinforce the targets to ensure students are receiving adequate support and good practice is rewarded.

Students are often directed to Indigenous academic support centres when requesting information, or assistance to complete administrative requirements of courses, and when requesting academic assistance. Such an approach demands that the staff members in the centres are 'all things to all people'. While these centres are often critical resources and positive centres of support for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, a whole of university approach requires all staff members to develop the necessary skills and understanding so that they can provide relevant, timely and accurate information and support in culturally appropriate ways.

One respondent stated that:

The key is not only attracting Indigenous students to university but keeping them there. It is important to get into their lives and into communities early. It's about imagining a vision of what university will be like. Ultimately, it's a whole of university thing.

At the University of Newcastle students are interviewed on enrolment and the type of support they need is identified. The Wollotuka Institute has developed a program based on these interviews and works with different service providers across the university to ensure that students are supported on their journey. There is a positive culture of student support at the University, and the work of the Institute is highly valued. Indigenous Collaboration is a strategic priority. Every faculty and division has to say how it is going to promote the Indigenous Collaboration priority. One director of the Wollotuka Institute is on the University's Senate Committee and another on the University's Academic Council, illustrating the links of the Institute into the wider university.

For academic staff members at The University of Sydney, eligibility for promotion will include participation in cultural competency workshops. Such approaches were regarded by some as critical to addressing successful transition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students to university and completion.

'Can't be what you can't see':

The transition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students into higher education

The ultimate catalyst for a successful university wide approach to ensuring success for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples is the relationship developed between the IEOs and each faculty, discipline or school. This cannot be left to the goodwill of individual staff member: it must be a part of the formal structures within the university.

(xii) Indigenous enabling centres and centres of Indigenous Knowledge for the whole university population

Centres of Indigenous Knowledges based in universities have the potential for the support of all students and staff members, Indigenous and non-Indigenous. Utilising centres of Indigenous Knowledge as a means of focusing Indigenous and non-Indigenous relationship building, and as a research and resource base for academic staff members, is also vital in assisting these centres to develop and extend their influence throughout higher education institutions. This process builds on the narrative of the university as being a culturally safe and inclusive place. Acknowledging that all universities have both a collective and individual culture of operation, whether it is discipline focused or in the intent of the graduate attributes they seek to foster. From an Indigenous perspective, it is essential to address this culture, add to it, and improve it. This does not mean being mainstreamed into this culture, so to speak, but it does mean working to have real engagement with it for the benefit of students and staff members, as one respondent reflected:

[It is a] good university for Aboriginal people. [I] felt comfortable as an Aboriginal person [The] university knows about Aboriginal people, there are Aboriginal people around [in high positions]. . .

A number of students interviewed highlighted the value for them in being able to access and participate in an Indigenous research centre which also provided opportunities for either work or internship. One respondent stated concisely:

It is. . .a culturally safe space. . .physical space as well as attitude and philosophy.

Centres of Indigenous Knowledge have the opportunity, as one respondent put it: “To change the paradigm from disadvantage to paradigm of excellence—driven by resilience and excellence”.

(xiii) Targeted strategies based in evidence

Having a dedicated strategy for success tied to indicators and outcomes is essential. Past policy and program failures were possibly due to under-investment in strategy and a lack of monitoring, evaluation and highlighting successful outcomes.

‘Can’t be what you can’t see’:

The transition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students into higher education

Universities with targeted strategies have generally also had Reconciliation Action Plans (RAPs) to guide this work. Ideally there is a need to have a research action plan that guides the targeted strategies. References have been made in interviews to RAPs as living documents which initiate change and can be revisited over time.

The National Indigenous Congress has highlighted evidence-based policy as a priority to enhance student outcomes and transition to university:

Congress is attempting to get good news from parents, students and others about what it is that is helping students to make successful transitions. In particular, Congress is asking the question, 'what really constitutes best practice?' Congress holds that educators should be looking at the data, identifying what is working and what is not, targeting the areas that are working and minimising the areas that are failing. Congress is also interested in focusing on quality of the teaching workforce from the perspective of teachers being knowledgeable of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Culture, knowledge practices, values and so on. Congress is focusing on accountability and performance in education. We're concerned with how we actually measure success. For example, in the ACT they have a Senate's Estimates Committee that is used to interrogate what is really going on and the need to feed that back to what you get from the community. So the key issue is a framework for measuring success for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander improvements in education. When you look at COAG targets, we also need to have our own form of measurement and an institution to oversee and promote those findings.

(xiv) Monitoring and evaluating student performance and program delivery—case management

Monitoring of student progress and implementing timely support mechanisms are essential in the first year with follow up opportunities as students progress. This process alerts staff members to student performance and triggers appropriate and targeted support. Case management of student development and transition is becoming a norm with students equally expected to follow through upon input of such efforts to achieve for their own sake and in the context of Indigenous Higher Education. Realising assets that already exist, instead of instituting new programs or implementing programs that are not based on evidence, is essential to reinforcing the important role of monitoring and evaluation. Diverse platforms of delivery offer unique opportunities for students to make considered choices about deciding to undertake university studies. Blended delivery models and bloc release teaching is of benefit to those studying in remote regions and those with dependents or employment responsibilities.

'Can't be what you can't see':

The transition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students into higher education

(xv) Continued mentoring and relationship building

Mentoring programs, based in evidence of outcomes and regularly monitored and evaluated, are becoming a movement of change at the transition stage. Opportunities for students and teaching staff members to be involved in mentoring networks within a knowledge community can be a means to successful transition. Genuine and respectful relationships where Indigenous students receive adequate support, and also have the opportunity to contribute, are important.

Chapter 3 detailed the key constraints and enablers to successful transitions to higher education. Chapter 4 examines recent and current activities aimed at limiting constraints and enhancing enablers to successful transition to higher education for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students through an analysis of the different models that have been, are in operation and have been recently developed to enhance Indigenous transition to university with particular acknowledgement of the continuing and central role of IEUs. Chapter 4 then summarises the elements of leading practice in operation across the five identified models to arrive at a framework of leading practice that can be utilised to support Indigenous student transition to higher education

Chapter 4:

Current Models
Supporting Aboriginal
and Torres Strait Islander
Students' Transitions into
Higher Education



Chapter 4: Current Models Supporting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Students' Transitions into Higher Education

The development of the 38 IEUs operating in Australian universities today is the result of almost three decades of accumulated action in response to lessons learned by IEU staff members, community leaders, key personnel working in Indigenous education and the activities of Indigenous students' associations. Their development is also the result of high level Indigenous policy engagement and program development with the Commonwealth, states and territories aimed at increasing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander student transition into higher education.

The terms of agreement for this project sought to define 'best practice models or frameworks' from which to 'maximise the transition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Students into higher education'. The report finds no single 'best practice model' is applicable to all Australian universities. This is supported by the views of respondents and reinforces the finding of the IHER that:

. . .there will be no 'one size fits all' approach that can be applied as each university offers a unique environment in which to build Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander success among its students and staff (Behrendt et al., 2012, p. 57).

Respondents identified that university governance plays a significant role in defining different models and in supporting Indigenous students' transition to higher education, while noting that the best solutions are tailored to local knowledge and contexts. The IHER supported the idea that, ". . .universities can benefit from sharing lessons about these best practice approaches and supportive governance structures. . ." but cautioned:

. . .given the distinctive nature of each university and their unique student profiles, universities must determine their own governance structures and cultural change processes. There can be no 'one size fits all' solution. (Behrendt et al., 2012, p. 142)

Accepting that there is no single model that can or should be applied across the sector, the report instead identifies a framework for leading practice. To arrive at a framework of leading practice, the following sections identify a range of common practices being implemented within Australian universities to support Indigenous students' transition into higher education. Noting the key constraints and enablers identified within the report and, assessing the scale of implementation and impact of current practices, it is possible to define leading practice elements which can be applied across the diversity of identified models within Australian universities. These are provided as a guide to all IEUs in accordance with Recommendation 11 of the IHER (Behrendt et al., 2012, p. xx) seeking to maximise Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander

'Can't be what you can't see':

The transition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students into higher education

students' transition to higher education through a considered review of IEUs, in order to increase understandings and progress toward better student outcomes. Defining and disseminating leading practice elements will aid these reviews.

Identified models of transition operating in Australian universities

The report identifies five models that have developed across the sector to meet the particular needs of Indigenous communities and students who have utilised their services and contributed to their character. The five models of transition operating within Australian universities to support the transition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students into higher education are:

- 1) **The Standard Model** - Table A - Indigenous Education Unit focused
- 2) **The School Model** - larger Indigenous Studies Programs linked with student support
- 3) **The Governance Driven Model** -
 - i) (IEU) governance tied to Key Performance Indicators (KPI) led by IEUs
 - ii) (Executive) governance tied to KPIs led by Executive staff members
- 4) **The Indigenous Knowledge Centre Model** - highlighting the relevance of IK
- 5) **Mainstream Enabling Support Model** - with minimal or no IEU facilitation

These different models have also been influenced by particular leadership styles, limitations or availability of resources, periodic phases of policy action or inaction, administrative cultures, the character of the courses on offer within their institutions and very importantly, personal and professional relationships between these IEUs and key university staff members. Similar models have been employed at different universities with similar characteristics in terms of the range of factors identified above, as well as the social, economic and cultural determinants that define the cohorts of Indigenous students within them.

All models share similar practices but differ in priorities, access to resources, scale of implementation, ability to fulfil targets and the ability to address different contexts of their student populations. Some models, such as the Standard Model, have been in place for many years and, while maintaining a constancy of support, can be identified as being in need of transformation through the implementation of leading practice elements. To enhance student transitions, other models, such as the Governance Driven Model and the Indigenous Knowledge Centre Model, have more recently transformed the Standard Model and already exhibit many of the elements of leading practice. Governance, policy and funding programs play a significant role in defining different models, informing, and in some cases directing, practices on the ground. The Report identifies 14 elements of leading practice representing a framework for leading practice which can be utilised to analyse and evaluate current models to enhance the transition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students to higher education.

'Can't be what you can't see':

The transition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students into higher education

The following section summarises key elements of the above five models and identifies the 14 elements of leading practice operating to varying degrees across all models. This is provided to identify opportunities to enhance the scale and effectiveness of practices already being employed, or to identify scope for implementation of new leading practices where certain models are yet to employ them.

The Standard Model

The Standard Model can be considered to have evolved from the original movement to establish IEUs that developed from the 1970s, initiated through the NAEC (Whatman & Duncan, 2005, p. 123), and which experienced significant growth in the 1980s and 1990s. Created to provide “enclave support” (Patton et al., 2012, p. 13), the Standard Model was developed to provide what can be considered essential support services with the goal of providing a safe and supportive environment for what were originally often no more than 15 to 25 Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander students. Most students in these original cohorts were mature age students who had significant other work and life experience, often working within Aboriginal organisations, who sought to develop their skills and qualifications so as to be able to hold positions of greater significance within their communities. Over time these earlier student cohorts blazed trails for others, often participating in the recruitment, support and tutoring programs of new incoming students. As younger high school students with competitive secondary tertiary rankings began to follow the pathway to higher education, older students took up leadership and mentor roles and often also became involved as staff members of IEUs.

The Standard Model of an IEU often involves a stand-alone approach to student support. Mainstream programs were, and increasingly are, utilised for students’ skills development and support, but were often initially resisted, at worst because of institutional racism, or lack of cultural competency, or at times because of the gaps that Indigenous students experienced in their skill sets and the expectation within mainstream programs of certain levels of competence in literacy, numeracy and even basic understanding of Western and university culture. The Standard Model of the IEU often involved a small very dedicated team of Indigenous staff members with a significant cohort of non-Indigenous tutors, often at undergraduate level, operating within the ITAS.

Key elements of the Standard Model included separateness and advocacy for Indigenous specific enabling programs developed within these units, even as student numbers grew and cohorts changed from mature aged students to younger students accessing university through ATAR process. Today those IEUs operating within the Standard Model continue to provide targeted, dedicated and culturally specific support to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, have definite assets in terms of Indigenous and community knowledge, and have the ability to be responsive to tangible Aboriginal student contexts including potential social trauma, gaps in skills sets and uncertainty in dealing with mainstream university systems.

‘Can’t be what you can’t see’:

The transition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students into higher education

The Standard Model also exhibits characteristics of having been pigeon holed within universities into a very separate existence described by some respondents as a form of 'siloeing'. This could be due in part to the creation of a separate identification as an Indigenous space and support service, but also because the Model is often expected to be responsible for all Indigenous issues, programs, workloads and student issues on campus. The Standard Model has been criticised by some academic staff members in recent years of working against its stated goal of enabling students to participate in university life. Through the appropriate efforts aimed at providing culturally safe places on campus, some Indigenous and non-Indigenous commentators believe that the Model has acted as a barrier, removing the valuable need for Indigenous students to be accessing mainstream services and be involved in other mainstream activities. As noted previously, Trudgett (2010) has indicated the need for proactive advocacy that includes ensuring that IEUs have "welcoming and approachable" staff members (p. 13), and that more staff members within IEUs are Indigenous people with higher qualifications. However, Professor Marcia Langton was publically critical of the Standard Model, making particular reference to the nature of such centres as an 'enclave' separating Indigenous students and discouraging 'high achievement and excellence as the goal', and criticising such centres, as she believed that they "tend not to attract high quality staff with professional expertise" (Trounson, 2011).

This view overlooks the lack of resources often existing and the entrenched isolation which can occur within smaller, regional and hinterland universities facing resource competition that larger Go8 Australian universities do not face to the same degree. It also overlooks the intense challenges faced by such universities seeking to encourage Indigenous students from lower SES backgrounds, evident within the Go8 universities, and the lack of integration into university governance and enabling programs. This view highlights the difficulty that many Standard Model (IEUs) have faced in attempting to be all things to all people: to provide a place of ownership and belonging for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, particularly those from lower SES backgrounds or who have had little engagement with mainstream institutional cultures, while also seeking to encourage non-Indigenous students and staff members to engage with Indigenous Knowledges and integrate with Indigenous students within an Indigenous space on campus.

Often isolated from the mainstream campus and operating within a student services or equity governance stream, centres operating within the Standard Model have struggled to achieve recognition for Indigenous Knowledges, community links, outreach potential and community linkages that can assist in the maximisation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander student transition. Regardless of the increasing number of students since their inception, student cohorts are largely catchment driven as there are few resources for outreach. A Centre is often located in the Student Services section of university governance structures, with a significant number of students, recruited through bridging programs with low ATAR or no ATAR, entering through alternative entry. The completion rates for such bridging programs range from 15% to 50%. The Indigenous student support centre and Indigenous Studies Programs can sometimes be housed in the same IEU within the Standard Model, but

'Can't be what you can't see':

The transition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students into higher education

are often separated so that the IEU is engaged in delivering a bridging program and supporting Indigenous students, but is not involved in undergraduate teaching. Within this Model, it is less likely that direct management of students' academic choices will be evident, as there are so few case management resources and most support is offered via ITAS tutors. Standard Model (IEUs) generally support approximately 25% of students on a daily basis with periodic involvement of up to 50% of students monthly and perhaps 80% of Indigenous students access the Centre once a year. The centres offer some cultural competency training when opportunity arises but this is not part of an integrated strategy. Engagement with the local community has become more common in recent years through a reference group or Aboriginal Education Advisory Body or Elder's group, but these structures are not integrated into the wider governance structures of the university. Key funding is provided through ISP funding programs, with little wider involvement of philanthropic and other industry support, which hinders implementation of new programs.

The School Model

The School Model developed within those Standard Model (IEUs) that were able to develop an academic program of Indigenous or Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies. Beginning with a number of core units, these programs grew into undergraduate courses which were able to be offered to all university students. The number of students enrolling in these degree courses was and is traditionally low compared with other disciplines. However, the number of students completing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies units as electives, or part of agreed elements of other Majors within universities, is commonly quite healthy. Such units also proved and continue to prove popular with mainstream students who often chose (or choose) a first year unit in culture, history or politics out of genuine interest.

The School Model operates in the same way as the Standard Model in regard to accessing ISF funding for student support, operating bridging and other pre-tertiary programs, providing a place of ownership and belonging on campus, and engaging wider student cohorts where ever possible through cultural or political events and performances. However, the School Model enables greater engagement of a growing number of Indigenous staff members in mainstream academic processes, committees, and governance structures, and becomes engaged in transforming pedagogical approaches in regard to teaching Indigenous elements of mainstream programs in history, politics, gender studies, law, health sciences and so on. This engagement at the academic level also creates provisions in some of the School Model (IEUs) to develop stronger governance structures and ensure high level Indigenous engagement on Academic Councils and other relevant university committees, and other areas including teaching and learning, student support and ethics.

The School Model can involve a research component or support for research output by Indigenous academic staff members, but the facility for significant research centre development and output is limited. Incorporating Indigenous Studies and Indigenous Studies staff members presents the opportunity to enhance Indigenous issues across

'Can't be what you can't see':

The transition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students into higher education

the campus, and to engage more directly with university power structures. Combining Indigenous Studies' academic staff members with Indigenous student support centres creates opportunities to engage Indigenous senior staff members in bridging and other pre-tertiary pathway programs.

To a degree, the School Model also creates an economy of scale by being able to offer different models of teaching, outreach and program delivery, including programs at the diploma level, often focused on community development or a specific pathway, through a relationship with a particular discipline such as Veterinary Studies, Medicine, Engineering, Media or Law. These pathway programs are able to draw on the expertise of Indigenous staff members in the development of curricula, and facilitation of entry programs. These specialist pathway programs also usually involve a dedicated layer of further specialised staff members and tutorial support beyond the standard.

The School Model is also characterised by the incorporation of strategy in the development of its overall programs. Because of economies of scale, leadership and power negotiation are made more possible within hierarchical university structures. Heads of IEUs within the School Model are usually at the Professorial level and are led almost exclusively by Indigenous Heads of School. This was not always the case, but it would be very unusual in the current climate for the Head of an IEU anywhere in the country to be non-Indigenous. In many cases these positions have been filled under Section 50 D of the Equal Opportunity Act (Cwlth.) 1984, enabling the identification of Indigenous applicants' personal lived experience as an Indigenous person, as a formal element of selection criteria. Having such leadership does not guarantee immediate ability to set strategies. Good leadership is a key factor, as is relationship building within and outside the university. Having leadership at the Professorial level and engaged in university power structures can lead to closer relationships with key executive members of the university. However, support from the highest levels of the university, for specific targeted strategies, is also essential to enable the School Model to be effectively applied.

The School Model grew in the 1990s on a range of fronts and was responsible for the development of new discipline pathways for Indigenous students who had traditionally joined university during an initial major push for social justice in education and health in the 1980s and 1990s. The Model retained key elements of the Standard Model, including being centralised (increasingly in purpose built or renovated premises with a distinctive Indigenous design or theme), relying on ISP funding, and operating separate student support services. However, while achieving success in attracting and retaining students at the undergraduate level, the larger bloc release programs that signalled the departure from the Standard Model have been less successful over the past five years. Common responses within the School Model have been to develop comparative advantage in terms of smaller more dedicated programs that are often tied to a particular pathway such as through outreach, reverse block release teaching, and professional pathway development.

'Can't be what you can't see':

The transition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students into higher education

The number of Indigenous students attracted to a School Model IEU annually is generally between 300 and 700 or more per institution. Student retention and completion rates are generally higher than for those operating within the Standard Model, particularly in the areas where universities have developed specialist programs of development such as a pathway program through medicine, engineering, law and so on. In this regard, the School Model provides an example of enhanced transition outcomes resulting from defined partnerships with other schools within the university system, which provide Indigenous students with appropriate skills development, information, tutoring and scholarship support.

When initially developed in the 1990s, and strengthened in the early 2000s, the School Model represented a leading practice model for IEUs which some smaller universities could only imagine. Often founded through significant leadership and support at the Vice-Chancellor level, they were also vulnerable to changes in personnel and policy and, essentially, lack of favour when a senior position of support changed. Operating from a clear strategy of community engagement and robust sense of identity, this Model generated significant interest for Indigenous students, often attracted to the stand-alone school and the larger numbers of Indigenous students on campus. However, the separateness could and can also be a weakness, as the School Model remained vulnerable to changing executive personalities and cultures within universities. The School Model created a profile large enough to be on the main agenda of the university when Indigenous issues and education were of key interest, but the Model created little real power or engagement beyond this as it was not integrated directly into university governance and overall decision making. This Model also often relied on specific program funding generated within the university which was not tied to a sustainable economic base, and so when these programs ended so too did the work which was being supported.

The Governance Driven Model (IEU)

Key Indigenous leaders, with many years of experience dealing with university systems, began to deal with the weaknesses of the School Model and also attempted to respond to specific realities facing Indigenous students in a changing educational environment. As new solutions to enhance student transitions and outcomes were sought, these leaders developed the Governance Driven Model from the School Model. Early in the 21st Century, many IEUs attempted to utilise the process of developing Reconciliation Action Plans (RAPs) as a means of formalising university support for engaging with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and students. The creation of RAPs was seen as a means by which some informal and even discrete agreements and Memoranda of Understanding (MOUs) could be formalised into an overall strategy by which Indigenous Knowledges, Indigenous issues, Indigenous student success and the role of the IEUs could be supported across the university. This period coincided with the growth of what were termed 'Cultural Awareness Programs' and what are generally known today as 'Cultural Competency Programs', which are part of an overall journey of engagement, review, reflection and growth of ability to work cross-culturally.

'Can't be what you can't see':

The transition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students into higher education

The RAPs and Cultural Competency training created new understandings of Indigenous Knowledges, culture and assets which could be realised within the university for all students, and, in particular, how Indigenous students could be better supported by all university staff members within a process of reconciliation through developed skills in cross-cultural engagement. This approach did yield significant changes in some situations, but any changes to personnel, loss of corporate knowledge or impact on wider university resources had immediate priority over a well-crafted and acceptable, but ultimately disempowered, RAP. Leaders who saw the benefits of the RAPs realised that it was also necessary that universities and staff members within other disciplines needed a more formalised process by which to ensure continued support for transitioning Indigenous students to and through university to completion. RAPs were also often tied to the creation of Indigenous Employment Strategies within these universities which set certain targets for Indigenous staff members in general and academic positions, but were rarely implemented effectively.

The Governance Driven Model requires significant effort and engagement with the executive levels of universities to enable its implementation. It is based on ensuring that the responsibility for Indigenous student success, engagement of Indigenous Knowledges and respect for Indigenous community is not simply based within an agreed 'plan', but forms part of the governance that defines responsibility and rights of schools and other key sectors within the university. This approach also enables the integration of targets that had previously been set in RAPs and in Indigenous Employment Strategies into formalised funding and management processes within universities. By making Deans or Heads of Schools also responsible for creating their own Indigenous Engagement Strategies and linking KPIs of Indigenous employment, student transition and student completions to potential promotions and other funding programs, the Governance Driven Model provides a 'stick and carrot' approach of formalised expectation of outcome to the process. This Model is relatively new. It retains aspects of the Standard and School Models, utilises a discrete Indigenous Education Unit for dedicated Indigenous student outreach, engagement and support, but seeks through formal governance structures supported by the executive, to ensure that the responsibility for closing the gap of student transition, retention and completion is 'shared' across the university.

In this regard, the Governance Driven Model is seen by some as merely a progression in a long process of formalising responsibility for Indigenous student transition and completion. Others have criticised the Governance Driven Model as removing any real sense of responsibility and genuine engagement on the part of other schools and basically forcing them to take responsibility. Adherents to the Governance Driven Model note that it formalises processes in a way that engages the appropriate power structures with which all schools within universities are familiar. Further, they note that relationships remain at the heart of the process as these schools work with the IEU to develop their own School Strategies to fit within the overall Indigenous Engagement Strategy operating within the university. The 'heavy lifting' that is required within any initiative is still considered to be carried out by IEU staff members who are able to work more formally with schools in developing specific programs and

'Can't be what you can't see':

The transition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students into higher education

pathways which are tailored to their own discipline. Through this Model, it is expected that the traditional bias of Indigenous students choosing to be teachers, lawyers and nurses (which is changing slowly through student choice) will be reduced as a more diverse range of disciplines creates pathways for Indigenous students to study environmental science, engineering, art and design, architecture, and information technology. By adopting this approach the IEU will not be over-burdened with all responsibility for Indigenous students, but it would retain a central role.

Within the Governance Driven Model other elements of practice are also able to be formalised including:

- Case management of students within a dedicated space within the IEU.
- General student and community outreach by the IEU and negotiated professional outreach and pathway development in collaboration between the IEU and separate schools.
- The greater integration of Indigenous staff members across all schools.
- IEUs engaging in wider aspirational programs to attract Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students to university.
- IEUs providing monitoring and evaluation of student performance and assisting in the monitoring and evaluation of school performance in delivering Indigenous Engagement Strategies, including provision of funding and other targeted initiatives.
- VC or Deputy Vice Chancellor (DVC) input into the Model and executive direction in regard to targets and achievements.
- ITAS tutorial assistance supplied for all students in their first year.
- Remuneration of ITAS tutors to be above that awarded by universities in order to attract high quality tutors and ensure the best outcomes for Indigenous students.
- Integration of Indigenous scholarships and cadetships via industry partnerships as part of a life-cycle approach to successful student completions.
- Strong emphasis on ongoing mandatory cultural competencies training for all staff members.

The Governance Driven Model retains the foundational elements employed in the Standard and School Model but formalises the processes by which Indigenous student transition, retention and completion is supported and shared by wider academic interests. It also ensures that resources are shared across a range of disciplines, removing the flaws of the School Model which can be vulnerable to the changing nature of executive support and priorities.

The Governance Driven Model (Executive)

The Governance Driven Model (Executive) seeks to share the workloads and resources by increasing the responsibility for Indigenous student engagement and success within a whole of university approach.

‘Can’t be what you can’t see’:

The transition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students into higher education

The Governance Driven Model (Executive) is a recent initiative of The University of Sydney (USyd). Following the completion of The Review of Indigenous Education (2009), USyd developed the Wingara Mura—Bunga Barrabugu Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Integrated Strategy, which was implemented in late 2012 and commenced in 2013. In 1989 there were 16 Indigenous students at USyd. In 2012 there were 323 students with at least one in every faculty. Fine Arts and Dentistry have the lowest number of Indigenous students, with one student in each faculty. The central premise of the strategy is that “Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander education, research and engagement are an integral part of our core business and the responsibility of the whole University community” (Wingara Mura—Bunga Barrabugu, 2012, p. 13). This Model is based on similar foundations to the Governance Driven Model (IEUs) involving the sharing of responsibility for successful Indigenous student outcomes with separate disciplines and schools. As with the IEU Model, the Executive Model requires that schools complete separate independent strategies as part of the overall strategy to achieve agreed targets for Indigenous employment, student success and completion. Other Professional Service Units (PSUs) within the university focus on enabling, skills development, scholarships, employment and student support are also integrated into the overall strategy. Instead of the IEU being responsible for driving engagement with the strategy, the Office of the Deputy Vice-Chancellor—Indigenous Strategy and Services—has been created to “. . .advise, liaise, assist and support where possible, monitor, promote transparent reporting, and recognise excellence in the achievement of the strategy” (Wingara Mura – Bunga Barrabugu, 2012, p. 13).

Prior to the implementation of this Strategy, The Koori Centre of USyd (discussed previously) was an exemplary IEU operating within the School Model that maintained an impressive success rate of student transition, retention and completion. The Review of Indigenous Education in 2009 recommended the development of a Governance Driven Model (IEU) retaining the Koori Centre as a central driver of the planned strategy. Instead, USyd has chosen an executive level driver for the Strategy which will see the devolution of core business of the Koori Centre to other university areas. This is part of a strategy to develop an integrated model that seeks a whole of university focus in which

. . .the task of implementation will rest generally in those units and areas of the University with responsibility for the University’s core business of learning and teaching, employment and staff development, student recruitment, marketing and so on (Wingara Mura – Bunga Barrabugu, 2012, p. 13).

There has been criticism that this Model is essentially a devolution of responsibility for Indigenous student success to mainstream university services and faculties without due regard for the value of the corporate knowledge of the former Koori Centre and the traditional role of the IEU (in the past 30 plus years) as central in driving policy, action and services for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students. The new policy seeks an integrated approach to Indigenous education.

‘Can’t be what you can’t see’:

The transition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students into higher education

The new Model seeks to move away from a Disadvantage Discourse. The new policy will see Indigenous focused units, for each of the faculties will develop their own Local Implementation Plan which will be linked to KPIs, particularly in the area of Indigenous Staff Employment. Critics of the new Model even question the drive to disperse Indigenous staff members and engagement with students to the faculties. They question whether this approach could result in the opposite outcome of its aim and create silos instead of greater involvement in Indigenous issues. Staff members of the Koori Centre note they have always worked hard to include the faculties in its activities and to have good relationships that support students in their disciplines. For instance, the Education Faculty was utilising many of Koori Centre staff members in their programs, and now Indigenous staff members will find themselves focused just in the one area, such as Education, and not dealing across other faculties. The Koori Centre Library will remain open, as will the student friendship spaces under the new Model. The key question raised by some regarding the new Model is, "Who will advocate for Indigenous Students?" Adherents to the Governance Driven (Executive) Model cite that there will still be a centralised space for Indigenous students on campus as well as centralised policy implementation, assessment, monitoring and evaluation through the Office of the Deputy Vice-Chancellor—Indigenous Strategy and Services. Within an ethos of a commitment to opportunity, capability and rights, the strategy is founded on key ideals of an integrated approach and optimising opportunities. In centralising policy within the Office of the Deputy Vice-Chancellor—Indigenous Strategy and Services, it has been argued that Indigenous students' issues, transition and outcomes are receiving the kind of executive focus that previous models have lacked and that has hindered the full realisation of opportunities within USyd for Indigenous students.

Key leadership within the University of Sydney emphasised that;

The Sydney model is definitely not about forcing Indigenous students or staff into the mainstream. It is about embedding Indigenous issues as part of the core business of the University and ensuring that students achieve their graduate attributes in a way that is measurable and ensures the Uni can respond appropriately at all levels, from the DVC level, the Dean Level and at the project level. It is actually about creating a set of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander standards that need to be achieved within the university about student outcomes, staff development, student increases, community engagement and staff development. It is also aimed at ensuring that Indigenous Knowledges are embedded as a core body of knowledge within the University either in specific units or elements of other units, including core units. All the plans are transparent and linked, so there is no overall strategy to amalgamate or consume Indigenous students into the mainstream, but to take a plural approach.

Key elements of the Governance Driven Model (Executive) that define it as uniquely different from the Governance Driven Model (IEU) are:

'Can't be what you can't see':

The transition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students into higher education

- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander education, research and engagement are part of the core business and the responsibility of the whole University community.
- It is corporately driven with oversight, monitoring and evaluation from the Office of the Deputy Vice-Chancellor—Indigenous Strategy and Services.
- The Senior Executive Group (SEG) Indigenous Strategy and Services Sub-Committee has been created to seek synergies and collaborate to achieve outcomes.
- Clear targets are being set for ambitious Indigenous student transition, retention and completion.
- Clear targets are being set for non-Indigenous student engagement in Indigenous Knowledges through teaching, learning, research and other experiences.
- Indigenous academic and general staff members' targets are being reset at impressive levels nearing parity.
- A program of cultural competency training for all staff members has been laid out that will see all staff members complete initial and ongoing training by 2015.
- Separate faculties and other PSUs will be responsible for creating their own strategies to fit within the overall strategy for Indigenous opportunity within the whole of university ethos of the strategy.
- Long term financing of the strategy is expected to come from a diversified base of university, partner and external program funding.
- Initial investment will fall on the university through a 'top slice' of designated funding of which it is expected that 80% will be shared with faculties and PSUs as they develop their teams, strategies and targets.

The Governance Driven Model (Executive) is a clear break with past models. It seeks to share the responsibility for supporting Indigenous student opportunity and success across the whole of university. It differs from the IEU Model in that the central support base is spread more definitely across mainstream faculties and PSUs.

The Indigenous Knowledge Centre Model

The Indigenous Knowledge Centre Model combines elements of all previous models with less of a focus on direct governance processes tied to KPIs for separate faculties, disciplines and schools, but with a clear focus on a whole of university approach tied to the Valuing of Indigenous Knowledges for all students across the university. This Model values Indigenous Knowledges as an important discipline and seeks to engage Indigenous and non-Indigenous staff members within the centre's teaching, activities, research and wider engagement with the university. It sets up a relational impact whereby Indigenous students and non-Indigenous students interact within a respectful, professional, creative and centrally defined centre of Indigenous Knowledge Excellence. This Model operates from the premise that Indigenous and non-Indigenous students do indeed need to engage directly, but does not assume that it is necessary that this interaction should primarily occur within the separate disciplines (as with the Governance Driven [Executive] Model). Neither does it operate

'Can't be what you can't see':

The transition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students into higher education

within the limitations of the Standard Model which has been criticised as being too focused on separate student support that possibly hinders Indigenous student engagement with other cultures, disciplines, activities and opportunities. The Indigenous Knowledge Centre Model incorporates Indigenous research and Indigenous Studies with a clearly articulated framework of what constitutes Indigenous Knowledges as opposed to teaching history, politics and cultural studies with a focus on Indigenous realities.

Similar to the Governance Driven Model (IEU), the Indigenous Knowledge Centre Model seeks to adopt a whole of university approach and in doing so relies on generating solid relationships with other faculties within the university. It also relies on key leadership from the Executive of the university in supporting the creation of a dedicated Indigenous Knowledge Centre and direct investment in regard to research, teaching and learning, community outreach, enabling programs and other dedicated university services. Similar to the School Model and the Governance Driven Model (IEU), the Indigenous Knowledge Centre Model provides a central space and centralised team of dedicated and predominantly Indigenous staff members who are able to support Indigenous students to receive targeted and appropriate support from the range of mainstream university services that are now more generally available.

While focused on Indigenous Knowledges as a foundation of the Indigenous Studies Program, as is common within the School Model, the Indigenous Knowledge Centre Model seeks to integrate Indigenous Knowledges across the sector, where appropriate, in a range of disciplines, providing Indigenous Knowledges expertise in partnership with other faculties. Some centres utilise a process commonly referred to 'Indigenising the curriculum' while others choose instead to negotiate direct partnerships at the leadership level that generate actions between faculties and the centres, to gradually build mutual understanding and value from respectful engagement across the disciplines. The Indigenous Knowledge Centre's focus on research is another avenue through which to build partnerships as well as provide pathways for the development of Indigenous academic staff members.

Indigenous Knowledge Centres are directly concerned with Indigenous student transition. Similar to the School Model and the Governance Model (IEU) the Indigenous Knowledge Centre Model employs dedicated staff members who focus on a range of key leading practices including community outreach, aspirational programs, student skills management (usually via case management) and student skills support. Similar to the Governance Driven Model (Executive), the Indigenous Knowledge Centre Model seeks to create opportunities for Indigenous students, communities and non-Indigenous people valuing Indigenous Knowledges through leading practice across a range of fronts with the view to achieving national and international recognition. The Indigenous Knowledge Centre Model, as with all other models, identified the need to work to overcome Indigenous disadvantage and the impacts of common low SES outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander education. It does so by utilising the capacity within its research functions to generate its own knowledge from which to set appropriate targets, agendas, processes and programs in place. This model utilises close

'Can't be what you can't see':

The transition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students into higher education

case management through understanding the contexts of the student cohorts it services and seeks to enhance student transition, retention and completion through increasing skills and ability.

The Indigenous Knowledge Centre Model places Indigenous students, issues, Knowledge and presence at the centre of university culture. It operates from a basis of opportunity and strength in Indigenous Knowledges as a means by which to focus student success across a range of disciplines. It identifies the need for integration across all services and disciplines for Indigenous students, while creating a place of central value, pride and effective service for Indigenous and non-Indigenous students.

Key elements of the Indigenous Knowledge Centre Model Include:

- Responsibility for Indigenous success is shared across the disciplines and faculties.
- Indigenous Knowledge Centre holding key strategy and operating via partnership and relationship building across disciplines.
- Research, teaching and student learning resources and support.
- Indigenous and non-Indigenous students engaging via the centre with a focus on sharing and supporting all students engaged in Indigenous knowledges with a focus on Indigenous student academic assets, skills needs and learning requirements.
- Being less concerned with mandatory cultural competency and more concerned with relationship building and genuine shared focus on Indigenous student success - universities as culturally safe places.
- Seeing value in engaging in the university structures and with academic and professional staff members genuinely, and less didactically, via (curriculum) strategies or governance.
- Expecting that Indigenous Knowledges, once valued through relationship building, will be incorporated more creatively where necessary across the campus to support Indigenous students.

The Indigenous Knowledge Centre Model often engages more closely with the mainstream governance structures of the university, focussing more on a negotiated relationship building approach than a top-down one. It generates knowledge as does any discipline or faculty within a university and derives power from that investment for staff members, students, the university and community.

The Mainstream Enabling Support Model

The Mainstream Enabling Support Model is rare and only exists in two Australian universities. One is a Table A university and one is a Table B university. Both operate from a mix of private and government supported funding, with a focus on teaching and learning over research. Table B universities are unable to attract ISP funding, which significantly inhibits their ability to create separately structured IEUs. The universities that operate the Mainstream Model also do so from an ethos that all students are

‘Can’t be what you can’t see’:

The transition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students into higher education

equally able to, and actively encouraged to, seek support through mainstream enabling programs, and that the resources that are provided to all students, whether domestic non-Indigenous, domestic Indigenous or International, are appropriately tailored to meet the specific skill needs of all students who require support.

Indigenous students within these institutions have generally entered via foundation programs that provide extra tuition, specified skills development and case management of low achieving students. The numbers of Indigenous students attending these institutions are relatively low by comparison with other models examined. Indigenous students often attend these institutions through the context of some community outreach, through being geographically near-by, or through particular relationships or a specific discipline focus such as education, business or nursing. Indigenous students have been a focus of strategy and investment within these universities, but through specifically targeted programs at the local level. The Mainstream Model has little or no engagement from the Executive, with most developments originating in the teaching and learning or enabling area. It is recognised that many Indigenous students may well be accessing university from low SES backgrounds, but the Mainstream Model is employed within the belief that it will provide what students require. Within these institutions, cultural competency training is minimal or non-existent. While Indigenous student numbers are generally low, completion rates are reasonably good, often because of the pathway that has been created through either dual sector opportunities or through other community based partnerships.

Key elements of the Mainstream Enabling Support Model include:

- Small part-time or no Indigenous Support Centres.
- Students expected to utilise mainstream services available.
- Some recruitment of Indigenous students through targeted programs.
- Little or no engagement of Indigenous Knowledges.
- Possible AECG or some form of Indigenous Community Engagement.
- Lacking strategy and often low levels of continuing corporate knowledge because Indigenous staff members who are engaged often struggle to achieve results, and leave to be more effective elsewhere.
- Where success is found it is usually down to dedicated staff members' contributions, more than any value in the overall approach of the Mainstream Model.

Summary—Models

All of the models discussed in Chapter 4 utilise some form of student support services. The Standard Model, which generally was characterised by providing stand-alone support services for Indigenous students, now generally utilises a mix of mainstream enabling support services and ITAS as well as support from dedicated Indigenous teaching staff members. The School Model operates in a similar way to the Standard

‘Can’t be what you can’t see’:

The transition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students into higher education

Model in this regard. The Governance (IEU) and Indigenous Knowledge Centre Models are more focused on targeting resources that include mainstream enabling support services as well as a mix of IEU generated community outreach and transition pathways. The Governance Driven Model (Executive) seeks to rely on mainstream PSU and faculty engagement in a whole of university approach, but unlike the Mainstream Model, seeks to focus Indigenous Knowledges, staff members and other resources/expertise within the mainstream services.

All of the models examined have particular historical, political, educational and cultural contexts in their construction and their output. The Standard Model was largely created through initial need and then became captured within policy and program limitations. Where it exists, staff members within these organisations are seeking to adopt more recently created structures such as the School, Governance (IEU) and Indigenous Knowledge Centre Models. The Indigenous Knowledge Centre Model represents a new generation of Indigenous Centres of Excellence that seek to engage on equal and sustainable footing within the wider governance, knowledge and economic realities of universities. Indigenous Knowledge Centres can also utilise elements of the Governance Model (IEU) as is considered appropriate within different contexts. The Indigenous Knowledge Centre Model is a progression from the School Model, and staff members within the School Model spoke often of the value of taking a strengths based approach that valued Indigenous Knowledges assets across all programs as part of an agenda to maximise Indigenous student transition through a life-cycle approach that included scholarships, cadetships, partnerships with industry and philanthropic support. This Model also seeks to generate sustainability through a diverse economic base and realising the power and value of these assets for Indigenous and non-Indigenous students alike.

In examining the different models that are being utilised to transition Indigenous students to higher education, the project has identified elements of leading practice that are being utilised, or recently initiated by universities. The following section details these elements of leading practice as part of a framework of leading practice to identify opportunities for Australian universities to enhance Indigenous student success. Finally, Chapter 5 summarises the key findings of the report and identifies opportunities by which the leading practice framework can be adopted at the university level to support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander student transition to higher education.

‘Can’t be what you can’t see’:

The transition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students into higher education

Framework of Leading Practice

Elements of leading practice for universities and Indigenous Education Centres

| No | ISSUE | CONSTRAINT | ENABLER | LEADING PRACTICE |
|----|--|--|--|---|
| 1. | ENHANCING INDIGENOUS EDUCATION CONTEXTS in TEACHER AND PRE-TEACHER TRAINING | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Teachers are not adequately prepared for the realities that confront Indigenous school students in urban, rural and remote settings. Early student experience of the Education System sets foundations for student success. Poor teacher preparation in regard to Indigenous issues and methods to enhance Indigenous student participation impacts on future skills sets and transitions to higher education. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Well trained Indigenous and non-Indigenous teachers who are aware of the specific contexts faced by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students and the need to set skills in place from early primary school and maintain student success throughout the student's progress to secondary school. Learning experiences that value Indigenous Knowledges and culture and engage students' strengths through acknowledging specific skills sets and supporting these in the development of western education skills and conventions. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Targeted programs such as MATSITI seek to increase the number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Teachers in schools with experiential and professional skills sets to enhance Indigenous student participation. The Stronger Smarter Institute developed a strengths based approach to Indigenous student participation as part of teacher training and development programs. |
| 2. | READINESS TO ATTEND and ACCESS TO INFORMATION ABOUT UNIVERSITY – OUTREACH PROGRAMS | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> A higher percentage of Indigenous students are not university ready yet are being admitted and experiencing low transition rates. Students indicate a lack of appropriate and available information as a significant barrier to transitioning to | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Universities need to generate appropriate skills testing and direct students through pathways that enable readiness before attempting Bridging Programs or Undergraduate Degrees. Appropriately targeted information that identifies specific | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Implementing early testing and experiences of university through summer schools and winter schools, specialist outreach information sessions and awareness raising programs that define pathways early achieve results. Dedicated outreach |

'Can't be what you can't see':

The transition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students into higher education

| No | ISSUE | CONSTRAINT | ENABLER | LEADING PRACTICE |
|----|--|---|---|--|
| | | university. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Many university information packages assume given knowledge that some Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students do not hold. • University outreach programs that are not adequately funded fail to attract and follow through. | student cohorts or regional groups and utilises community partnerships or other outreach programs achieve significant increases in transition to university. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Outreach programs that have good community buy in and regular long-term and repeatable programs are successful. | programs with assigned and resourced staff members and potential industry and philanthropic support overcome resource barriers and yield high transition rates. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Early awareness about older family members attending aspirational programs and changing community perceptions. |
| 3. | INTERGENERATIONAL TRAUMA and RESISTANCE to TRANSITIONS TO UNIVERSITY | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Past policies of exclusion from mainstream economies, cultures, rights, infrastructure and other benefits have disenfranchised Indigenous families and students from the benefits of the Australian Education System from primary and secondary through to Tertiary. • This accumulation of exclusion resulted in entrenched disengagement that manifested in various forms including continued exclusion, a lack of skills to engage and Indigenous resistance to trust and engage with such systems. • Generations of families have little or | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • As more students engage with the university system and utilise the skills gained to enhance community and personal choice the barriers to university pathways begin to reduce. • Family members of students seek to follow other family members. Elders who are engaged with universities share those experiences and universities that embrace local knowledge and respect Traditional Ownership build community relationships. • Appropriate information for potential students and school students | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Engage with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities to create pathways for student engagement and transition. • Adopting a holistic approach to community engagement including respecting and enhancing the presence of Indigenous people, events, knowledge centres and Indigenous Studies Programs within universities. • Creating high profile centres that support Indigenous students, community engagement and non-Indigenous experiences of Indigenous culture, |

‘Can’t be what you can’t see’:

The transition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students into higher education

| No | ISSUE | CONSTRAINT | ENABLER | LEADING PRACTICE |
|----|--|--|---|--|
| | | no engagement with education and its benefits and do not know how to access it. | opens pathways. | knowledge and community. |
| 4. | PREPAREDNESS FOR UNIVERSITY – TERTIARY PREPARATION PROGRAMS AND TERTIARY ENABLING PROGRAMS WITHIN UNIVERSITIES | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A higher percentage of Indigenous students who are able to transition to university, experience institutional, pedagogical, cultural and financial stress that impedes transition. • Even high achieving Indigenous secondary students do not transition at the same rate as non-Indigenous students often because of peer pressure or lack of community understanding and support. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Aspirational programs that link students with universities, develop pathways to enhance student skills sets and enhance student confidence and understanding of the requirements of university studies and their ability to achieve in this environment need to be engaged with. • Two way outreach programs that enable universities to connect with communities and communities to utilise and see value in universities. • Engaging with those students identified as having poor readiness through appropriate testing and directed through Preparation programs. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Aspirational programs linked to community and student outreach provide a means by which students can be informed, engaged, supported and also monitored and evaluated to ensure they have the required skills to ensure their best possible entry path to higher education. • Programs that enable Indigenous students to mentor other Indigenous students within settings that support engagement of youth culture and regional Indigenous youth cohorts. • Merit based programs that support and enhance the skills sets of talented students to achieve above average results through early intervention. |
| 5. | STUDENT CASE MANAGEMENT AND MONITORING AND EVALUATION OF STUDENT PERFORMANCE | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Few IEUs are able to resource and support student case management to support retention of students. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Case management and early engagement of ITAS tutors is considered essential to enhancing student retention and | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dedicated skills assessment, programs of support and skills development and monitoring of |

‘Can’t be what you can’t see’:

The transition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students into higher education

| No | ISSUE | CONSTRAINT | ENABLER | LEADING PRACTICE |
|----|---|--|---|--|
| | | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Those who employ case management have only done so within the last 3-5 years. • Monitoring and Evaluation of student performance is time intensive and requires dedicated and experienced staff members. • IEUs that are not able to engage with mainstream enabling programs that have developed in Australian universities become over-burdened. • Not all universities have student record keeping systems that enable close case management and some specifically do not provide this information or have few extra resources to support student case management. | <p>completion.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Appropriate identification of skills sets enables staff members to provide dedicated enabling support either through IEUs or through engaging with dedicated enabling programs. • Appropriate and ongoing monitoring and evaluation of students catches students before they get behind in their studies, reduces stress and provides lessons in meeting targets and being able to identify when to be able to ask for support. These are valuable skills sets in themselves. | <p>progress early in a student's studies ensures transparent and timely support can be provided.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Employment of a dedicated student case management team ensures that staff members are focused on their clients and can also receive specific and appropriate professional development to focus their own skills sets. • Early intervention and development of an academic skills base is essential and if developed early leads to less need for additional support as students progress and higher percentages of completion. |
| 6. | MENTORS AND TUTORIAL ASSISTANCE AT UNIVERSITY | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • IEU staff members are already over-stretched and often teaching and supporting students across a range of programs. • The ITAS Scheme is not flexible enough to ensure targeted support in the early stages of student progression – often being implemented | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dedicated student support units that employ staff members with specialist skills sets and provide professional development to enhance skills. • Development programs that enable students to transition to university and continues | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Development of a dedicated student enabling and support unit within IEUs that liaises with mainstream enabling and skills development programs. • Continued engagement with programs such as AIME which both supports and |

'Can't be what you can't see':

The transition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students into higher education

| No | ISSUE | CONSTRAINT | ENABLER | LEADING PRACTICE |
|----|--|---|--|--|
| | | <p>when students are at crisis point.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ITAS tutors and IEU staff members require appropriate skills in specific disciplines as well as specific enabling practices. • Not being able to monitor and evaluate student progress adequately through the provision of university records and lack of resources to case manage students. | <p>engagement, support and collaboration through skills development.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Early intervention and continued pathway evaluation and support for talented as well as less skilled students. • Allowing ITAS to be provided more liberally and as part of developing student skills early in their degree along-side mainstream enabling courses. • Investment that increases the ITAS rate to ensure the best possible tutors available mentor students. | <p>encourages students to support and engage with other students.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continued engagement with programs such as The Aspiration Initiative that works with talented students to significantly prepare them for higher education through long-term dedicated mentoring, study camps and enrichment programs. • Providing ITAS to all Indigenous students in the first year of study and increasing the amount of funds to attract high quality tutors in appropriate disciplines. • Involving elders and community leaders in activities that recognise student progression and successes to foster community and family support. |
| 7. | ACCESS AND LOCATION REGIONAL AND REMOTE STUDENTS and DIVERSIFIED MODES OF DELIVERY FROM UNIVERSITY | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rural and remote students are geographically disadvantaged from most Australian university opportunities. • Rural and remote students generally | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dedicated programs that link universities with students from particular regions with dedicated follow through and long term relationships. • Acknowledgement that remote students | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Development of dual sector outreach through defined pathways provides significant transitional outcomes. • Blended delivery models provided |

‘Can’t be what you can’t see’:

The transition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students into higher education

| No | ISSUE | CONSTRAINT | ENABLER | LEADING PRACTICE |
|----|-------|---|--|---|
| | | <p>experience the impacts of lower SES on educational attainment.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Outreach to Rural and remote students is more costly and lower numbers of participation cause programs to target areas with greater rates of transition. • Very low numbers of rural and remote students transition to higher education generally. • Higher proportions of rural and remote students access VET and there are very low transitions from VET to higher education. • Reverse bloc teaching is only possible in a small range of disciplines, mostly education, teaching and community development. • Equipment access and Internet coverage hinder accessing external studies programs in rural and remote regions. • Students in rural and remote regions have less chance of experiencing university in any way prior to attending • Rural and remote students often have | <p>need targeted support programs and investment in skills sets that work to strengths and build confidence in obtaining Western skills relevant for higher education.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Specific funding that enables universities to develop and support outreach and pathway development. • Pathways from VET that recognise not all students wish to transition to university but for those that do it requires dedicated programs that enhance necessary skills. • Reverse block teaching is successful, but expensive to initiate. • Mixed mode delivery utilising a combination of block and reverse block teaching with online resources recognising limitations of Internet access. • Creating a culture of transition through regional networks recognising leadership and developing leader pathways. • Travel for remote students to return | <p>consistent and successful pathways for remote students through a mix of block release, reverse block release and online real-time delivery.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Programs that identify knowledge strengths within regional and remote settings and seek to develop key skills by building on these interests and strengths. • Additional programs within VET and dual sector institutions that specifically target university readiness instead of expecting that this will be possible within all CERT IV programs. • Development of programs utilising a combination of block and reverse block teaching with online resources recognising limitations of Internet access. • Targeted community engagement in remote and regional settings that work with community institutions and identify leaders with the desire to complete further |

‘Can’t be what you can’t see’:

The transition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students into higher education

| No | ISSUE | CONSTRAINT | ENABLER | LEADING PRACTICE |
|----|---|--|--|--|
| | | significant cultural and social obligations to family that impede transition to higher education. | home in times of emergency and appropriate support when away from home. | studies. • Assisted travel and accommodation either within hostel settings or supporting independent living options as occurs for International students. |
| 8. | FINANCIAL CONSTRAINTS – SCHOLARSHIPS and CADETSHIPS | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A high proportion of Indigenous students enter university from low SES backgrounds. • Indigenous women who are primary carers have significant responsibilities that inhibit attempting a transition to university. • Remote and rural Indigenous students do not often have the resources necessary to ensure smooth relocation and re-establishment in major cities and regional towns where universities are located. • Lack of information regarding HECS and Fee Help has led to many Indigenous students incurring significant debts without completing their tertiary qualifications. • Many mature age Indigenous students have dependents and the impact of | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clear information about financial responsibilities and the possibility of accruing debt for courses not completed. • Information provided through Indigenous aspirational programs and mentoring schemes supporting student knowledge of financial support and university costs in targeted youth campaigns. • Opportunities for cadetships and other employment opportunities that recognise other significant experience and offer mentoring opportunities through university. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Targeted philanthropic and non-government scholarships that enable women who are primary carers targeted resources that enable flexible solutions to parenting responsibilities. • Targeted student support for relocating Indigenous students either through mainstream accommodation and other services or through dedicated community college places. • Linkage with the growing range of Indigenous scholarships and cadetship programs. |

‘Can’t be what you can’t see’:

The transition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students into higher education

| No | ISSUE | CONSTRAINT | ENABLER | LEADING PRACTICE |
|----|---|---|--|---|
| | | attending university on their families is a significant impediment. | | |
| 9. | LIFE CYCLE APPROACH and PROFESSIONAL PATHWAYS | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Impediments to Indigenous student transition to higher education begin in the early years of education where students and families can become disengaged from the opportunities of education. • Programs aimed at transitioning Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Students have traditionally focused on numbers of students through the doors and sought to retain as many as possible with little strategy other than getting through each year. • The focus on transitions to university often begin later in student's educational pathway and opportunities are missed to provide experiences that can help define career choices for a best fit of studies and careers. • Professional and corporate pathways have traditionally not been developed as a | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander teachers and teachers with specific skill sets to deal with disengaged Indigenous students and families within the context of low SES backgrounds. • Targeted information and opportunities to experience universities and understand the professions they prepare students for. • Engagement of students from Year 9 to begin students considering a range of options instead of an expectation of early completion of high school or TAFE. • Involvement of the commercial, industry and resources sector in scholarships and cadetships identifying and supporting talented students through pre-tertiary programs through to future employment. • Opportunities for | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Development of student pathways to employment through cadetships and commercial partnerships. |

'Can't be what you can't see':

The transition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students into higher education

| No | ISSUE | CONSTRAINT | ENABLER | LEADING PRACTICE |
|-----|--|---|--|---|
| | | <p>significant pathway for student career pathways.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Government programs focused at transitioning students from VET into the resource sector can provide immediate benefits and opportunities but can also limit choice. | <p>Indigenous leadership programs to be initiated within the university sector for students and developed as students develop careers beyond university.</p> | |
| 10. | GOVERNMENT POLICY FOCUS AND RESPONSES TO THE BRADLEY REVIEW and THE IHER | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Policy inertia in the face of clear evidence and successful initiatives. • Top down policies such as Indigenous Education Strategies that are not resourced and do not respond to clear findings of significant reviews. • Lack of evidence about the effectiveness of current programs and policies. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • National responses to IHER and the Bradley Review that incorporate Indigenous education representative bodies. • Development of an integrated Indigenous Education Strategy that responds to the key recommendations of IHER. • Evidence based reporting that focuses on transition to higher education that contextualises the Indigenous Disadvantage focus of COAG. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Evidence based programs that engage key Indigenous education specialists and work to support programs having success on the ground. • Implementation of regularly reviewed Indigenous Education Strategies with monitoring and evaluation focused on transition to higher education and parameters identified by the IHER. |
| 11. | GOVERNANCE – A WHOLE OF UNIVERSITY APPROACH | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Isolation of Indigenous issues and support of IEUs. • Lack of clear strategy and shared tasks and programs supporting transition to higher education. • Lack of support from the Executive within universities. • Lack of decision-making and policy | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • IEUs that operate on equal footings with other disciplines delivering undergraduate, post graduate and research programs as part of an integrated sustainable model as well as supporting Indigenous student transition. • Indigenous | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Development of dedicated Indigenous Education Strategies that are based within a whole of university approach. • Development of integrated governance to enhance Indigenous student transition across the disciplines. |

‘Can’t be what you can’t see’:

The transition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students into higher education

| No | ISSUE | CONSTRAINT | ENABLER | LEADING PRACTICE |
|-----|---|--|--|--|
| | | development power for senior managers of IEUs, Pro Vice Chancellor (PVC) and DVC Indigenous. | opportunity being embraced in all relevant disciplines within an integrated strategy and defined governance structure. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Targeted KPIs supported with appropriate Monitoring and Evaluation for reflexive program refinement. |
| 12. | THE PROVISION OF INDIGENOUS EDUCATION UNITS AND ENGAGEMENT STRATEGIES | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Universities that do not invest in dedicated IEUs or strategies to enhance Indigenous student transition. IEUs that are only able to operate within a Standard Model based on minimum support and basic funding guidelines. Lack of investment in community relationships, Indigenous Knowledges, cultural competency training and Indigenous student networks. Lack of engagement of Indigenous issues and representation at higher levels within university governance. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Movement from RAPs to dedicated Indigenous strategies that include clear targets and set KPIs for all aspects of student transition, support and career development. Movement from Standard Models of transition to Governance Driven and Indigenous Knowledge Centre Models. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Building on the foundations of IEUs to develop integrated strategies for diversified investment, partnerships and cross discipline engagement on student transition. Transforming governance structures to include senior Indigenous representation in governance, strategy and sustainable economic modelling for Indigenous programs. |
| 13. | THE PROVISION OF INDIGENOUS KNOWLEDGE CENTRES and VALUING INDIGENOUS KNOWLEDGES | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Resistance to valuing Indigenous Knowledges as a discipline and asset within the university. Pigeonholing of Indigenous Knowledges within an Indigenous Studies Program or less defined separate Indigenous studies | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Indigenous Knowledge Centres provide integrated platforms for enabling student transition, developing wider partnerships and developing sustainable models of Knowledge creation and dissemination. Indigenous | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Development of IEUs into Indigenous Knowledge Centres to enhance Indigenous transitions through the development of an integrated platform of outreach, transition, support, knowledge development, |

‘Can’t be what you can’t see’:

The transition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students into higher education

| No | ISSUE | CONSTRAINT | ENABLER | LEADING PRACTICE |
|-----|---|---|---|---|
| | | units. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Indigenous students are not attracted to universities that do not support Indigenous Knowledges and community engagement through the support of IEUs. | Knowledge Centres provide a focus of Indigenous value and a foundation from which Indigenous and non-Indigenous students can engage across disciplines. | evidence gathering and strategy. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Development of business models for the transition of IEUs, Indigenous Studies programs and cultural competency training into an integrated platform with shared responsibility across disciplines to support students engaged in separate programs. |
| 14. | CULTURAL COMPETENCY ACROSS THE UNIVERSITY SECTOR – CHANGING UNIVERSITY CULTURES | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> A general lack of understanding of Indigenous history, culture and contexts causes staff members and students to fall back on stereotypes about Aboriginal students and hinders good working relationships. Lack of awareness can result in a deficit model approach in which universities place Indigenous students and staff members within an equity stream and overlook assets and creative solutions to poor transition. Lack of awareness of community value can hinder universities engaging appropriately with community and impeding good working relationships. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Increased cultural competency enables the completion of appropriately designed programs of support. Being informed of Indigenous contexts, issues, assets and aspirations enhances delivery of transition initiatives. Cultural competency training builds relationships across disciplines enabling the development of a whole of university approach to student transition. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Develop targeted programs of cultural competency for all staff members. Provide opportunities for continued development of cultural competency for students through Indigenous community engagement on and off campus. |

‘Can’t be what you can’t see’:

The transition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students into higher education

Chapter 5: Summary of Key Issues and Opportunities



Chapter 5: Summary of Key Issues and Opportunities

The 14 elements of leading practice (Chapter 4) provide a guide to opportunities which different universities can undertake to enhance Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students' transition to higher education. The models which have been identified previously existed in various forms within each IEU in Australian universities. To a degree, it is possible to identify stages of development from the Standard Model to the School Model, Indigenous Governance and finally, Indigenous Knowledge Centre Model. However, beyond the Standard Model, it is important not to fall into the trap of seeing the different models in a hierarchy of value or specifically in stages of development. It is more relevant to enable universities to identify a model which suits their institutional and community contexts, and to utilise the elements of leading practice as a guide to enhancing student transition.

In regard to the identified under-represented groups (women as primary carers, young men, people in the prison system and people with disabilities), the Project Team found a number of specific programs in operation or development, but little real focus on these groups as separate identifiable groups with special needs within universities and the wider transition sector. All respondents identified the need for more targeted programs for these groups; yet few were able to implement such programs to meet this need, relying instead on mainstream support mechanisms.

Vice-Chancellors (VCs) have responded positively to the Indigenous Higher Education Review (*IHER*, 2012). However, the key to student outcomes will involve Vice-Chancellors discussing it and deciding exactly how they plan to support and implement it in their institutions. As stated previously, the Federal Government's response to the recommendations of the *IHER* included \$ 18.1 million of Higher Education Participation and Partnerships Program (HEPPP) allocated to nine priority projects of national significance which can be viewed online at (<http://www.education.gov.au/nationally-significant-projects-addressing-behrendt-review>). However, many respondents noted that implementing the recommendations of *IHER* cannot be left to the Federal Government alone. There is much that can be done at the Vice-Chancellor and IEU manager level. Governance is an important element of success, but it is not just about creating more governance.

A leading Indigenous academic and executive manager noted:

We need people to be focusing on the key messages of the Review into Indigenous Higher Education and make sure they are focused on by our own institutions. We need decision makers to really understand what it is all about.

The reality is that IEUs are still required to do the 'heavy lifting' as there are not enough resources spread across the university faculties, or enough staff members with

'Can't be what you can't see':

The transition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students into higher education

Indigenous Knowledges and expertise to ensure that students, staff members and programs receive adequate focus. There still needs to be a central Indigenous body that will keep people focused and provide support and facilitate change. In some institutions, this policy and decision making driver is taking place at senior Indigenous executive levels. The key point is that Indigenous education needs such drivers for universities to achieve results.

Indigenous Education Units are responsible for most of the achievements in transitioning Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students in the past 30 years even when they have been under-resourced. However, when resources have been reduced significantly, or the role of the centres has been transformed through policy that has weakened their focus, Indigenous education has not bloomed. Lack of university support has contributed to centres floundering or failing, and changing policy has further reduced their effectiveness.

A senior Indigenous educator working within a leading Indigenous IEU with a strong track record of student transition and completion stated: “If you look at where Indigenous education is thriving you'll see strong Indigenous units at the centre of those outcomes. You'll not find Indigenous students succeeding without that support”.

Another key issue is the need to provide a sense of community. The majority of respondents identified the need to create a sense of place and belonging for students and information needs to be provided so they can know what is expected while at university and break down any sense of alienation they may experience initially.

Nearly all respondents identified the need to humanise students' experience of coming to university and the important role of centres as part of a university which they feel they belong to: a place of connections that takes place when communities come together. They recognised the necessity to create a sense of belonging for Indigenous staff members and students: a sense that it is a place for them as much as anyone else. The existence of the Centre at the university is also important for community members who can feel it is a place they can link with and know that it is there for them.

The best chance of success is to create an environment of community and family connection that looks to fostering generational change and connection with the institution, so that people create a history with the institution and also become part of making decisions about community related issues.

It is important to note that while the new approaches within the Governance Model enable the identification of key roles and responsibilities, the knowledge about how best to achieve successful Indigenous student transition, retention and completion does not automatically exist within the faculties. Indigenous education is everyone's business. No one operates in isolation. Students consistently indicate that they are looking for sound information and IEU staff members have identified that such resources yield good results, thus Indigenous students' information experiences are

‘Can’t be what you can’t see’:

The transition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students into higher education

crucial. Providing people with course guides, applications for entry, clear pathways of access and other information is incredibly useful, but requires resourcing and staff members to implement and design these outreach programs.

The overall constraint recognised by the majority of respondents that many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Students face is the lack of basic foundations in education, social support and the impacts of intergenerational poverty and trauma. These realities for many students mean that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Students are starting without foundations that other students take for granted. There is no level playing field from which students can compete and achieve based on merit alone. They need support to make the playing field level in the first place. Geography counts. It is important to identify this context so that appropriately targeted programs, partnerships and pathways can be employed to enhance transitions. For instance, in those areas with poor outcomes, it is likely that people have not engaged with Western society as strongly as other areas from where students enter university, sometimes following their parents' paths. In the areas that are somewhat disengaged from Western society, the common knowledge about how to deal with places like a university is not widespread, and so more work needs to be done to address this which builds on people's cultural and community strengths but acknowledges the skills pathway in need of support. This is not to say that every individual from a remote region, regional community or urban low SES background cannot also simply rise to and even thrive on the challenges that confront them. However, staff members within IEOs indicated a more general pattern of such students initially needing more support to cope with this aspect of transition to higher education.

There is a kind of non-Indigenous cultural competency that some Indigenous leaders identified as taking generations to develop and respondents have acknowledged this as an important issue that needs to be addressed. When discussing this issue or 'gap' respondents have noted that the approach of building these skills may be viewed incorrectly in some circles as assimilation. This simplistic view is tempered by the acknowledgement that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander leaders and students have already transformed what it means to be Australian in the modern context, and Aboriginal community engagement in all aspects of Australian life and culture, including within universities, adds to the vibrancy and diversity of Australian culture. It also comes from a maturity which acknowledges that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Students have interests beyond their own communities in the same way many non-Indigenous peoples have very definite interests in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures. As one leading academic stated;

Just because some Kartiya (non-Aboriginal person) takes an interest in Aboriginal culture, doesn't mean they're assimilating into our mob. We have to get away from this them and us business and realise that we've been dealing with one another for centuries now. It's not been an equal relationship for most of this period, and this is reflected in our people's educational outcomes, our incomes, our opportunities. But we also have to acknowledge that we have engaged with Western culture and we are always looking for ways to create

'Can't be what you can't see':

The transition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students into higher education

opportunities for non-Aboriginal people to be more than the sum of their own history. There is scope for growth all round.

This approach also acknowledges that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have the ability to be Indigenous and to negotiate mainstream systems; and are increasingly doing better in terms of outcomes at university; and in ways that add to and transform universities to make them more unique learning environments.

Acknowledging these strengths that already exist in Indigenous communities, yet noting the need to address these gaps, a national Indigenous higher education provider highlighted that:

Gaps, generally are the biggest constraint. Universities also need to be resourcing significant university outreach. Regardless of what life might be dishing out and the lack of resources, there are always opportunities to reach out to your community. It helps to have resources to target students in schools, but community involvement should always be part of the process. The commonwealth and the states should be funding these kinds of mentoring experiences. You can't imagine what you haven't seen.

On the evidence of numbers alone, there has been a steady increase in Indigenous student numbers over time and this has led to a general increase in the overall Indigenous student population. Enhancing transitions for all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, and for other under-represented groups, will require a greater focus on targets for increasing student higher education completions and the appropriate resources and governance to work with community based and IEU based assets which are already in place. The research finds that there is significant scope for increasing and enhancing the transition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students into higher education by building on the assets already in place and supporting IEUs to be able to engage in leading practice actions toward this end.

‘Can’t be what you can’t see’:

The transition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students into higher education

References

- AIME Mentoring. (2011). AIME: Australian Indigenous Mentoring Experience. Retrieved September 12, 2011, from <http://www.aimementoring.com/>
- Ainley, J., Buckley, S., Beavis, A., Rothman, S., & Tovey, A. (2011). Analysis of Year 12 or Certificate II attainment of Indigenous young people – Stage 1: A report prepared for the Council of Australian Governments Reform Council: Australian Council for Educational Research.
- Atkinson, J. (2008). Educare and human rights: An Indigenous Australian response to the effects of colonisation and trauma. In C. Newell & B. Offord (Eds.), *Activating human rights in education: Exploration, innovation and transformation* (pp. 117-133). Deakin West, ACT: Australian College of Educators.
- Aurora Project, T. (2009). *The Indigenous students' guide to postgraduate scholarships in Australia and overseas*. Coogee, NSW: Aurora Project/The Charlie Perkins Trust for Children & Students.
- Aurora Project, T. (2011). Indigenous scholarships. Retrieved April 4, 2012, from <http://www.indigenousscholarships.com.au/>
- Austin, K., & Heath, J. (2011). *Using DEMO to evaluate and enhance schools outreach programs: an example from the South Coast of New South Wales*. Paper presented at the 2nd Annual Student Equity in Higher Education National Conference. <http://ro.uow.edu.au/asdpapers/304/>
- Australia. Department of Education Employment and Workplace Relations. (2011a). Higher Education Participation and Partnerships Program (HEPPP). Retrieved April 5, 2012, from <http://www.deewr.gov.au/highereducation/programs/equity/pages/heppprogr am.aspx>
- Australia. Department of Education Employment and Workplace Relations. (2011b). *Indigenous Education Statement (IES)*. Retrieved from <http://www.innovation.gov.au/HigherEducation/IndigenousHigherEducation/Documents/Programs/2011IESstatement.pdf>
- Australia. Department of Education Employment and Workplace Relations. (2011c). *Undergraduate applications offers and acceptances 2011*. Canberra, ACT: Commonwealth of Australia. Retrieved from <http://www.deewr.gov.au/HigherEducation/Publications/HEReports/Documents/UndergraduateApplications2011.pdf>
- Australia. Department of Education Employment and Workplace Relations. (2012a). *Annual national report of the Australian vocational education and training system 2010*. Canberra, ACT: DEEWR.

‘Can’t be what you can’t see’:

The transition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students into higher education

- Australia. Department of Education Employment and Workplace Relations. (2012b). Commonwealth Scholarships. Retrieved March 22, 2012, from <http://www.deewr.gov.au/highereducation/programs/studentsupport/commonwealthscholarships/Pages/Home.aspx>
- Australia. Department of Education Employment and Workplace Relations. (2012c). National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Policy. Retrieved December 18, 2012, from <http://deewr.gov.au/national-aboriginal-and-torres-strait-islander-education-policy>
- Australia. Department of Education Employment and Workplace Relations (DEEWR). (2011). *The Indigenous Education (Targeted Assistance) Act Annual Report, 2009*. Canberra, ACT: Commonwealth of Australia.
- Australia. Department of Education Employment and Workplace Relations (DEEWR), & Bradley, D. (2008). Review of Australian higher education report. Retrieved October 12, 2010, from <http://www.innovation.gov.au/HigherEducation/ResourcesAndPublications/ReviewOfAustralianHigherEducation/Pages/ReviewOfAustralianHigherEducationReport.aspx>
- Australia. Department of Education Science and Training. (2004). *Review into the impact of ABSTUDY changes that came into effect in 2000: A discussion paper*. Canberra, ACT: Commonwealth of Australia. Retrieved from http://www.deewr.gov.au/Indigenous/Schooling/Programs/Documents/ABSTUDY_Changes/DiscussionPaper.pdf
- Australia. Department of Education Science Training. (1999). *A national strategy to improve education and training outcomes for adult Indigenous Australians in the custody of correctional authorities*. (0642239460). Canberra, ACT: Department of Education Science Training. Retrieved from <http://hdl.voced.edu.au/10707/62160>
- Australia. Department of Finance Administration. Office of Evaluation Audit. (2005). *Evaluation of the Indigenous education strategic initiatives programme - away-from-base for 'mixed-mode' delivery (IESIP-AFB)*. (1921182342). Canberra, ACT: Commonwealth of Australia. Retrieved from http://www.anao.gov.au/uploads/documents/Evaluation_of_the_Indigenous_Education_Strategic_Initiatives_Programme_-_Away-from-Base_for_Mixed_Mode_Delivery_%28IESIP-AFB%29_Report.pdf
- Australia. Department of Industry Innovation Climate Change Science Research and Tertiary Education. (2013). Indigenous students 2012.
- Australia. Department of Industry Innovation Science Research and Tertiary Education. (2011). *Indigenous Education (Targeted Assistance) Program Guidelines 2009 to 2012*. Canberra, ACT: Commonwealth of Australia. Retrieved from <http://www.innovation.gov.au/HigherEducation/IndigenousHigherEducation/Pages/AwayFromBase.aspx>

'Can't be what you can't see':

The transition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students into higher education

- Australia. Department of Industry Innovation Science Research and Tertiary Education. (2012). *Summary of the 2011 full year higher education student statistics*. Canberra, ACT: Australia. Department of Industry Innovation Science Research and Tertiary Education. Retrieved from <http://www.innovation.gov.au/HigherEducation/HigherEducationStatistics/Documents/Publications/11AttachmentB.pdf>
- Australia. Senate Select Committee on Regional and Remote Communities. (2010). *Indigenous Australians, incarceration and the criminal justice system: a discussion paper prepared by the committee secretariat*.
- Australian Broadcasting Commission (ABC). (2011). ABC Online Indigenous opinion: Close the gap and other rhetoric in the place of real policies. Retrieved from <http://www.abc.net.au/indigenous/stories/s3125869.htm>
- Australian Bureau of Statistics. (2009). *National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Survey, 2008*. (Cat no. 4714.0). Canberra, ACT: Australian Bureau of Statistics. Retrieved from <http://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/Latestproducts/4714.0Main%20Features72008?opendocument&tabname=Summary&prodno=4714.0&issue=2008&num=&view=>
- Australian Bureau of Statistics. (2010). *4430.0 - Disability, Ageing and Carers, Australia: Summary of Findings, 2009*. Canberra, ACT: Commonwealth of Australia. Retrieved from <http://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/Latestproducts/4430.0Main%20Features12009?opendocument&tabname=Summary&prodno=4430.0&issue=2009&num=&view=>
- Australian Bureau of Statistics. (2011a). *4704.0 - The Health and Welfare of Australia's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples, Oct 2010* Canberra, ACT: Commonwealth of Australia. Retrieved from <http://www.abs.gov.au/AUSSTATS/abs@.nsf/lookup/4704.0Chapter365Oct+2010>
- Australian Bureau of Statistics. (2011b). *Australian Standard Geographical Classification (ASGC), cat no 1216.0*. Canberra, ACT: Retrieved from <http://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/mf/1216.0>
- Australian Bureau of Statistics. (2011c). The health and welfare of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, October 2010. Cat no. 4704.0. Retrieved March 28, 2012, from <http://www.abs.gov.au/AUSSTATS/abs@.nsf/lookup/4704.0Chapter510Oct+2010>
- Australian Bureau of Statistics. (2011d). *Schools, Australia, 2010*. Retrieved March 28, 2012, from <http://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/mf/4221.0>
- Australian Bureau of Statistics. (2013a). *Corrective Services, June quarter 2013*: Cat. no 4512.0.
- Australian Bureau of Statistics. (2013b). *Schools Australia, 2012*: Catalogue no. 4221.0. Retrieved November 14, 2013, from <http://www.abs.gov.au>
- Australian Curriculum Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA). (2011). *Curriculum, ACARA*. Retrieved April 3, 2012, from <http://www.acara.edu.au/curriculum/curriculum.html>

'Can't be what you can't see':

The transition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students into higher education

- Australian Indigenous Education Foundation. (2011). AIEF - Australian Indigenous Education Foundation. Retrieved April 3, 2012, from <http://www.aief.com.au>
- Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership. (2011). Accreditation of initial teacher education programs in Australia: Standards and procedures. Retrieved from <http://www.teacherstandards.aitsl.edu.au/static/docs/7%20Accred%20Init%20Teacher%20Ed%20Cover%20Conv%20Aust.pdf>
- Bandias, S., Fuller, D., & Pfitzner, D. (2011). Vocational and higher education in Australia: A need for closer collaboration. *Journal of Higher Education Policy and Management*, 33(6), 583-594.
- Behrendt, L., Larkin, S., Griew, R., & Kelly, P. (2012). *Review of higher education access and outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people: Final report*. Canberra, ACT: Department of Industry, Innovation, Science, Research and Tertiary Education.
- Biddle, N., & Cameron, T. (2012). Potential factors influencing Indigenous education participation and achievement. Adelaide, SA: NCVER.
- Bin-Sallik, M. (2003). Cultural safety : let's name it! *Australian Journal of Indigenous Education*, 32(2003), 21-28.
- Boughton, B. (2000). What is the connection between Aboriginal education and Aboriginal health? Casuarina, NT: CRCATH.
- Bunda, T., Zipin, L., & Brennan, M. (2012). Negotiating university 'equity' from Indigenous standpoints: a shaky bridge. *International Journal of Inclusive Education*, 16(9), 941-957. doi: 10.1080/13603116.2010.523907
- Burrow, S., Galloway, A., & Weisssofner, N. (2009). Review of educational and other approaches to hearing loss among Indigenous people. Retrieved from Australian Indigenous Health InfoNet website: <http://www.healthinfonet.ecu.edu.au/other-health-conditions/ear/reviews/our-review-education>
- Callan, V., & Gardner, J. (2005). *Vocational education and training provision and recidivism in Queensland correctional institutions*. Adelaide, SA: National Centre for Vocational Education Research.
- Carapetis, J., & Silburn, S. (2011). *Key factors influencing educational outcomes for Indigenous students and their implications for planning and practice in the Northern Territory*. Paper presented at the Australian Council for Educational Research conference 2011 : Indigenous education : pathways to success : conference proceedings, Darwin, NT. [http://www.acer.edu.au/documents/RC2011 -
Key factors influencing educational outcomes for Indigenous students and their implications for planning and practice in the Northern Territory.pdf](http://www.acer.edu.au/documents/RC2011_-_Key_factors_influencing_educational_outcomes_for_Indigenous_students_and_their_implications_for_planning_and_practice_in_the_Northern_Territory.pdf)
- Carnes, R. (2011). *Education revolution or just plain revolting? Aboriginal prisoner education in Western Australia*. Paper presented at the AARE Conference 2011: Researching Across Boundaries. November 27-December 1, 2011, Hobart, Tasmania.

'Can't be what you can't see':

The transition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students into higher education

- Centrelink. (2008). *Lawful custody allowance - helping Indigenous people with the cost of studying while imprisoned: A factsheet for prison officers and service providers*. (ah1703_0806en). Canberra, ACT: Australian Government.
- Centrelink. (2012). ABSTUDY. Retrieved April 3, 2012, from <http://www.centrelink.gov.au/internet/internet.nsf/payments/ABSTUDY.htm>
- Council of Australian Governments (COAG). (2011). *National Disability Strategy 2010-2020 Evidence Base*. Canberra, ACT: Commonwealth of Australia.
- Craven, R. G., & Marder, K. (2007). *Career aspirations of rural and urban Indigenous students*. Paper presented at the 4th International Biennial SELF research conference : self-concept, motivation, social and personal identity for the 21st Century, Ann Arbor, Michigan.
<http://www.rcgd.isr.umich.edu/garp/self/keynote%20abstracts/SELF%20Abstracts.pdf>
- Dawe, S. (2004). *Moving on from enabling courses: why do some students remain in enabling courses?* Adelaide, SA: NCVER.
- Doyle, L., & Hill, R. (2012). *The best of every woman: An overview of approaches for philanthropic investment in Aboriginal women and girls*. Sydney, NSW: AMP Foundation.
- Engineering Aid Australia. (2011). *Annual report*. St. Ives, NSW: Engineering Aid Australia.
- Ford, P.L. (2010). *Aboriginal knowledge, narratives & country: Marri kunkimba putj putj marrideyan*. Teneriffe, Qld: Post Pressed.
- Fordham, A. M., & Schwab, R. G. (2007). *Education, training and Indigenous futures: CAEPR Policy Research 1990–2007*. Canberra, ACT: Centre for Aboriginal Economic Policy Research, Australian National University.
- Gale, T., Sellar, S., Parker, S., Hattam, R., Comber, B., Tranter, D., & Bills, D. (2010). *Interventions early in school as a means to improve higher education outcomes for disadvantaged (particularly low SES) students*. Canberra, ACT: Australia. Department of Education, Employment, and Workplace Relations.
- Gale, T. and Parker, S. (2013). *Widening Participation in Higher Education*. United Kingdom, Higher Education Funding Council for England. Retrieved from http://www.ncsehe.edu.au/wpcontent/uploads/2013/10/2013_WPeffectivenessAus.pdf
- Indigenous Business Australia. (2009). *Mining opportunities in the Pilbara*. Inspire, (3). <http://www.iba.gov.au/inspire-october-2009/mining-opportunities-in-the-pilbara/>
- Indigenous Business Australia. (2011). *IBA Scholarship Fund: Post 2011 Policy*. Retrieved November 18, 2013, from <http://www.iba.gov.au/corporate/iba-scholarships/>
- Indigenous Higher Education Advisory Council. (2008). *Supplementary submission to the review of Higher Education*. Australian Government. Retrieved from <http://www.deewr.gov.au/Indigenous/HigherEducation/Programs/IHEAC/Documents/SuppHER.pdf>

‘Can’t be what you can’t see’:

The transition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students into higher education

- Indigenous Higher Education Advisory Council. (2010). *Submission to DEEWR discussion paper: Measuring the socio-economic status of higher education students*. Retrieved from <http://www.deewr.gov.au/Indigenous/HigherEducation/Programs/IHEAC/Documents/SESMeasurement.pdf>
- Indigenous Higher Education Advisory Council. (2011). Submission to the review of student income support reforms. Canberra, ACT: Indigenous Higher Education Advisory Council.
- Jacobs, A., Sinclair, A., Williams, C., & Rowlands, J. Q. (2002). *Do You Hear What I Hear? Living and learning with conductive hearing loss/Otitis media*. East Perth, WA: WA Department of Education.
- James, R. (2000). *TAFE, university or work: The early preferences and choices of students in years 10, 11 and 12*. Leabrook, SA: NCVER.
- Johnston, V., Lea, T., & Carapetis, J. (2009). Joining the dots: The links between education and health and implications for Indigenous children. *Journal Of Paediatrics And Child Health*, 45(12), 692-697.
- Larkins, S., Page, P., Panaretto, K. S., Mitchell, M., Alberts, V., McGinty, S., & Veitch, C. (2011). The transformative potential of young motherhood for disadvantaged Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women in Townsville, Australia. *Medical Journal of Australia*, 194(10), 551-555.
- Larkins, S., Page, P., Panaretto, K. S., Scott, R., Mitchell, M., Alberts, V., McGinty, S. (2009). Educational aspirations and views of pregnancy of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people in Townsville, Australia. *Redress*, 18(3), 11-18.
- Miller, C. (2007). Education and training for Indigenous people in prisons. In S. Dawe (Ed.), *Vocational education and training for adult prisoners and offenders in Australia: Research readings* (pp. 204-234). Adelaide, SA: NCVER. Retrieved from <http://www.ncver.edu.au/publications/1789.html>
- Milroy, J. (2011). *Incorporating and understanding different ways of knowing in the education of Indigenous students*. Paper presented at the Research conference 2011 : Indigenous education : pathways to success, Darwin, NT. http://research.acer.edu.au/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1109&context=research_conference
- Ministerial Council for Education Early Childhood Development and Youth Affairs (MCEECDYA). (2010). *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Action Plan 2010-2014*. Carlton, Vic: Ministerial Council for Education, Early Childhood Development and Youth Affairs. Retrieved from http://www.mceecdya.edu.au/verve/_resources/A10-0945 IEAP web version final2.pdf
- More Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Teachers Initiative. (2012). More Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Teachers Initiative (MATSITI). Retrieved April 2, 2012, from <http://matsiti.edu.au/>

‘Can’t be what you can’t see’:

The transition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students into higher education

- Muloin, S., & Sellwood, J. (2009). *Building confidence and getting out of your comfort zone: Creating easier pathways for Indigenous and remote prospective JCU students*. Paper presented at the Preparing for tomorrow today: The first year experience as foundation : First Year in Higher Education Conference 2009, Townsville, Qld.
http://www.fyhe.com.au/past_papers/papers09/content/pdf/1E.pdf
- Nakata, M. (2013). The rights and blights of the politics in Indigenous higher education. *Anthropological Forum: A Journal of Social Anthropology and Comparative Sociology*, 1-15. doi: 10.1080/00664677.2013.803457
- National Centre for Vocational Education Research. (2011a). *Australian vocational education and training statistics: Indigenous students 2010*. Adelaide, SA: National Centre for Vocational Education Research. Retrieved from <http://www.ncver.edu.au/publications/2393.html>
- National Centre for Vocational Education Research. (2011b). *Australian vocational education and training statistics: young people in education and training 2010*. Adelaide, SA: NCVER.
- National Centre for Vocational Education Research. (2012). *Australian vocational education and training statistics: Indigenous students 2011*. Adelaide, SA: NCVER.
- National Centre for Vocational Education Research. (2013). *Australian vocational education and training statistics: Indigenous students 2012*. Retrieved from <http://www.ncver.edu.au/publications/2644.html>
- National Welfare Rights Network (NWRN). (2012). ABSTUDY factsheet. In National Welfare Rights Network (NWRN) (Ed.).
- O'Brien, G. (2011). *Designing outreach programs for student success in the classroom and beyond*. Paper presented at the International First Year in Higher Education (Int FYHE) Conference, Fremantle, WA.
http://fyhe.com.au/past_papers/papers11/FYHE-2011/content/pdf/4D.pdf
- O'Neill, M., Kirov, E., & Thomson, N. (2004). A review of literature on disability services for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. *Australian Indigenous Health Bulletin*, 4(4).
- Oliver, R., Rochecouste, J., Bennell, D., Anderson, R., Cooper, I., Forrest, S., & Exell, M. (2013). Understanding Australian Aboriginal tertiary student needs. *International Journal of Higher Education*, 2(4), 52-64. doi: <http://dx.doi.org/10.5430/ijhe.v2n4p52>
- Pakeha, E. (2011). *Submission from Eike Pakeha to the Review of Higher Education Access and Outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People context paper, 2011*. Canberra, ACT: Department of Industry, Innovation, Science, Research and Tertiary Education. Retrieved from <http://www.innovation.gov.au/HigherEducation/IndigenousHigherEducation/ReviewOfIndigenousHigherEducation/Documents/Submissions/SubmissionfromEikePakeha.PDF>

‘Can’t be what you can’t see’:

The transition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students into higher education

- Panel for the Review of Higher Education Access and Outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. (2011). *Review of higher education access and outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people: Context paper and call for submissions*. Canberra, ACT: Commonwealth of Australia. Retrieved from <http://www.deewr.gov.au/Indigenous/HigherEducation/ReviewofIndigenousHigherEducation/Submissions/Documents/IndigenousHigherEducationReview-ContextPaper.pdf>
- Patton, W., Hong, A. L., Lampert, J., Burnett, B., & Anderson, J. (2012). More Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Teachers Initiative: Report into the retention and graduation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students enrolled in initial teacher education. Brisbane, Qld: Queensland University of Technology.
- Pearson, C., & Daff, S. (2011). Collaborative delivery of work-integrated learning to Indigenous Australians in a remote community. *Asia-Pacific Journal of Cooperative Education*, 12(2), 125-145.
- Pechenkina, E., & Anderson, I. (2011). *Background paper on Indigenous Australian higher education: Trends, initiatives and policy implications*. (ISBN 978-0-642-78089-8). Canberra, ACT: Commonwealth of Australia.
- Pechenkina, E., Kowal, E., & Paradies, Y. (2011). Indigenous Australian students' participation rates in higher education: Exploring the role of universities. *Australian Journal of Indigenous Education*, 40(1), 59-68.
- Phan, O., & Ball, K. (2001). Outcomes of enabling courses. Leabrook, SA: NCVER.
- Powell, B., & Lawley, M. (2008). Australian Indigenous students tertiary education choices: Exploring the decision to enter higher education and choice of university. *Journal of the Australian and New Zealand Student Services Association* (31), 23-41.
- Productivity Commission. (2011). *Disability care and support: Productivity Commission Inquiry report*. Canberra, ACT: Commonwealth of Australia. Retrieved from <http://www.pc.gov.au/projects/inquiry/disability-support/report>
- Richardson, S., & Friedman, T. (2011). Research Report: Australian Regional Higher Education: Student characteristics and experiences: Australian Council for Educational Research (ACER).
- Ryan, J. (2011). Access and participation in higher education of students with disabilities: access to what? *Australian Educational Researcher*, 38(1), 73-93.
- Ryan, R., Wilczynski, A., Watkins, S. R., & Rose, J. (2012). Assessment of the social outcomes of the Working on Country program: Urbis Pty Ltd.
- Taylor, J., Gray, M., Hunter, B., Yap, M., & Lahn, J. (2011). Higher education and the growth of Indigenous participation in professional and managerial occupations. Retrieved November, 14, 2013, from <http://caepr.anu.edu.au>
- Taylor, J., & Scambary, B. (2005). Indigenous people and the Pilbara mining boom: A baseline for regional participation. Canberra, ACT: Centre for Aboriginal Economic Policy Research, Australian National University.
- Tiplady, T., & Barclay, M. A. (2007). Indigenous employment in Australian minerals. Brisbane, Qld: Centre for Social Responsibility in Mining, University of Queensland and Rio Tinto Corporation Limited.

'Can't be what you can't see':

The transition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students into higher education

- Trounson, A. (2011, April 20). Support centres can hold back indigenous students, *The Australian*. Retrieved from <http://www.theaustralian.com.au/higher-education/support-centres-can-hold-back-indigenous-students/story-e6frgcjx-1226041765703>
- Trudgett, M. (2010). Supporting the learning needs of Indigenous Australians in higher education: How can they be best achieved? *The International Journal of Learning*, 17(3), 351-361.
- University of Technology Sydney. (2012). UTS: About us - Jumbunna. Retrieved April 2, 2012, from <http://www.jumbunna.uts.edu.au/about/index.html>
- Usher, S. (2010). Education behind bars. *Australian TAFE Teacher*, 44(2), 16-18.
- Vanderpoll, T., & Howard, D. (2011). Investigation into hearing impairment among Indigenous prisoners within the Northern Territory Correctional Services.
- Walter, M. M. (2010). The politics of the data: How the Australian statistical Indigene is constructed. *International Journal of Critical Indigenous Studies*, 3(2), 45-56.
- Whatman, S., & Duncan, P. (2005). Community participation in Indigenous education: Learning from the past, in policy and practice. In J. Phillips (Ed.), *Introductory Indigenous studies in education: The importance of knowing* (pp. 117-138). Frenchs Forest, NSW: Pearson Australia.
- Whatman, S., McLaughlin, J., Willsteed, S., Tyhuis, A., & Beetson, S. (2008). Quality and efficacy of the Indigenous Tutorial Assistance Scheme (ITAS) for university students. *Australian Journal of Indigenous Education*, 37(2008), Supplement 118-130.
- White, N., & Fredericks, B. (2012). Tiddas writin' up: Indigenous women and educational leadership. Sydney, NSW: Office for Learning and Teaching, Department of Industry, Innovation, Science, Research and Tertiary Education.
- Yalari. (2010). Yalari: Educating Indigenous children. Retrieved January 21, 2012, from <http://www.yalari.org/>

'Can't be what you can't see':

The transition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students into higher education

Appendices

Appendix 1:

Summative Evaluation

'Can't Be What You Can't See': The Transition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Students into Higher Education

Steve Kinnane Rod Little, Canberra

12/19/2013

'Can't be what you can't see':

The transition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students into higher education

Introduction

This evaluation aims to interpret the extent of achievement of the project objectives; and form an independent opinion on the effectiveness of the project strategy and management.

It also seeks to highlight potential gaps or inconsistencies and opportunities, as well as comment on the overall management and implementation of the project contributing to meeting its key objectives.

In arriving at these views and completing this evaluation, reassurance of the project deliverables and the following has been carried out:

- a) Reading of the draft report;
- b) Reading of the Literature Review;
- c) Visit and navigate the Edmodo site; and
- d) Conversation with project team members.

This independent summary of the findings of the report '*Can't Be What You Can't See' The Transition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Students to Higher Education*, will focus on the key research areas of:

- Enablers and constraints that have impacted on transition success of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander students;
- National and international literature on best practice models or frameworks;
- Examination of support initiatives not delivering intended outcomes; and
- Highlighting strategies that will assist students to successfully transition.

It is noted that the project deliverables were not limited to but included posting of the Literature Review; Final Report, a *Can't Be what you can't see: The transition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students to higher education website* and published articles and conference papers however unfortunately the web url is disabled or not yet activated.

Finally, this evaluation will provide a brief conclusion on key aspects of the project findings and the value or significance of the project's work contributing to existing knowledge and potential opportunities to support further successful transition.

'Can't be what you can't see':

The transition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students into higher education

Project content

Achievement of project outcomes

It is apparent that the project planning and monitoring has achieved the intended objectives. The findings uncover or affirm constraints that potentially can be contributing factors to progressive success stories; for example, financial capacity; prioritising and valuing of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander knowledges, lived experiences and leaning practices; competency of institution personnel and much needed changes in organisational/intuitional cultures.

Value of project enhancing knowledge

This project has exposed an enormous amount of existing national and international information to support the enhancement of knowledge and effective initiatives. A view is that the combination of this evidence and the alignment with the Indigenous Higher Education Review recommendations is of significant value for enhancing knowledge to support; and a key consideration may be is 'how to use this to influence action and subsequent change contributing to success'.

Recommendations of the Indigenous Higher Education Review [2012]

The project wholly supports the recommendations of the Indigenous Higher Education Review of 2012. A critical support or alignment with the report is the outreach approaches particularly with schools and communities in enhancing student readiness for higher education and VET through high expectations, developing and ensuring the academic foundations are sound to support successful education journeys.

Leading Practice Models

The practice models are invaluable sources in the provision of student support and have an exceptionally useful role in outreach approaches. However, resourcing is a significant factor in the report that is fundamental to building and sustaining the models that contribute considerably to success.

Project Strategy and Management

Effectiveness of project leadership and management

Appendix 1 of the report clearly articulates a well thought out process for the establishment of the Terms of Agreement and methodology of the project. The highly reputational expertise, experienced and leadership quality and commitment has

'Can't be what you can't see':

The transition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students into higher education

undoubtedly attributed to the team's commitment, support and drive for quality results.

On reading the draft report and the Literature Review, an initial interpretation is formed of the four objectives of the *Aims and Research Questions* presenting somewhat challenging tasks for the team particularly in terms of the breadth of access to enablers and constraints impacting on the identified under-representative groups. These groups appeared to extend at times due to responses from informants and geographical locations of students, situations impacting on women as primary carers; young men; people in prisons; students from remote areas; people transitioning from VET; and people with disabilities.

However, the terms of reference allowed for this extension and the information obtained supports the capacity of the project team to effectively demonstrate versatility to acquire necessary information in line with the objectives and capturing additional information across the breadth of under-represented groups adding value to the project.

Effectiveness of the project tools

The succinct methodology clearly attributed to the acquisition of both qualitative and quantitative information and processes highlighted the difficulties with examining institution data collection and reporting mechanisms. This may have some impact on the *Outcomes and Deliverables* of an effective transition model to be used broadly to influence growth in the successful transition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples into higher education.

According to project team members the on-line forum Edmodo for educators and learners was an effective and productive tool for sharing knowledge and experiences, contributing to analysis of information and collaborative discussion for forming consensus for the report. Edmodo is a free flowing friendly environment enabling users to access professional and lived experiences and resources to inform themselves and explore solutions.

Appendix 2 Interview Questions – targeting Indigenous Education Units; Key Informants and Students; is an in depth reasonable well structured approach to engaging with informant and based on the responses resulting in a very effect for informing the findings.

As highlighted in the report the Survey Monkey responses were of a small sample and perhaps may need to be reviewed as an effective tool.

‘Can’t be what you can’t see’:

The transition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students into higher education

Lessons learned

Commitment, collaboration and passion of all involved in this project appear to be a key success factor, spanning from the development and design of the project and terms of reference. Aboriginal and Torres Islander peoples 'lens', qualifications, professionalism and lived experiences are another.

As mentioned above, the difficulties expressed in the report regarding institution data systems or processes potentially is a gap that could strengthen the findings or better inform models for successful transition.

Another constraint interpreted from the report is *institution cultures*; this may potentially be a major success factor to successful transitions, however, as highlighted by the report it requires exceptional take-up from institutions governance and leadership and some considerable time to change.

Dissemination

Notwithstanding existing networks, social or institutional, it is anticipated that in its partnership role in developing and implementing the dissemination strategy the Indigenous Higher Education Advisory Committee will consider strengthening networks and informing stakeholders and students.

Sustainability of outcomes

Whilst the project has found an investment growth through pathway development and engagement, sustained resourcing across a myriad of stakeholders and institutions may be challenging in the future.

Enablers and Constraints

Fully support both the Literature Review and report's identification in these areas which must be viewed as opportunities for contributing to the consolidation of successful models that enable a student's journey to higher education a positive experience.

One of the greatest enablers to the success of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples is the engagement of them on matters that impact on their lives. The four specific under-represented groups may need to be further clarified, e.g. women who are principle carers; young men; prisoners or people in prison systems, and *remote students or people [students] with disabilities or young people transitioning from VET*.

'Can't be what you can't see':

The transition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students into higher education

Under-represented group identified at the Aims & Research Questions may need to better represented and aligned with the findings at Chapter 2, plus equally reflected in the Framework of Leading Practice.

Enablers

It is acknowledged that engagement and the valuing of engagement of students, parents and families, key education personnel and community to support and guide students through the transition phase is paramount to building student confidence and likelihood of success.

Clear, concise and relevant student information is a key enable before and during preparation to embarking on a journey to higher education, so too is this critical during student's time in higher education institutions.

Based on an interpretation of the evidence within the report it would appear that successful transitioning of students is more likely to occur where there is change in institution cultures and relationships attributed by Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander peoples being involved in leadership and decision making.

Whilst cultural competency training is a key finding, cultural improvements within institution, including recommendations addressing racism or prejudice may potentially be more persuasively emphasised.

Long term sustainable resourcing is a constant message from institutions and communities; however recommendations and findings of referenced evidence and research collectively may serve to strengthen an investment argument with funders. Evidence data is key to investing in the most effective model of practice.

Constraints

It is supported that the quality of data to inform success is critical. In regard to transition, not only student success but processes and procedures, and consistency across institutions would be valuable to enable student and personnel understanding, collaboration and planning.

Inconsistent data sets and processes across institutions reflect moderate to extreme difficulties in demonstrating successes of support initiatives; as well as value for money and tracking of students between education institutions and beyond. This baseline data gap is recognised in the Literature Review.

A familiar contributing constraint to success is the lack of appropriate resources to enable the sustainability of effective initiatives which would have far greater outcomes embedded in systemically.

'Can't be what you can't see':

The transition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students into higher education

Best practise framework

Whilst it is encouraged not to view the best practice models from a hierarchy perspective and acknowledge each will have its own purpose and impact, it may well present the opportunity for an analysis of models for key elements that demonstrates or contributes to the greater transition success for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students.

Also, an opportunity may be present to review the models strategically commencing with a 'whole education journey' perspective in that the outreach approach engages and promotes high expectations [*'Can see, can be'*] and build the foundations for the arrival and survival in higher education or VET.

Of the 14 key elements may be beneficial to describe these logically from engagement at community or school level with potential students and supporters realising the journey or pathway choices available with the necessary information to support and guide success, particularly for the under-representative groups.

An apparent gap in a leading practice model is perhaps student health and social and emotional wellbeing which is a key factor of success for young people. Where there is the necessary support and management in these areas it is likely to affect retention and completion rates at universities.

Initiative impacts

Potentially a sample of comparative analysis of a couple of initiatives would demonstrate achieving significant positive impacts from well supported and valued participation. Outreach; engagement and informed community support has potential to enhance opportunities to influence change in participation, challenge myths and barriers and also promote success and high expectations.

Effective strategies

The report highlights significant strategies contributing to successful transition of peoples. Of particular concern is capacity to sustain effectiveness given the recognised constraints; however the approach to improve utilisation of technology, existing networks and enhanced engagements and relationship building is commended.

'Can't be what you can't see':

The transition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students into higher education

Conclusion

Overall the main objectives of the project have been achieved exceptionally. The national and international information available and referenced will undoubtedly enhance knowledge and inform support of successful transitioning. However where this evidence is not embraced or seriously taken up and invested in to influence change it may be viewed as not contributing substantially to the success of this project or consequently to successful transition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students to higher education.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples have the opportunity for taking control of their success through leading and creating an environment of success, 'can see, can be'; cultural safety and where there is history of success in the university, alumni's, living proof sharing experience and achievements from individuals, young or older. It is acknowledged that where the fundamental foundations of a good education are absent, the journey to a successful higher education experience is a greater challenge. A potential gap in the report is an analysis or reference to stimulate conversation about scenarios of consequences where there is withdrawal of resources and what are potential impacts for student or institutions.

I commend the work in this area and congratulate all involved.

Rod Little

'Can't be what you can't see':

The transition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students into higher education

Appendix 2:

The transition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students into higher education (SI11-2138)

Interview Questions – Indigenous Education Units

- 1 – 5) (Questions 1-5 focused on identification of individuals, their institution, position and Aboriginality)
- 6) How do you access information about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students at your university?
- 7) Can you provide figures for commencement and completion of Indigenous students in higher education at your university?
- 8) Are there any significant changes or trends that you can identify (including changes to university and (or) government policy)?
- 9) How are Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students accessing higher education at your institution? What is the breakdown between school leavers, mature age, tertiary enabling programs and bridging courses - from VET courses or TAFE?
- 10) How many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students are accessing your services on a daily basis and how?
- 11) Do you identify Indigenous students with disabilities (how do you identify these students, referrals etc)?
- 12) What services are available targeting Indigenous students with disabilities (do you facilitate access to other university services or do you provide them within your own centres, are they funded support programs)?
- 13) Do you have specific programs that focus on engaging Indigenous students who are currently or formerly in prison?
- 14) How many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are working within your centre?
- 15) How many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff, in academic teaching support and student programs; and what are their roles?
- 16) What do you consider constitutes a successful transition to university for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students?

'Can't be what you can't see':

The transition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students into higher education

- i) What are the key enablers to successful transitions?
 - ii) What are the main constraints to successful transitions?
- 17) What programs are you aware of designed to engage/support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students to enrol in university; from your university (or) external to your university?
 - 18) What programs exist for retention and support of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students? Are there any aspirational programs internal or external to your institution being utilised?
 - 19) To what extent are Indigenous perspectives and knowledges being incorporated into programs on offer at your institution?
 - 20) How is your institution funded to support Indigenous students and what is the breakdown of resourcing of your unit in terms of staff, student programs, student facilities and communication with the community?
 - 21) Are there any activities you undertake that are unfunded but seen to be important support?
 - 22) Are there any comments that you would like to add?

Interview Questions – Key Informants

- 1-5) (Questions 1-5 focused on identification of individuals, their institution, position and Aboriginality)
- 6) What current programs and models do you have in place to support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students successfully transition to university?
- 7) What are the key factors within models that you are utilizing that are enabling successful transition?
- 8) What other useful and valuable models have you trialled or are aware of that should be considered for wider implementation and why?
- 9) Literature suggests (and numbers of students studying for higher education degrees) that current models overall are not delivering successful outcomes. What do you consider are the key reasons for this overall trend?
- 10) What do you consider to be the key constraints to successful transitions?
- 11) What strategies do you believe need to be implemented to support successful Indigenous transitions into university?

‘Can’t be what you can’t see’:

The transition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students into higher education

- 12) At the community support centre level and wider institutional level what would be beneficial to Indigenous student transition to university?
- 13) What needs to be done at the policy and management level within government and funding programs to enable Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander transition into university?
- 14) Any further comments or points you would like to make from your perspective?

Interview Questions – Students

- 1-5) (Questions 1-5 focused on identification of individuals, their institution, position and Aboriginality)
- 6) What mode of study are you enrolled in?
- 7) Are you studying full time or part time?
- 8) If you are not currently enrolled when did you last study and how long did it take you to complete your studies?
- 9) As part of the research we have been asked to look at underrepresented groups of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people accessing higher education. We acknowledge that compared to non-Indigenous people Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are underrepresented. We are canvassing a range of people with diverse experiences, coming to university with different life experiences, differing circumstances etc. Would you describe yourself as experiencing any of these factors?
- 10) What is your story of coming to university?
- 11) When and why did you decide to go to university?
- 12) What was your path to university? (NOTE: you can select more than one answer for this question)
- 13) How many other family members also attended university and what did they study?
- 14) Were your family or community supportive of you attending university? How did they support you?
- 15) What course of study have you chosen?
- 16) Was the course described above your first choice?

'Can't be what you can't see':

The transition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students into higher education

- 17) Have you changed course since you started studying?
- 18) Do you use any Indigenous support programs on offer at your University, or external to your uni (why or why not)?
- 19) What could be done to help people achieve what they want from their university education?
- 20) What have been the key factors that have enabled you to come to and stay at university?
- 21) What role did family, community or others play in your decision to come to university and help you stay at university?
- 22) Can you name one or two key things that helped you to come to university; how did they help?
- 23) Can you name one or two things you had to overcome to be able to come and to stay at university?
- 24) What advice would you give to a young person in your community who is thinking of coming to university?
- 25) What would you say to your university about improving the support available?
- 26) Were there any influences we have not discussed?

‘Can’t be what you can’t see’:

The transition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students into higher education

Appendix 3:

(Note: Names have been withheld at this time due to agreed confidentiality and release agreements that require permission to quote individuals. This list only details individuals interviewed. At least twice this number were contacted for interview and provided information via personal communication that assisted the project).

| Researcher | Institution | Date | Method |
|--------------------------------|---|-----------------------|--|
| Terri Hughes | CDU | 01/08/12 | Discussion followed by online completion of survey |
| Terri Hughes | CDU | 01/08/12 | Interview |
| Terri Hughes | CDU | 02/08/12 | Interview |
| Terri Hughes | CDU | 02/08/12 | Interview |
| Terri Hughes | CDU | 30/07/12 | Interview |
| Terri Hughes | CDU | 02/08/12 | Interview |
| Terri Hughes | CDU | 30/07/12 | Interview |
| Terri Hughes | CDU | 20/07/12 | Interview |
| Terri Hughes | Batchelor Institute | 30/07/12 | Interview |
| Steve Kinnane and Sue Thomas | University of Technology Sydney | 10/09/12 and 18/09/12 | Interview |
| Steve Kinnane and Judith Wilks | University of Technology Sydney | 12/09/12 and 20/09/12 | Interview |
| Steve Kinnane and Judith Wilks | The University of Sydney | 13/09/12 | Interview |
| Steve Kinnane and Sue Thomas | Catholic Education Support | 18/09/12 | Interview |
| Steve Kinnane | The University of Sydney | 19/09/12 | Interview |
| Sue Thomas | Macquarie University | 19/09/12 | Discussion followed by online completion of survey |
| Steve Kinnane | ANU | 20/09/12 | Interview |
| Steve Kinnane | ANU | 20/09/12 | Interview |
| Steve Kinnane | ANU | 20/09/12 | Interview |
| Steve Kinnane | ANU | 20/09/12 | Interview |
| Steve Kinnane | Congress – Canberra | 20/09/12 | Interview |
| Steve Kinnane | Australian Indigenous Mentoring Experience Sydney | 21/09/12 | Interview |
| Steve Kinnane | Australian Indigenous Mentoring Experience Sydney | 21/09/12 | Interview |
| Steve Kinnane and Sue Thomas | Aurora – The Aspiration Initiative Project | 21/09/12 | Interview |
| Steve Kinnane | Murdoch University | 23/10/13 | Interview |
| Steve Kinnane | Murdoch University | 26/11/13 | Interview |

‘Can’t be what you can’t see’:

The transition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students into higher education

| Researcher | Institution | Date | Method |
|-----------------|---|----------|--|
| Steve Kinnane | Murdoch University | 09/12/13 | Interview |
| Steve Kinnane | Murdoch University | 09/12/13 | Interview |
| Steve Kinnane | Murdoch University | 09/12/13 | Interview |
| Steve Kinnane | University of Western Australia | 18/11/13 | Interview |
| Steve Kinnane | Edith Cowan University | 21/01/14 | Interview |
| Steve Kinnane | Edith Cowan University | 21/01/14 | Interview |
| Steve Kinnane | Edith Cowan University | 21/01/14 | Interview |
| Steve Kinnane | University of Western Australia | 10/12/13 | Interview |
| Sue Thomas | Yalblinga IHEU | 01/08/12 | Interview |
| Sue Thomas | Ngarara Willim Centre | 10/09/12 | Interview |
| Sue Thomas | University of Melbourne | 17/09/12 | Interview |
| Sue Thomas | University of Notre Dame | 10/01/13 | Interview |
| Sue Thomas | University of Notre Dame | 10/01/13 | Interview |
| Sue Thomas | University of Notre Dame | 11/01/13 | Interview |
| Sue Thomas | University of Notre Dame | 11/01/13 | Interview |
| Sue Thomas | UTAS Cradle Cape Campus | 12/01/13 | Interview |
| Sue Thomas | Queensland University | 13/01/13 | Interview |
| Sue Thomas | PLC Graduate Considering Education Pathways | 13/01/13 | Interview |
| Sue Thomas | University of Notre Dame | 15/01/13 | Interview |
| Sue Thomas | ECU External | 15/01/13 | Interview |
| Sue Thomas | ECU External | 15/01/13 | Interview |
| Sue Thomas | UNDA | 09/12/13 | Interview |
| Sue Thomas | UNDA | 09/12/13 | Interview |
| Sue Thomas | VU | 06/12/13 | Interview |
| Sue Thomas | Bond University | 17/01/13 | Interview |
| Sue Thomas | La Trobe University | 18/01/13 | Interview |
| Sue Thomas | UNDA | 18/01/13 | Interview |
| Sue Thomas | Monash University | 19/01/13 | Interview |
| Sue Thomas | Horsham, Ballarat TAFE and MT Helen | 04/03/13 | Interview |
| Dr Judith Wilks | Southern Cross University | 13/08/12 | Interview |
| Dr Judith Wilks | The University of Sydney | 03/08/12 | Interview |
| Dr Judith Wilks | Charles Sturt University | 23/07/12 | Interview |
| Dr Judith Wilks | University of Newcastle | 23/07/12 | Interview |
| Dr Judith Wilks | University of Technology Sydney | 02/08/12 | Interview |
| Dr Judith Wilks | University of New England | 17/7/12 | Discussion followed by online completion of survey |
| Dr Judith Wilks | University of Wollongong | 13/01/13 | Interview |
| Dr Judith Wilks | University of Wollongong | 10/01/13 | Discussion followed by online completion of survey |

‘Can’t be what you can’t see’:

The transition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students into higher education

Appendix 4:

PROJECT - THE TRANSITION OF ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER STUDENTS INTO HIGHER EDUCATION

The Nulungu Way of doing business is ...

Right People Right Country Right Way

Asking information from universities, key personnel and students past and present

Reporting on successful practices and explaining what works (enablers) and what else could be done to overcome the challenges (constraints). This report is especially interested in focussing on underrepresented Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people who are not sufficiently accessing the benefits of higher education

The report will inform Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, Universities, governments and others

What is Nulungu Research Institute, University of Notre Dame Australia?

A research institution based in Broome, on Yawuru Country, focusing on three core areas of Education, Health and Wellbeing and Caring for Country within a knowledge framework of Healthy People, Healthy Country.

What is the Project?

The project has been funded by the Office for Learning and Teaching (OLT) to explore the enablers and constraints experienced by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students successfully transitioning into and benefitting from higher education.

The Project Team

Prof Lyn Henderson Yates, Prof Patrick Dodson, Prof Marguerite Maher, Prof Neil Drew, Stephen Kinnane, Bruce Gorrington, Sue Thomas, Prof Keith MacNaught, Dr Kevin Watson, Terri Hughes (BIITE), Dr Judith Wilkes (SCU).

What are we doing?

- We have conducted a literature review to see what the research tells us.
- Then we have scanned University websites to look for information targeting students to support successful transitions.
- Now we are contacting Indigenous units and enabling centres in all Universities to learn from the expertise and knowledge that already exists
- Interviews and information provided will help us to identify successful models that cater to a range of people from diverse contexts.

'Can't be what you can't see':

The transition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students into higher education

- We are also interviewing and in some cases surveying past and present students and key informants with expertise in education.
- We will then visit a range of sites and highlight the models that are working.
- The final report will be published and available on a website which captures the narrative of many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and shares what we have found to work to support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people into Universities.

The Nulungu Way

Focusing on strengths, highlighting positive approaches and ensuring the information is accessible to and benefits Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and their communities.

How will I benefit?

Your involvement and stories will help to generate better understandings of what helps Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people successfully go to and benefit from University. Sharing your story will help others to learn from the experiences of a diverse range of people.

Will I be identified?

Information provided will be treated in confidence, it will be provided back to you to approve and your consent will be sought then. We will only disclose your name /details in circumstances where permissions have been granted. Some stories will be shared on the website to highlight diverse experiences and successes.

If you have any questions about this project please telephone Sue Thomas on (08) 9192 0600 during business hours (8am – 5pm). This project has received clearance from the University of Notre Dame Human Research Ethics Committee.

‘Can’t be what you can’t see’:

The transition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students into higher education

Transition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Students into Higher Education

Informed Consent

I (name) _____

Of (address) _____

Hereby agree to participate in an interview for the Transition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Students into Higher Education Project.

- I have read the Information Sheet and any questions have been answered to my satisfaction. I agree that I will participate in an interview, realising that I may withdraw at any time without prejudice.
- I understand that audio recordings may be made of the interview to ensure the information is accurate. (Agree to recording: **YES** / **NO (Please circle)**)
- I understand that all information gathered is treated as strictly confidential and will be presented as group-based information in reports to the organisations and Government.
- I agree that the matters raised may be published in an anonymous form.

Signed: (participant): _____ Date _____

Signed: (Researcher: Steve Kinnane – Nulungu Research Institute, Broome Campus, The University of Notre Dame)

_____ Date _____

The Human Research Ethics Committee at the University of Notre Dame requires that all participants are informed that, if they have any complaint regarding the manner in which a research project is conducted, it may be given to the researcher, or please contact the Executive Officer, Human Research Ethics, The University of Notre Dame on (08) 9433 0870 or fax (08) 9433 0855 or email research@nd.edu.au

'Can't be what you can't see':

The transition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students into higher education

Appendix 5:

In an effort to ensure we did not replicate the similarly titled (SI11-2137) project, we interviewed a small sample size of students from the under-represented groups. Some students had attributes from more than one subgroup. We were interested in capturing their narrative and story of getting to university to see whether their stories illuminated aspects of the elements of leading practice to support Indigenous student transition to higher education.

The sample included:

- 1) A 50 year old Indigenous man from a remote Community
- 2) A 23 year old male urban university
- 3) A young single mother in her 20s, remote area
- 4) A single mother from a remote area deterred from university by secondary school boarding experience with sight and hearing impairment
- 5) A Tasmanian Aboriginal woman who is a mother and primary carer from a remote/ rural community
- 6) A mature age woman from a remote town centre returning to study after being in the workforce
- 7) A young mother from a remote town, attempting studying Fulltime several times, and who incurred a significant HECS Debt
- 8) A mother who is a primary carer from a remote area returning to study after being in the workforce
- 9) A young male from a remote area who has withdrawn from studies
- 10) A mother of mature children who is from a remote community who completed a transition from VET to higher education.

‘Can’t be what you can’t see’:

The transition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students into higher education

**The Objects of The University of
Notre Dame Australia are:**

- a) the provision of university education within a context of Catholic faith and values; and
- b) the provision of an excellent standard of –
 - i) teaching, scholarship and research;
 - ii) training for the professions; and
 - iii) pastoral care for its students.

Broome Campus

PO Box 2287 Broome WA 6725

Tel: +61 8 9192 0602 **Email:** bruce.gorring@nd.edu.au

www.ndcis.org.au