

UNIVERSITIES AUSTRALIA

Indigenous Strategy annual report

MAY 2022





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Foreword



Universities Australia and its 39 members are committed to providing the educational, social and economic opportunities for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to achieve their potential.

We all understand how education is vital to a person's social and economic wellbeing. Data consistently shows that higher education is a major contributor to Indigenous advancement.

Since launching the first Indigenous Strategy in 2017, universities have delivered results. We have made significant progress in breaking down barriers and learnt how our collective efforts can support the advancement of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in and through universities.

This report tells us that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander student enrolments continue to grow however there is still a significant gap in course completion rates. We also know that graduate outcomes are often better than those of non-Indigenous counterparts.

While we celebrate these shared achievements, we recognise there's more work to do.

We need to do more to combat racism against Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and train our university community to better acknowledge historic injustices and unconscious bias.

As we commit to our 2022-25 strategy, we will continue to build on our successes and work hard in the areas where we must improve. This is a high priority for the Universities Australia Board, the Plenary and across all specialist policy committees to support and embed change across the sector.

Our continuing work is imperative to ensure Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are respected, valued and recognised as integral contributors to all of university life.



Ms Catriona Jackson
Chief Executive
Universities Australia



Professor Bronwyn Fredericks
Chair
DVC/PVC Indigenous Committee



Ms Inala Cooper
National President
NATSIHEC



Executive summary



Overview

In March 2017 Universities Australia (UA) members launched the UA Indigenous Strategy 2017-20. This was the Australian university sector's first coordinated plan to boost the participation and success of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in universities and to make universities places that reflect and respect Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, cultures and knowledge.

Much has been learned over the life of the first Indigenous Strategy and this has been key in the development of the new Indigenous Strategy 2022-25 launched in March 2022.

The Indigenous Strategy 2022-25 is built on five key themes with related commitments:

- **Student success** – a university experience that fosters the successful completion of a degree, which sets up students for favourable outcomes.
- **Staff success** – where Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff recruitment, retention, workloads, promotion pathways, pipeline development and professional development are all appropriately supported.
- **University responsibility for Indigenous advancement** – harnessing the evidence base and resources to champion the advancement of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples within institutions.
- **Racism and cultural safety** – continuing to take an active anti-racism stance including addressing more subtle forms of racism and developing understanding of the impact of the dominant culture on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.
- **Recognising the value Indigenous people and knowledges bring to the university and embedding Indigenous value systems and knowledges into university structures** – Australian universities seize the opportunity to mark themselves as unique in the world as home to the world's oldest continuous culture.

Going forward, the *Indigenous Strategy annual report* will report on progress under these themes.

The sector's commitment is long-term and as the sector's peak representative body Universities Australia acknowledges the need to continue to work alongside its members to advocate and maintain momentum.





Context

This is the fourth *Indigenous Strategy annual report*.

The report draws information from the Department of Education, Skills and Employment and the *Indigenous Strategy annual survey* completed by Universities Australia's member universities.

The 2021 annual survey was forward looking to the new Indigenous Strategy 2022-25 focusing on three themes: the impacts of COVID-19, combating racism and cultural safety.

These areas reflect priorities under the new Indigenous Strategy 2022-25 and survey findings will set a baseline for related commitments over the life of the strategy.

The annual reporting process is an important way for the sector to chart progress, share good practice and to identify areas requiring further action. Universities Australia acknowledges the complications and strain that COVID-19 has placed on the sector and so commends and appreciates the effort of those involved in the production of the survey responses.





Higher education data



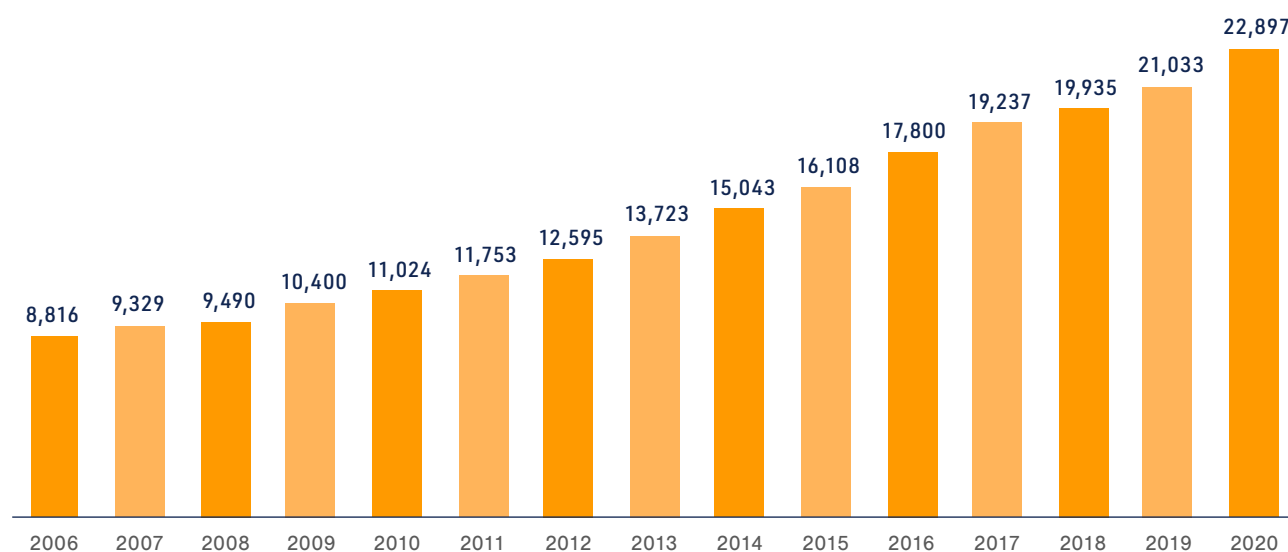
Indigenous student enrolments



Indigenous student enrolments have more than doubled since 2008 – increasing by 141.3 per cent – from 9,490 students to 22,897 students in 2020 with an annual average growth rate of 7.6 per cent.

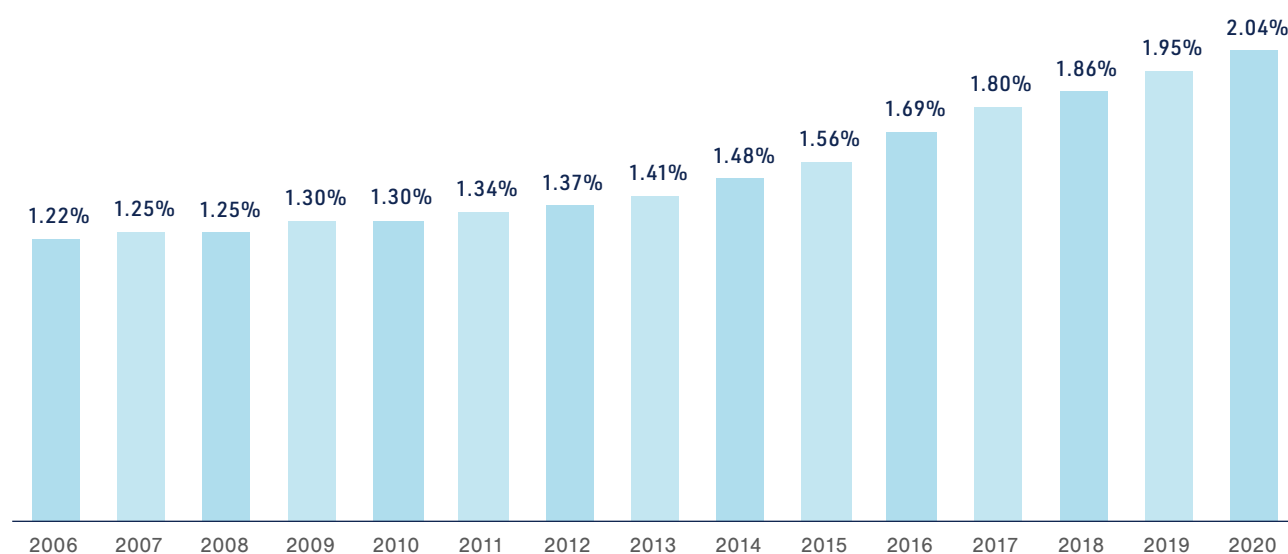
Despite this significant growth, Indigenous student enrolments remain well below population parity (3.1 per cent). As a proportion of all domestic enrolments, Indigenous students increased from 1.25 per cent in 2008 to 2.04 per cent in 2020 (Figure 2).

Figure 1: Indigenous student enrolments, 2006 to 2020



Source: Department of Education, Skills and Employment 2022, *Selected Higher Education Statistics – 2020 Student data*, Section 11: Equity Group.

Figure 2: Share of Indigenous student enrolments, 2006 to 2020



Source: Department of Education, Skills and Employment 2022, *Selected Higher Education Statistics – 2020 Student data*, Section 11: Equity Group.

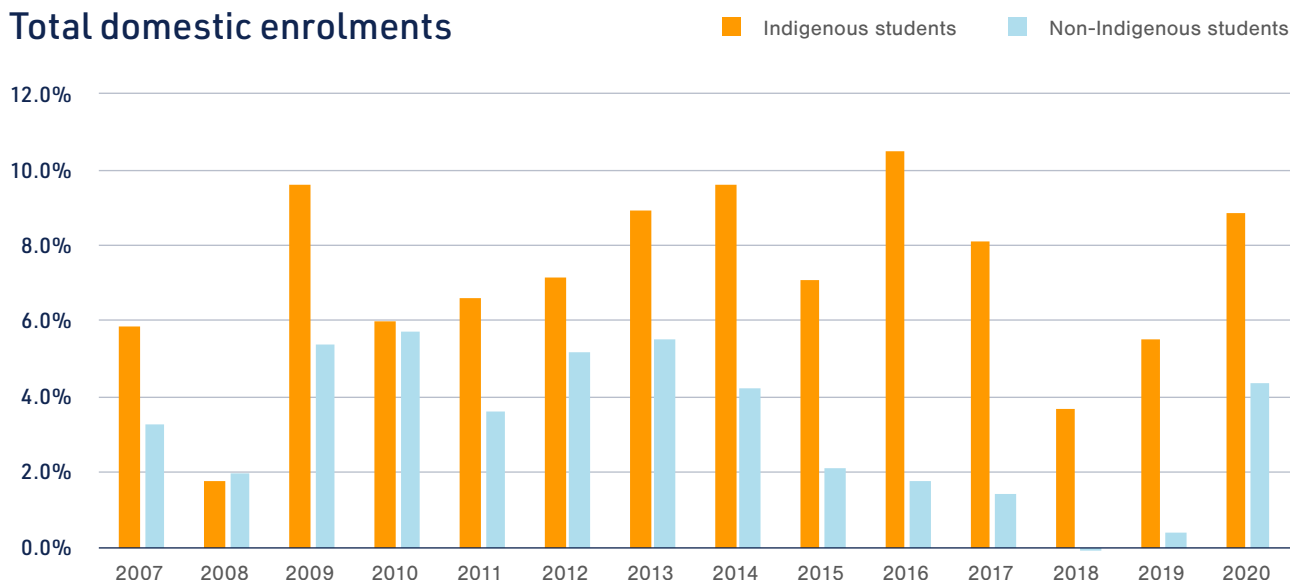


Annual growth in Indigenous student enrolments has more than tripled the rate of growth in non-Indigenous student enrolments in recent years, especially undergraduate enrolments.

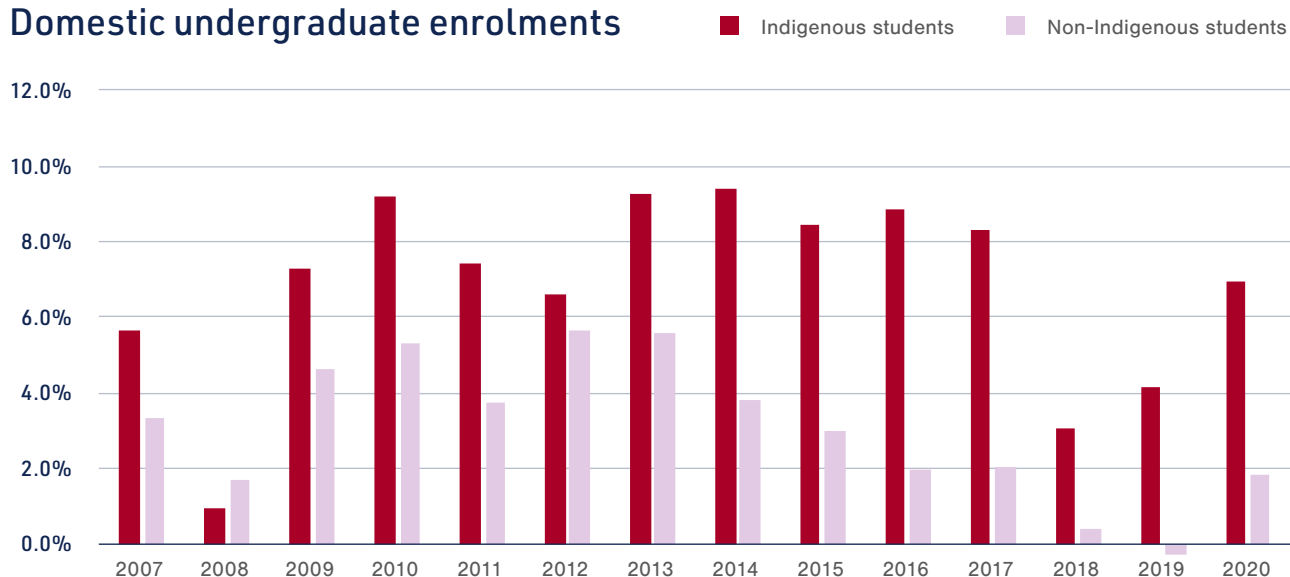
In 2020, Indigenous undergraduate enrolments grew by 6.9 per cent while non-Indigenous undergraduate enrolments rose just 1.8 per cent. Total Indigenous enrolments rose by 8.9 per cent in 2020, compared to a growth of 4.3 per cent in total non-Indigenous enrolments.

Figure 3: Annual growth in Indigenous student enrolments, 2007 to 2020

Total domestic enrolments



Domestic undergraduate enrolments



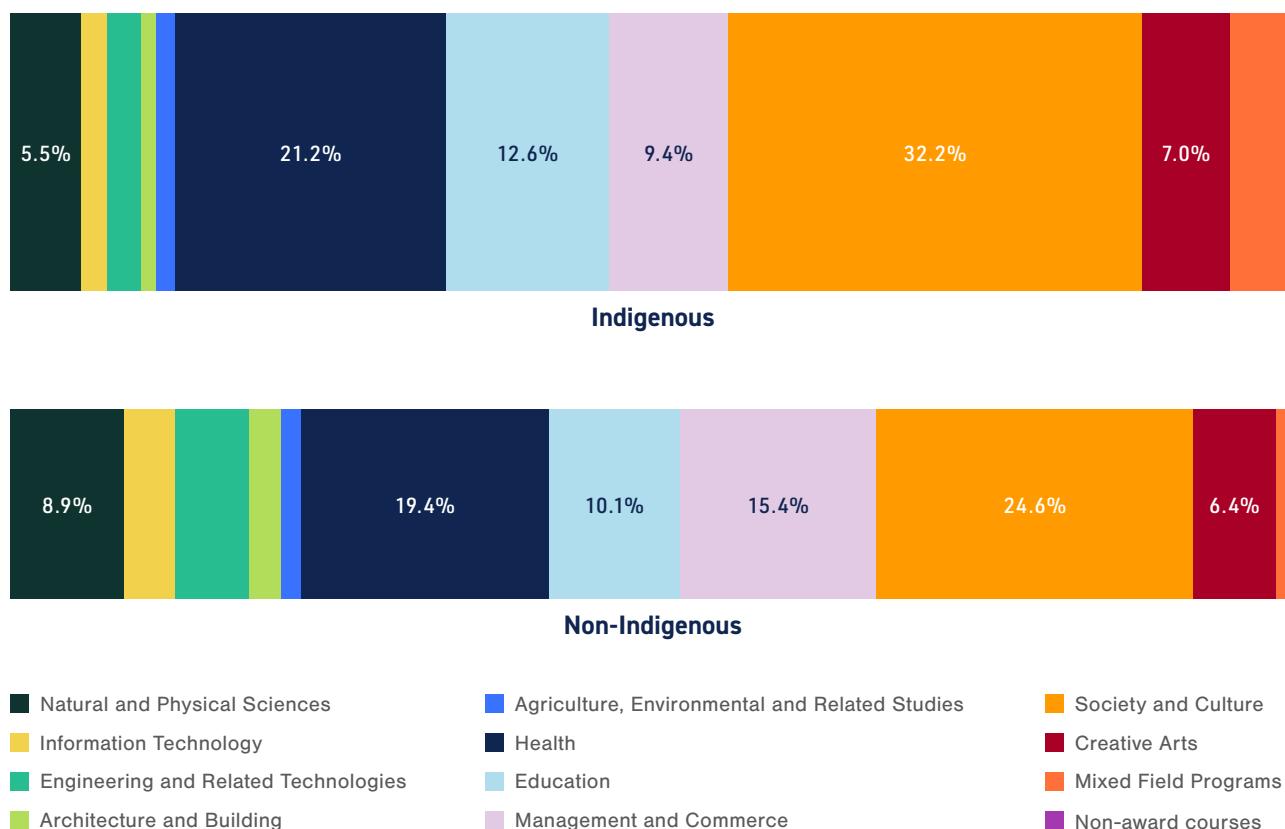
Source: Department of Education, Skills and Employment 2022, *Selected Higher Education Statistics – 2020 Student data*, Section 11: Equity Group.



Field of education

Indigenous students are more likely than non-Indigenous students to enrol in courses in society and culture (32.2 per cent for Indigenous students vs 24.6 per cent for non-Indigenous students), health (21.2 vs 19.4 per cent) and education (12.6 vs 10.1 per cent) and less likely to enrol in management and commerce (9.4 vs 15.4 per cent), natural and physical sciences (5.5 vs 8.9 per cent) and engineering (2.6 vs 5.6 per cent).

Figure 4: Enrolments by broad disciplines, 2020



Source: Department of Education, Skills and Employment 2022, *Selected Higher Education Statistics – 2020 Student data*, Section 11: Equity Group.



Course level

Indigenous enrolments in Bachelor degree courses grew by an average of 7.6 per cent per year, from 6,352 in 2008 to 15,291 in 2020. Annual average growth for Indigenous enrolments in enabling courses was 7.6 per cent, from 871 in 2008 to 2,097 in 2020. While Indigenous student postgraduate research enrolments grew by 5.5 per cent per annum on average between 2008 and 2020 – from 393 to 751– enrolments in postgraduate coursework degrees have increased by 9.4 per cent per annum on average over the period, from 1,138 to 3,330.

Table 1: Indigenous enrolments, by course level, 2008 and 2020

Course level	2008	2020	Growth since 2008	Annual average growth since 2008
Postgraduate research	393	751	91%	5.5%
Postgraduate coursework	1,138	3,330	193%	9.4%
Bachelor	6,352	15,291	141%	7.6%
Sub-bachelor	686	1,268	85%	5.3%
Enabling	871	2,097	141%	7.6%
Non-award	50	160	220%	10.2%
All courses	9,490	22,897	141%	7.6%

Source: Department of Education, Skills and Employment 2022, *Visual analytics – Enrolment time-series*

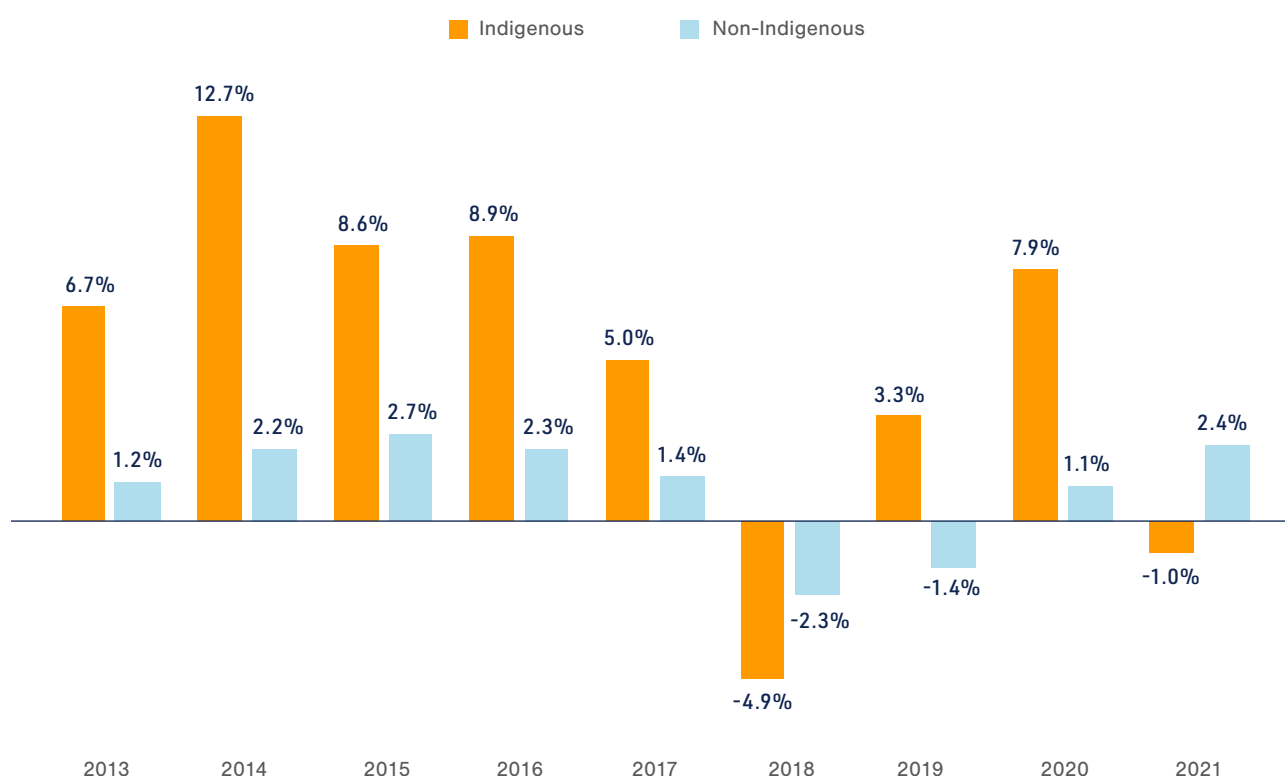
Indigenous undergraduate applications²



Indigenous undergraduate applications fell marginally in 2021 (-1 per cent) – following an increase of 7.9 per cent and 3.3 per cent in 2020 and 2019 respectively. In 2021, applications from non-Indigenous students increased by 2.4 per cent, the highest level since 2015.

The share of Indigenous applications remained at around 2 per cent of all undergraduate applications in 2021.

Figure 5: Annual growth in undergraduate applications, 2013 to 2021



Source: Department of Education, Skills and Employment 2021, *Undergraduate Applications Offers and Acceptances*, unpublished data.

² In 2007, the Queensland government introduced an additional year of schooling before Year 1 with only a half-cohort of students enrolling that year. As a result of the Queensland half-year cohort effect, the number of Year 12 students in Queensland in 2019 was around 30 per cent less than the previous year leading to lower applications for higher education among Queensland school leavers in 2020. Thus, analysis in this section for 2020 and 2021 exclude applications and offers from the Queensland Tertiary Admissions Centre, unless specified otherwise.

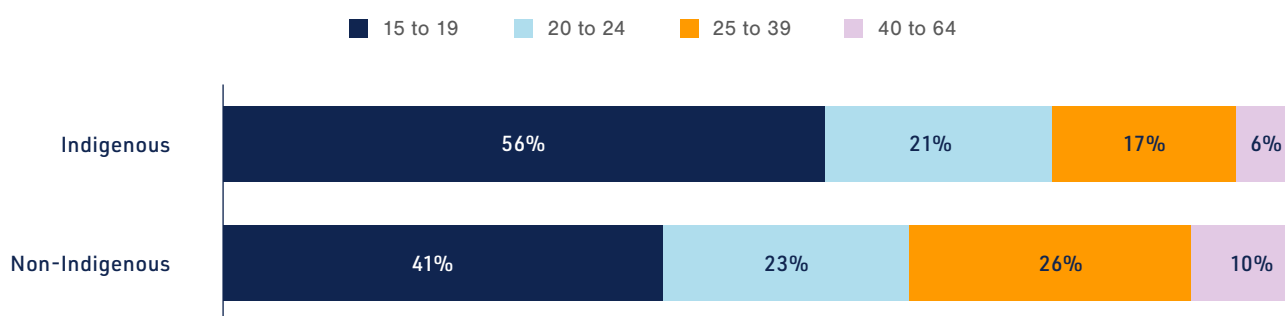


Figure 6 shows Indigenous applicants for undergraduate courses are more likely to be older than non-Indigenous applicants. In 2021, more than one-third (36 per cent) of Indigenous applicants are aged 25 or older, compared to 23 per cent for non-Indigenous applicants.

The share of Indigenous undergraduate applications at younger age cohorts remains significantly below the share of the young Indigenous population.

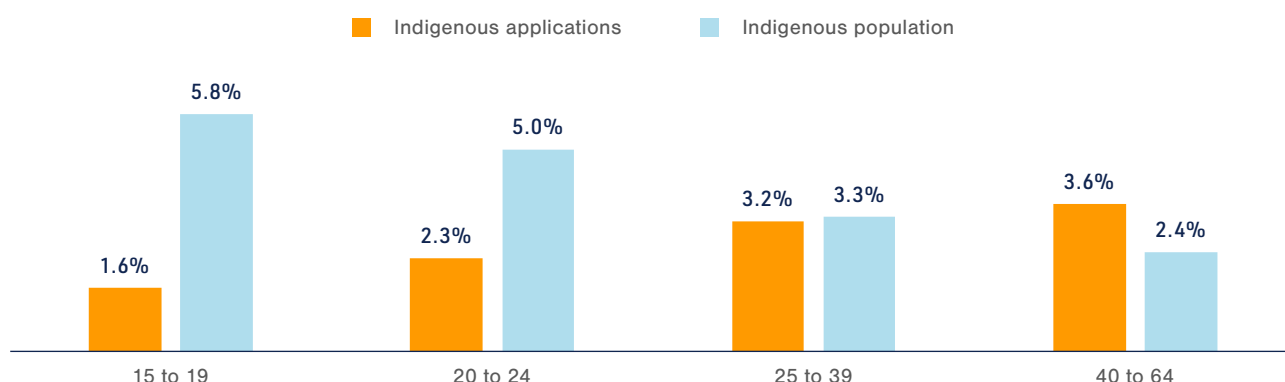
Just 1.6 per cent of all undergraduate applicants aged 15–19 were Indigenous, compared with an Indigenous population share of 5.8 per cent in 2021. For the 20–24-year-old age group, Indigenous people are 2.3 per cent of applicants but 5.0 per cent of the population as a whole. In contrast, for the 40–64-year-old age group, Indigenous students are 3.6 per cent of applications but represent 2.4 per cent of the whole population (Figure 7).

Figure 6: Share of undergraduate applications, by age, 2021



Source: See Figure 5.

Figure 7: Share of Indigenous undergraduate applications compared to share of Indigenous population, by age, 2021



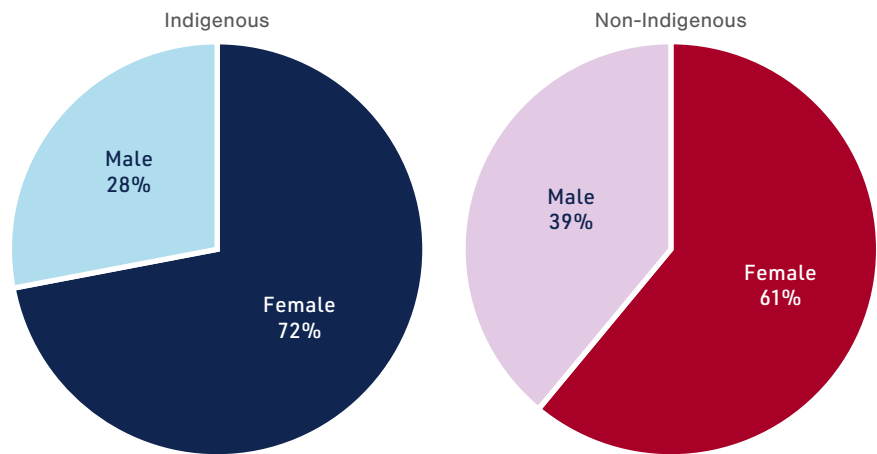
Source: UA analysis based on Department of Education, Skills and Employment 2021, *Undergraduate Applications Offers and Acceptances*, unpublished data, Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) 2019, *Estimates and Projections, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians, 2016 to 2031*, Cat. No. 3238.0., Series B and ABS 2021, *National, State and Territory Population, June 2021*.



Indigenous undergraduate applicants are also more likely to be female compared to non-Indigenous applicants. In 2021, 72 per cent of Indigenous

undergraduate applicants were female compared to 61 per cent for non-Indigenous applicants (Figure 8).

Figure 8: Share of undergraduate applications, by gender, 2021

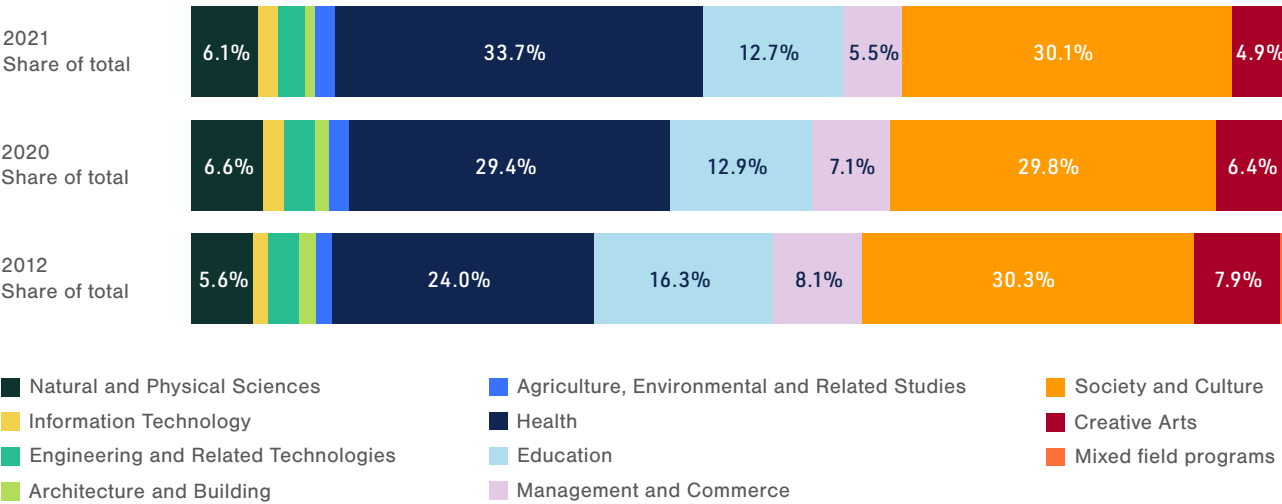


Source: See Figure 5

Figure 9 shows the share of Indigenous applications for Society and Culture courses remain relatively unchanged at around 30 per cent since 2012; while share of Indigenous applications for Health courses has increased from 24 per cent in 2012 to 33.7

per cent in 2021. The share of Indigenous applications for Education, Management and Commerce courses has declined over the same period.

Figure 9: Share of Indigenous undergraduate applications by broad disciplines, 2012, 2020 and 2021



Source: See Figure 5.



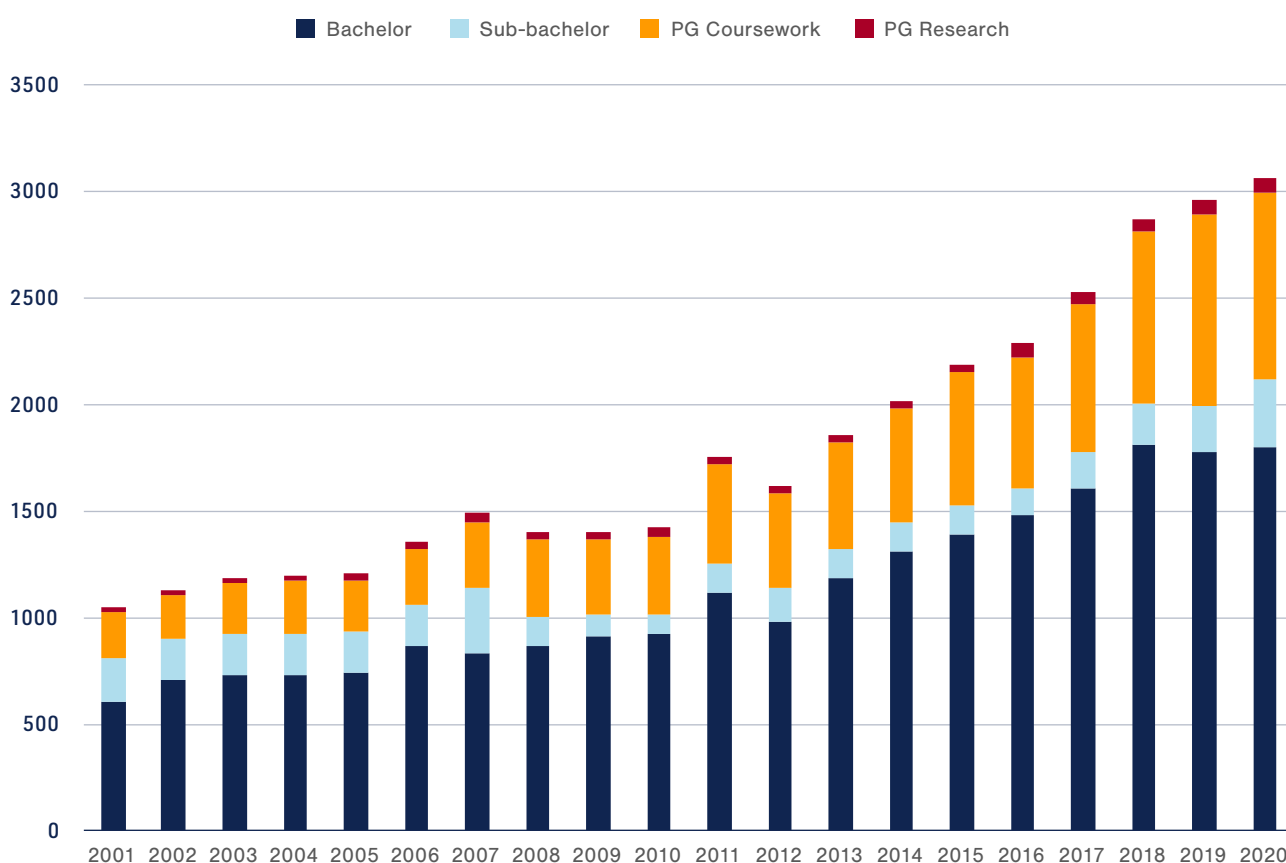
Indigenous student award course completions and completion rates

Since 2008, award course completions by Indigenous students have continued to grow year-on-year, consistent with the growth in Indigenous enrolments.

Indigenous Bachelor award course completions grew by 109.8 per cent – from 860 degrees awarded to Indigenous students in 2008 to 1,804 in 2020.

Postgraduate research course completions rose 115.2 per cent – from 33 in 2008 to 71 in 2020 – and postgraduate coursework completions rose 139 per cent – from 364 to 870 (Figure 10).

Figure 10: Number of award course completions by Indigenous students, by course level

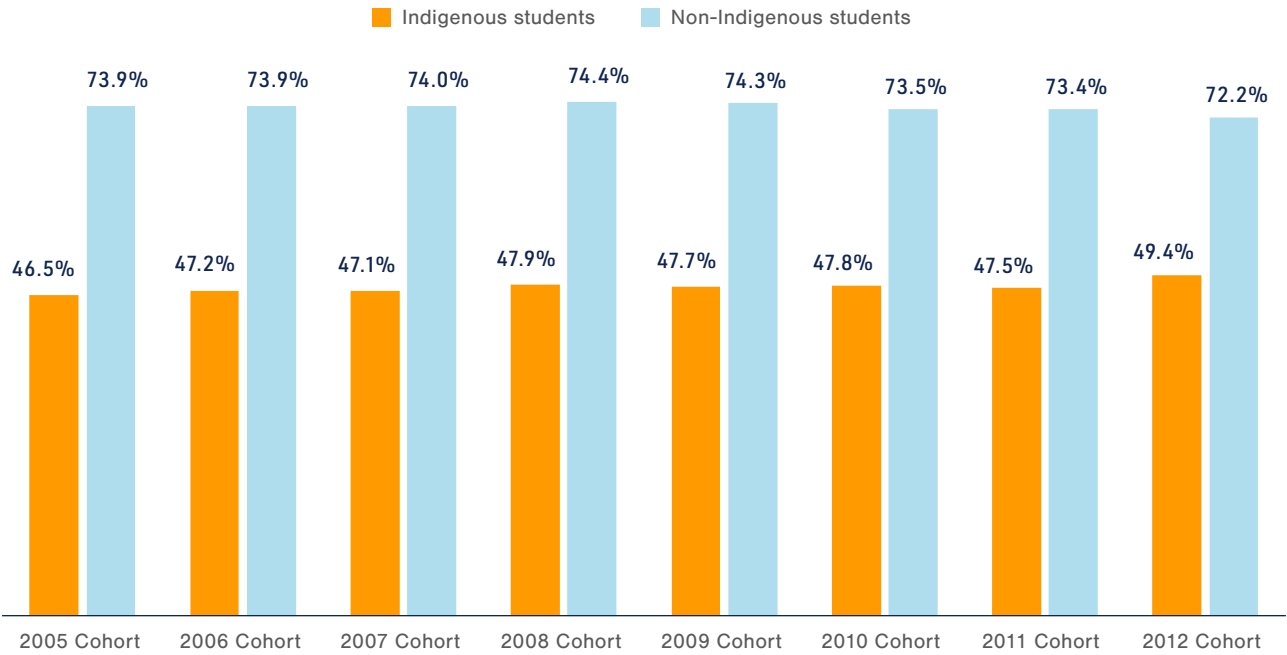


Source: Department of Education, Skills and Employment 2022, *Visual analytics – Award course completions time series*.



Bachelor degree completion rates for Indigenous students remain low compared to non-Indigenous students. While Indigenous students typically can take longer to finish their degrees, nine-year completion rates for Indigenous students remains significantly below the completion rates for non-Indigenous students (Figure 11). Nonetheless, nine-year completion rates for Indigenous students have increased over time from 46.5 per cent for Indigenous student who started university in 2005 to 49.4 per cent for the 2012 cohort.

Figure 11: Nine-year completion rates of commencing Indigenous and non-Indigenous Bachelor degree students

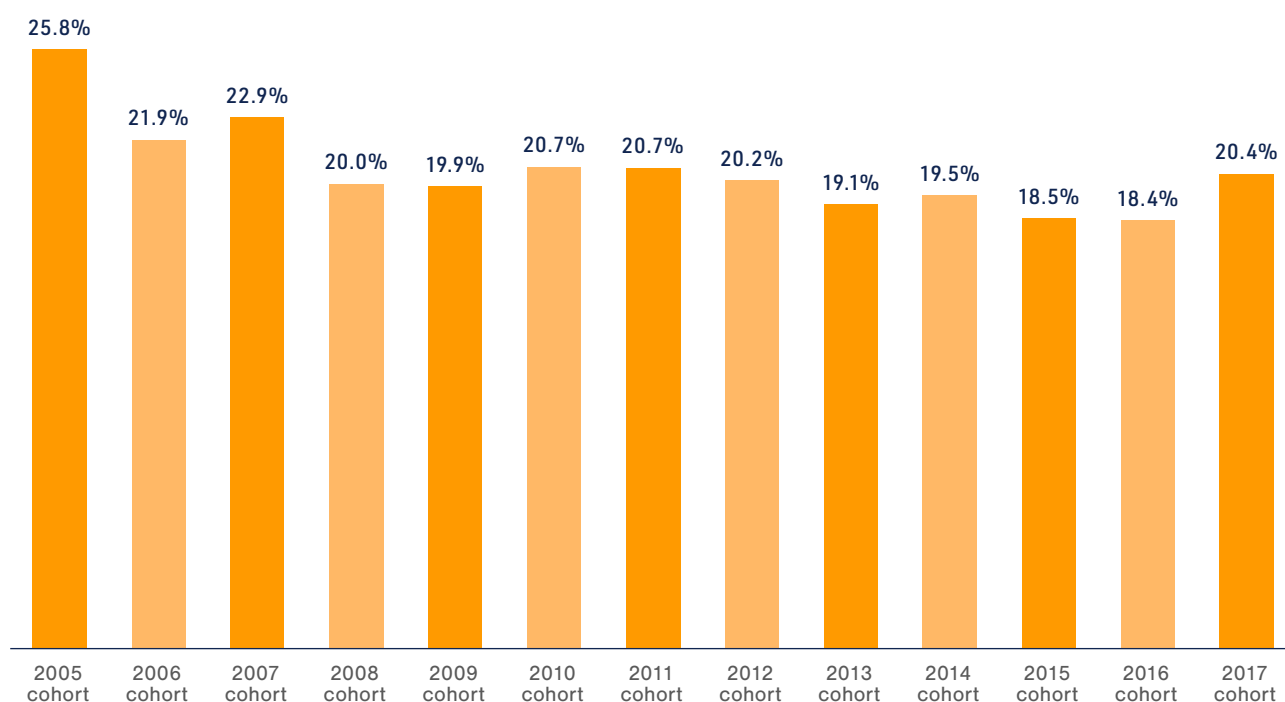


Source: Department of Education, Skills and Employment 2022, *Completion Rates of Higher Education Students – Cohort Analysis, 2005–2020*.



Since 2005, fewer Indigenous students leave their studies and do not return. Of the Indigenous students who started university in 2005, 25.8 per cent had left their studies four years later. For Indigenous students who started university in 2016, the attrition rate had fallen to 18.4 per cent – a substantial improvement (Figure 12). However, the attrition rate had increased to 20.4 per cent for the 2017 cohort.

Figure 12: Share of Indigenous students commencing a Bachelor degree that never return – after four years



Source: See Figure 11.

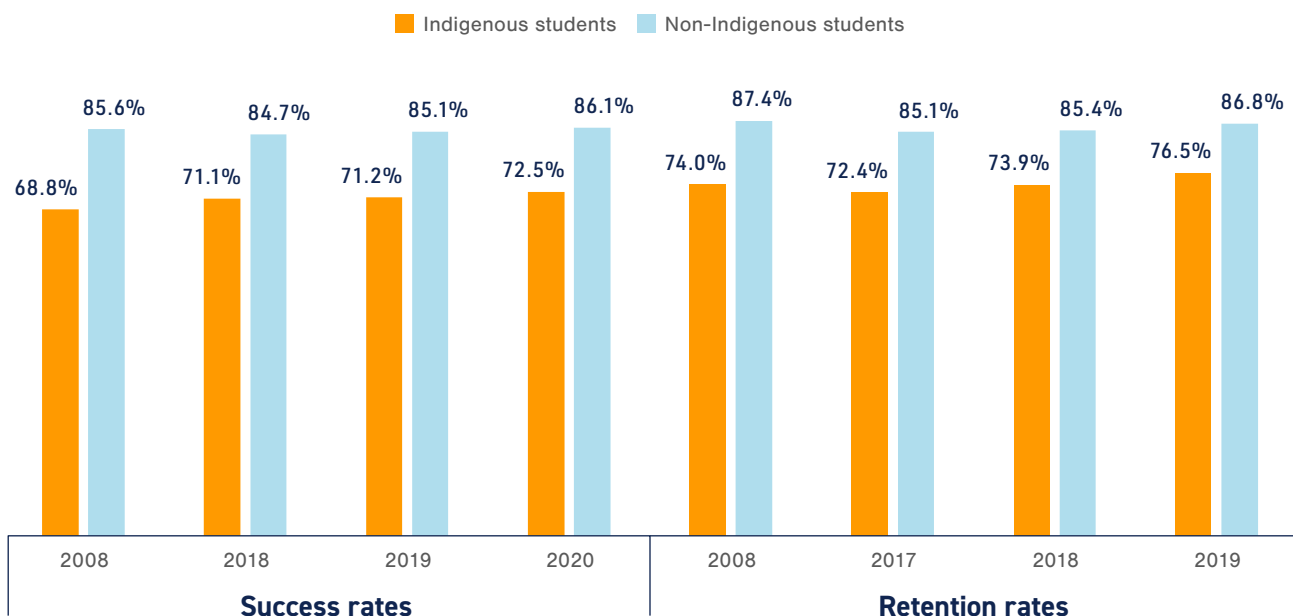


Retention and success rates of Indigenous and non-Indigenous Bachelor degree students have remained relatively stable throughout the past decade.

Success rates calculate the proportion of units that students pass in any given year. Success rates for Indigenous students have consistently been in the 69-72 per cent range since 2008, with non-Indigenous students in the 84-86 per cent range (Figure 13).

Retention rates calculate the proportion of students who return to study after their first year. Similarly, retention rates for Indigenous students have remained in the 72-77 per cent range since 2008, with non-Indigenous students typically remaining in the 85-87 per cent range.

Figure 13: Retention and success rates of domestic Bachelor degree students, Indigenous vs non-Indigenous, per cent



Source: Department of Education, Skills and Employment 2022, *Visual Analytics—Attrition, retention and success rates*.

Note: Adjusted retention rate for year (x) is the number of students who commenced a bachelor course in year (x) and did not complete in year (x), and continued in year (x + 1) (retained students), as a proportion of all students who commenced a bachelor course in year (x) and did not complete in year (x). If a student moves from one institution to another in the following year, he or she would be counted as retained in the adjusted retention rate calculation. Success rate for year(x) is the proportion of actual student load (EFTSL) for units of study that are passed divided by all units of study attempted (passed + failed + withdrawn).

Indigenous employment outcomes

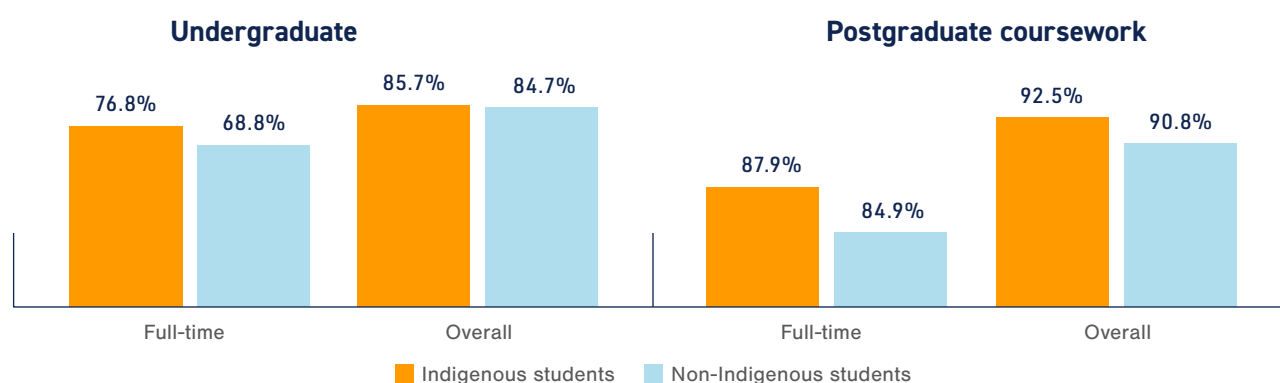


Indigenous graduates generally experience strong employment outcomes, comparable to non-Indigenous graduates and often better (Figure 14).

In 2021, 76.8 per cent of Indigenous undergraduates were in full-time employment four months after completion, outperforming non-Indigenous undergraduates (68.8%).

For graduates with postgraduate degree, 87.9 per cent of Indigenous graduates were in full-time employment four months after completion in 2021, compared to 84.9 per cent for non-Indigenous graduates.

Figure 14: Short-term graduate employment outcomes, 2021

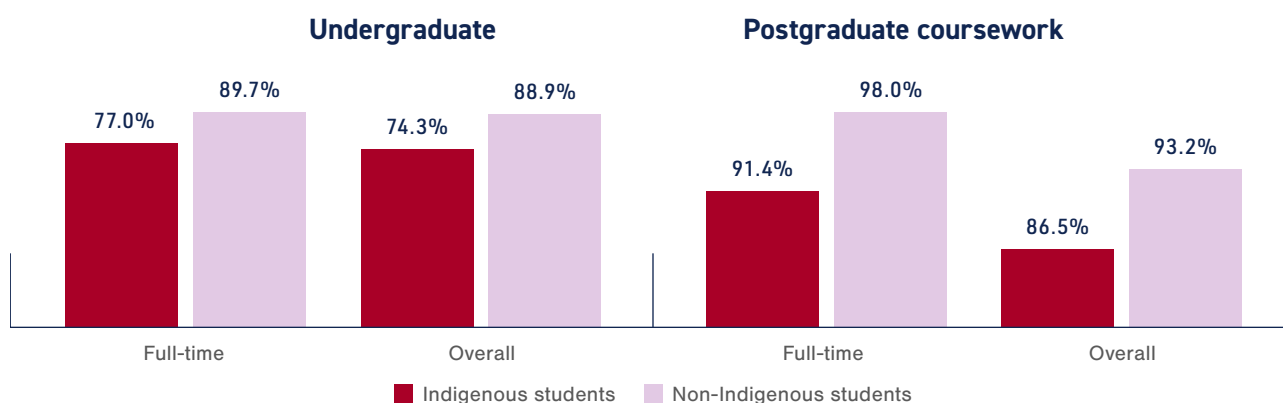


Source: Social Research Centre 2021, *2021 Graduate Outcomes Survey*.



Figure 15 shows that over the medium-term – three years after finishing their degrees – employment outcomes for Indigenous graduates are similar to non-Indigenous graduates. While Indigenous graduates with an undergraduate degree have higher full-time employment outcomes (77.0 per cent) than non-Indigenous graduates (74.3 per cent) in the short-term, non-Indigenous graduates catch up in full-time employment in the medium-term to trail Indigenous graduates by around 0.8 percentage points in 2021.

Figure 15: Short and medium-term full-time employment outcomes, for 2018 graduates



Source: Social Research Centre 2021, *2021 Graduate Outcomes Survey–Longitudinal*.

Indigenous undergraduates continued to earn more than non-Indigenous undergraduates immediately upon graduation, with median full-time salaries of \$65,800 compared to \$62,000 for non-Indigenous graduates in 2018. Three years after graduation, median full-time salaries for non-Indigenous undergraduates were still trailing Indigenous undergraduates by \$2,000 in 2021.

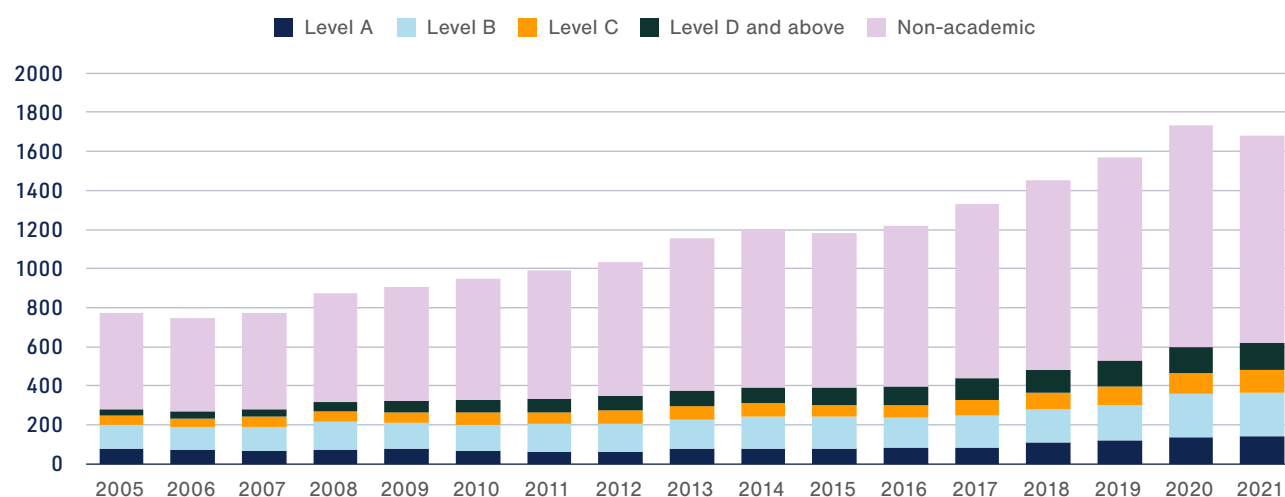


Indigenous academic and non-academic workforce³

Figure 16 shows total number of Indigenous staff has more than doubled since 2005, from 771 staff to 1,735 staff in 2020, before declining by 3.2 per cent to 1,680 staff in 2021. In 2021, 37 per cent of Indigenous staff were academic staff and the remaining 63 per cent were non-academic staff.

The number of Indigenous academic staff has increased by 119.5 per cent between 2005 and 2021, from 282 in 2005 to 619 in 2021. Despite the COVID-19 pandemic, Australian universities have continued to grow their Indigenous academic staff in 2021 (increased 3.2 per cent or 19 staff) amid a 6.5 per cent reduction in Indigenous non-academic staff (or down 74 staff).

Figure 16: Number of Indigenous staff by duties classification, 2005 to 2021



Source: Department of Education, Skills and Employment, Unpublished HEIMS data, various years.

³ In this section, data refers to staff headcount (rather than full-time equivalent (FTE)) and only includes permanent and fixed-term contract staff with reference period ending 30 March of each calendar year. Note that Indigenous status indicator is not collected for casual staff.

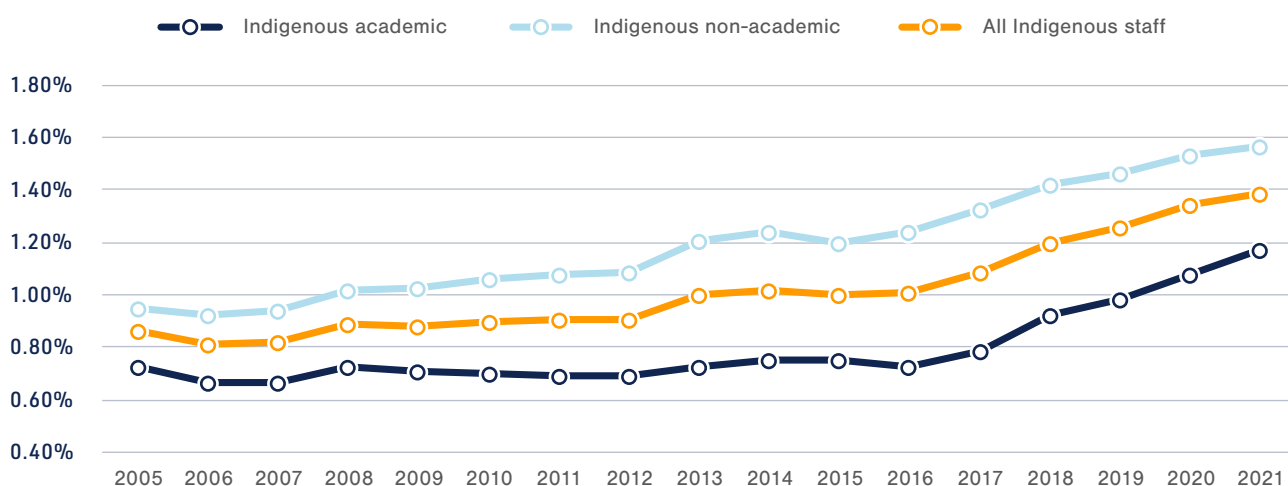


Figure 17 shows that Indigenous staff as a proportion of total academic staff has increased from 0.73 per cent in 2005 to 1.17 per cent in 2021, with most of the increases occurring after 2016.

There has been slightly greater growth in the proportion of non-academic positions held by Indigenous people over the same period. The share of non-academic Indigenous staff increased from just 0.95 per cent in 2005 to 1.57 per cent in 2021.

In 2021, just 1.4 per cent of Australian university staff – both academic and non-academic – were from an Indigenous background, significantly below the working-age population parity figure of 3.1 per cent.

Figure 17: Share of Indigenous staff, 2005 to 2021

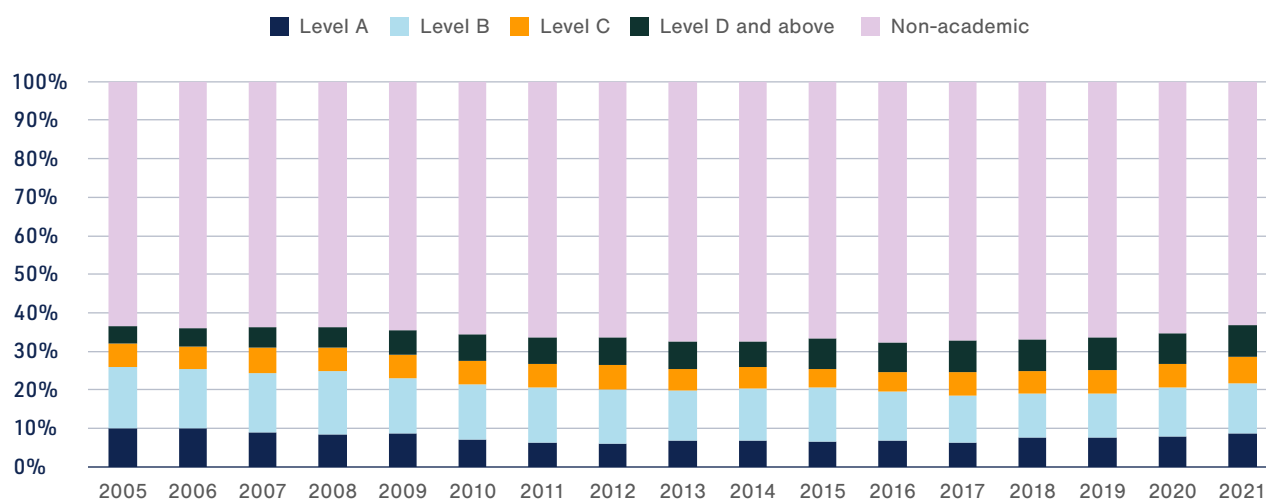


Source: Department of Education, Skills and Employment, Unpublished HEIMS data, various years.



Figure 18 shows the share of Indigenous staff in non-academic roles has increased from 63.4 per cent in 2005 to 66.5 per cent in 2019, before declining to 63.2 per cent in 2021. The share of Indigenous staff at academic Level A positions declined from 10.1 per cent to 7.6 per cent in 2019, before increasing to 8.6 per cent in 2021. In 2021, 8.3 per cent of Indigenous staff were employed in senior academic roles – Level D and above – increasing from 4.4 per cent in 2005.

Figure 18: Proportion of Indigenous staff by duties classification



Source: Department of Education, Skills and Employment, Unpublished HEIMS data.



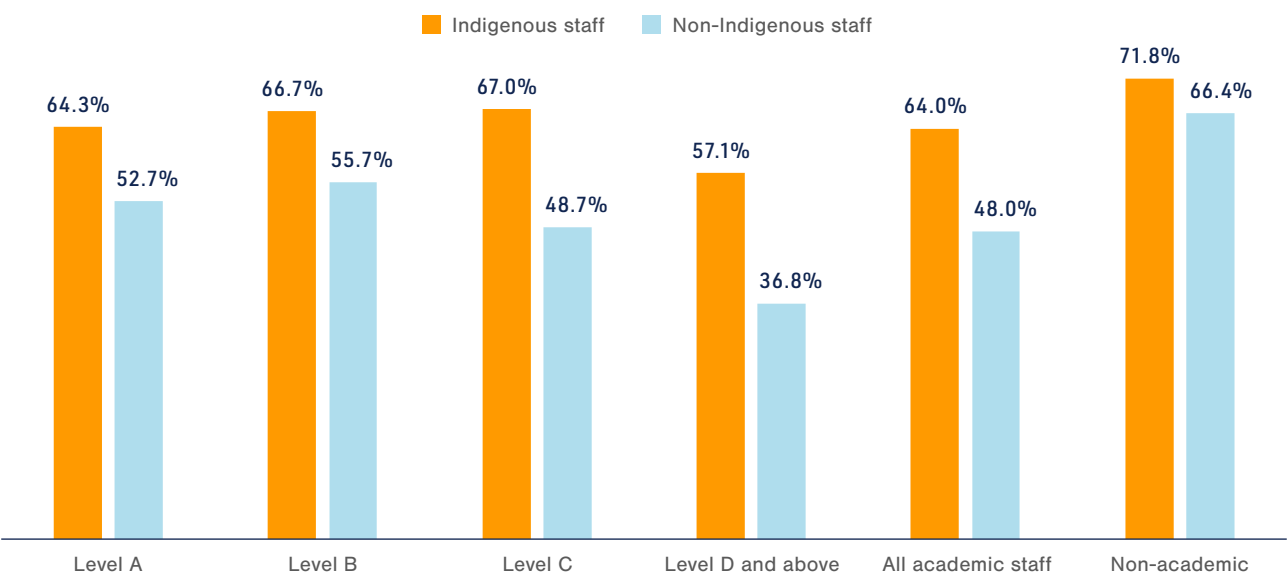
Comparisons to non-Indigenous staff

In 2021, a greater proportion of Indigenous staff were women, over 40 years old and in lower academic positions and in teaching-only roles compared to non-Indigenous staff.

GENDER

Indigenous staff are more likely to be female compared to non-Indigenous staff, particularly at senior academic positions – at Level C and Level D and above. In 2021, 64 per cent of all Indigenous academic staff were female compared to 48 per cent of non-Indigenous staff; while 71.8 per cent of Indigenous non-academic staff were female compared to 66.4 per cent for non-Indigenous staff.

Figure 19: Share of female staff by duties classification, 2021



Source: Department of Education, Skills and Employment 2022, Unpublished HEIMS data.

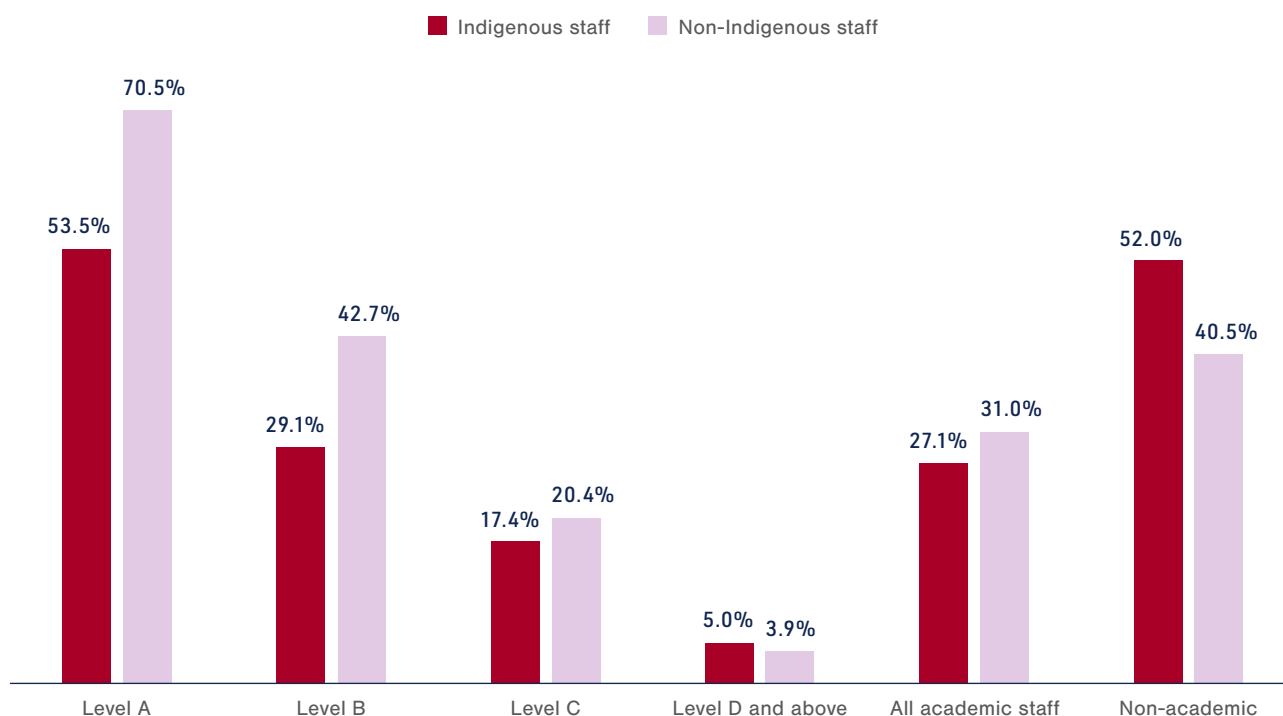


AGE

Indigenous academic staff are more likely to be older than non-Indigenous academic staff (Figure 20). In 2021, 27.1 per cent of Indigenous academic staff were aged under 40 compared to 31 per cent of non-Indigenous academic staff. The share of Indigenous academic staff under 40 has declined since 2005 – from 32.3 per cent to 27.1 per cent in 2021 – while the share of non-Indigenous academic staff under 40 has increased over the same period.

The share of Indigenous staff aged under 40 is significantly lower than non-Indigenous staff for staff employed in junior academic positions – i.e., below lecturer (Level A) and lecturer (Level B) positions. In contrast, 52 per cent of Indigenous staff employed in non-academic roles were aged under 40 in 2021, compared to 40.5 per cent of non-Indigenous staff.

Figure 20: Proportion of staff aged under 40 by duties classification, 2021



Source: Department of Education, Skills and Employment 2022, Unpublished HEIMS data.



ACADEMIC DUTIES CLASSIFICATION

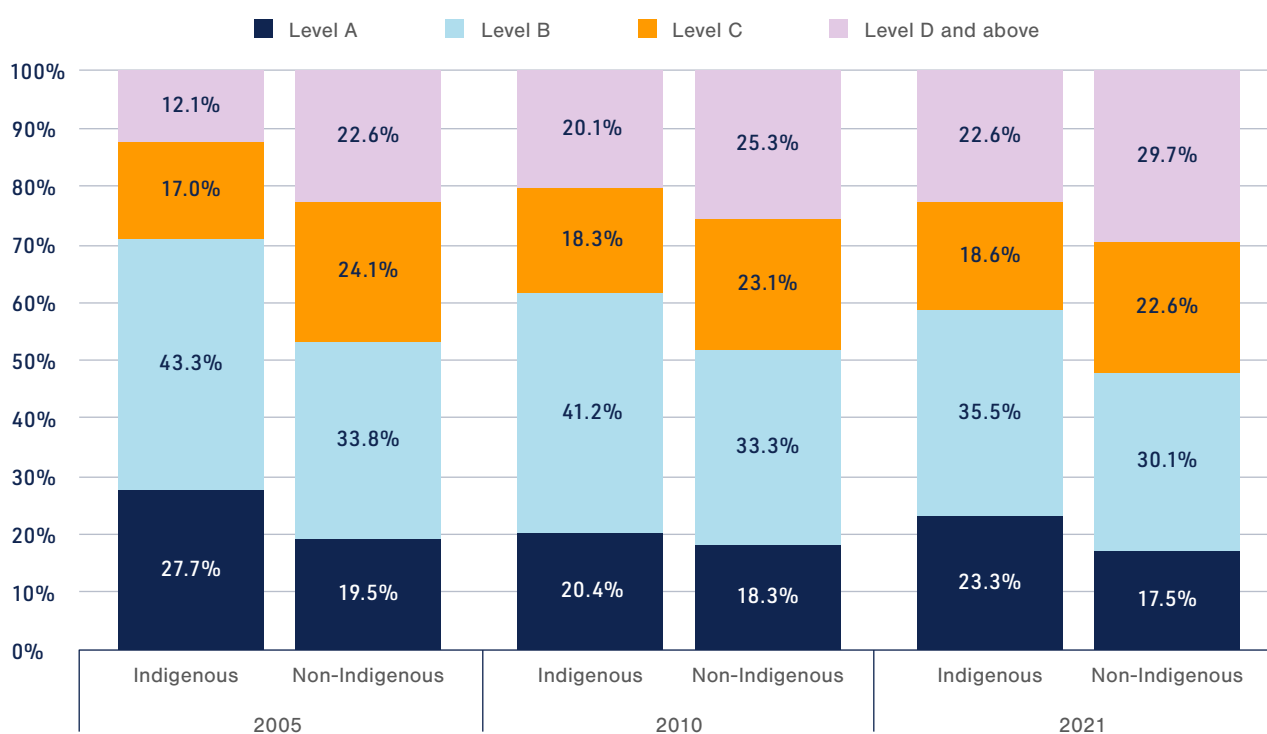
In 2021, Indigenous academic staff were employed in greater proportion at more junior academic ranks compared to non-Indigenous staff. This includes levels below lecturer (Level A) – 23.3 per cent, compared to 17.5 per cent for non-Indigenous staff – and lecturer (Level B) – 35.5 per cent, compared to 30.1 per cent for non-Indigenous staff.

In contrast, Indigenous academic staff were employed in lower proportion at levels of senior lecturer and above, compared to non-Indigenous

staff. 18.6 per cent of Indigenous staff were employed at the level of senior lecturer (Level C), compared to 22.6 per cent for non-Indigenous staff – and above senior lecturer (Level D and above) – 22.6 per cent, compared to 29.7 per cent for non-Indigenous staff.

Nonetheless, the share of Indigenous staff in senior academic roles – Level D and above – has increased since 2005, from 12.1 per cent to 22.6 per cent in 2021.

Figure 21: Share of staff by academic duties classification, 2005, 2010 and 2021



Source: Department of Education, Skills and Employment, Unpublished HEIMS data, various years.



ACADEMIC FUNCTIONS

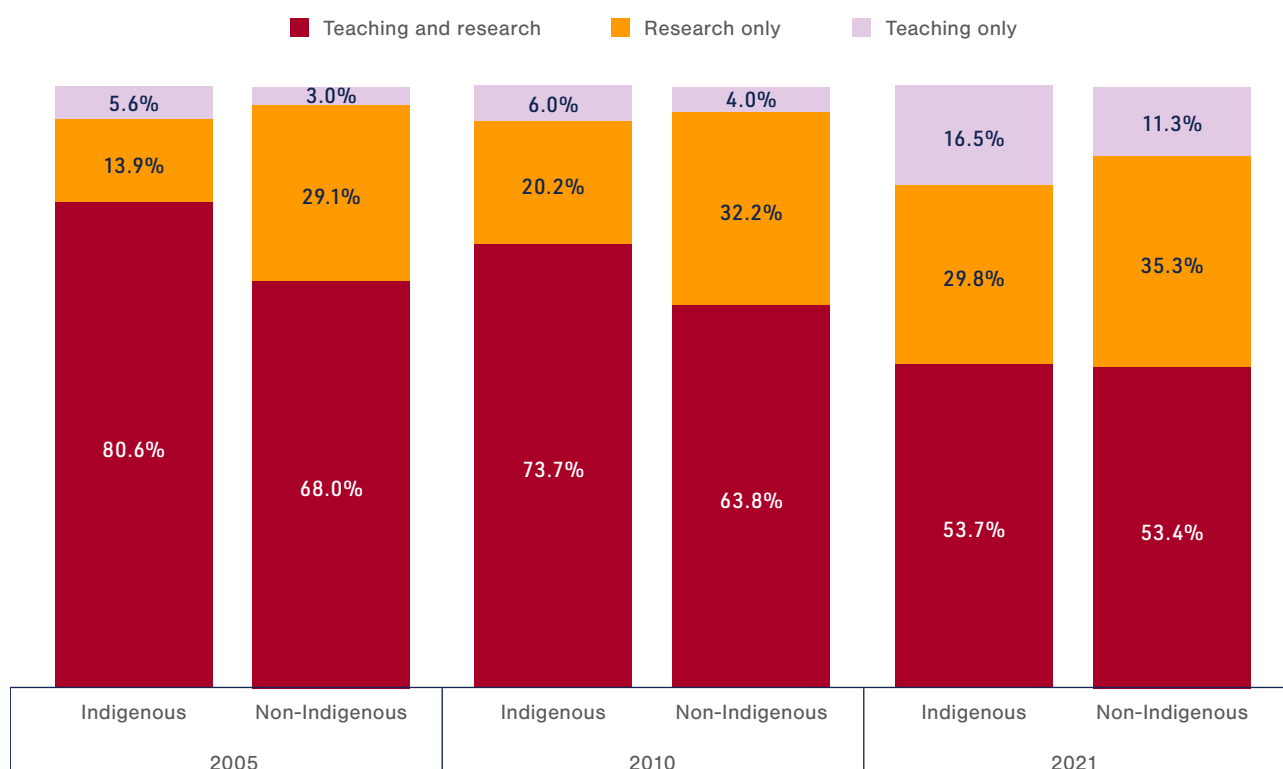
Indigenous academic staff are more likely to be employed in teaching and research or teaching-only positions and less likely to be employed in research-only functions. However, similar to non-Indigenous academics, the share of staff employed in teaching and research functions has declined over time, with more staff being employed in teaching-only or research-only roles.

In 2021, most Indigenous academic staff were employed in teaching and research functions (53.7 per cent), declining from 80.6 per cent in 2005.

The proportion of Indigenous academic staff employed in teaching-only roles increased from 5.6 per cent in 2005 to 16.5 per cent in 2021; while the share of research-only Indigenous staff increased from 13.9 to 29.8 per cent over the same period.

This compares to just 11.3 per cent of non-Indigenous academic staff employed in teaching-only function and 35.3 per cent in research-only function in 2021. Nevertheless a similar proportion of Indigenous and non-Indigenous staff were employed in teaching and research functions.

Figure 22: Share of staff by academic functions, 2005, 2010 and 2021



Source: Department of Education, Skills and Employment, Unpublished HEIMS data, various years.

Indigenous staff – population parity

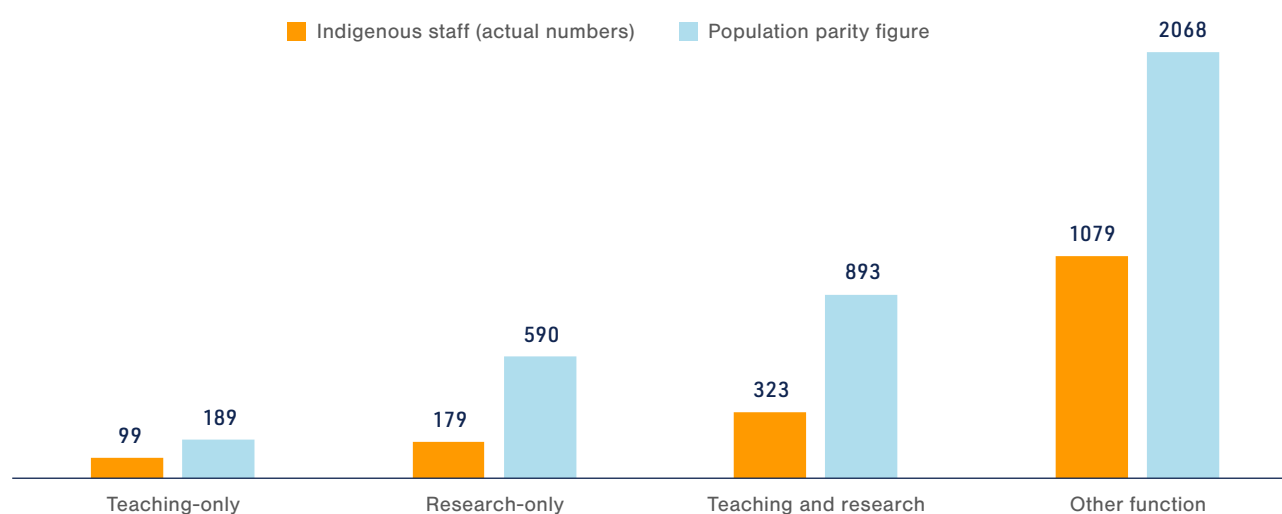


In 2021, 601 Indigenous staff were employed in a teaching and/or research role in Australian universities, representing 1.11 per cent of total staff employed in teaching or research roles.

To have reached population parity of 3.1 per cent in 2021 an additional 1,071 Indigenous academic staff would need to have been employed to meet that target (Figure 23).

In terms of types of roles, the sector would have needed to employ an extra 90 Indigenous staff in teaching-only roles, 411 in research-only roles and 570 in roles that combined teaching and research in 2021.

Figure 23: Indigenous staff, actual vs population parity figures, 2021



Source: UA estimates based on 2021 actual Indigenous staff numbers compared to if Indigenous staff numbers are at 3.1 per cent population parity.



The pipeline of Indigenous academics and researchers

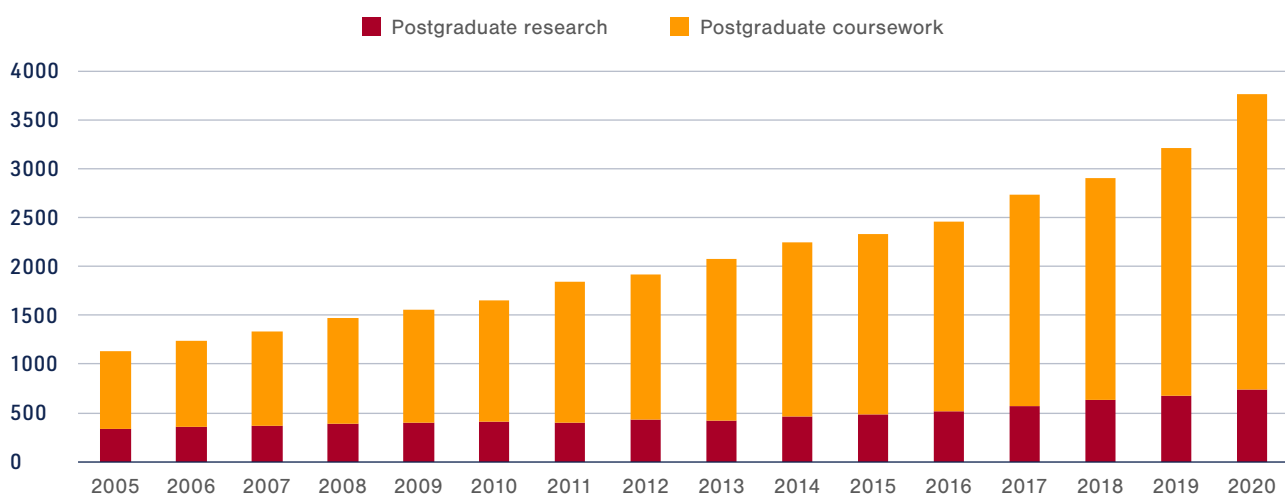
Universities indicate they are seeking to ‘grow their own’ Indigenous academics and researchers by building a pipeline of high performing undergraduate students, postgraduate students and alumni from Indigenous backgrounds. Indigenous postgraduate student enrolments have increased since 2005 (Figure 24).

The number of Indigenous enrolments in postgraduate research has more than doubled since 2005 – from 334 students to 743 students in 2020. **Enrolment in postgraduate coursework degrees has more than tripled** (growing by 277.6

per cent) – rising from 799 Indigenous students in 2005 to 3,017 Indigenous students in 2020.

As a result, the total number of Indigenous postgraduate students – coursework and research – as a proportion of all domestic postgraduate students increased to 1.54 per cent in 2020, from 0.67 per cent in 2005. The share of Indigenous postgraduate research students grew from 0.84 per cent in 2005 to 1.76 per cent in 2020 and the share of Indigenous postgraduate coursework students also grew from 0.61 per cent to 1.49 per cent over the same period (Figure 25).

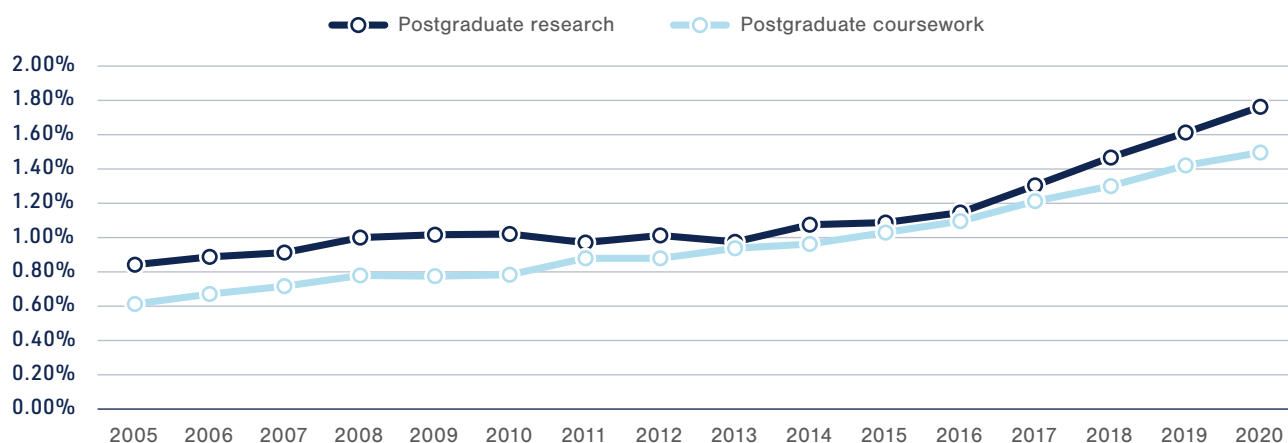
Figure 24: Indigenous postgraduate enrolments, 2005 to 2020



Source: Department of Education, Skills and Employment 2022, Unpublished HEIMS data.



Figure 25: Share of Indigenous postgraduate enrolments, 2005 to 2020

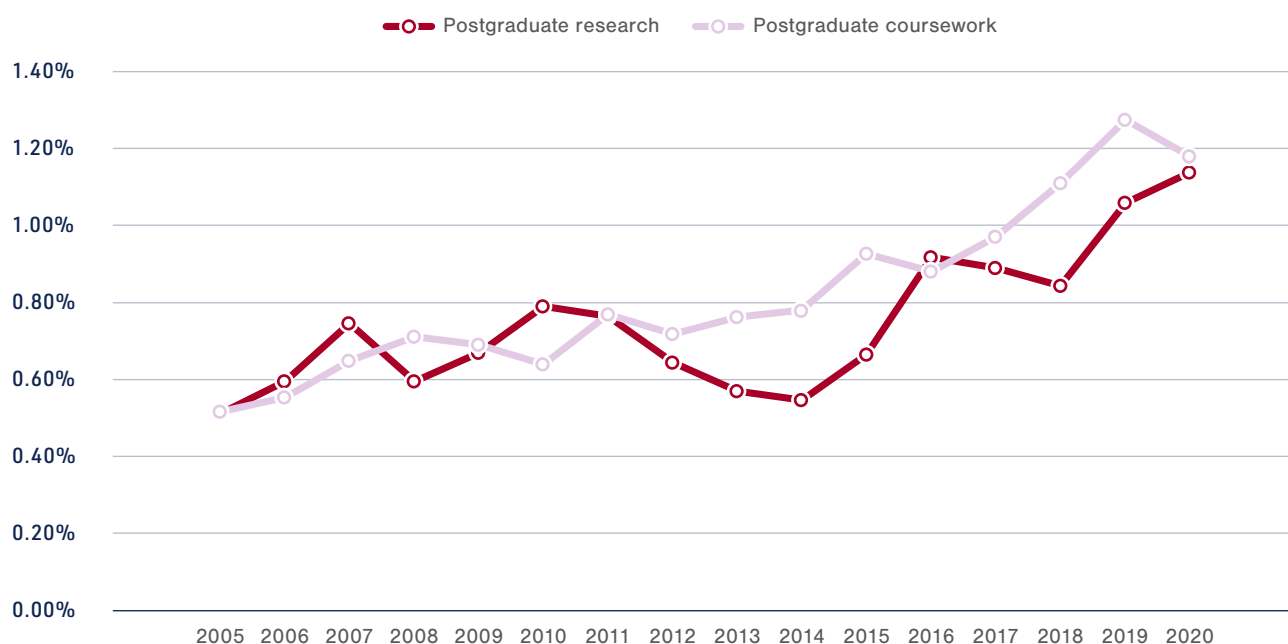


Source: Department of Education, Skills and Employment 2022, Unpublished HEIMS data.

Despite the growth in postgraduate enrolments, Indigenous postgraduate student award completions remain low despite the growth in recent years (Figure 26). In 2020, Indigenous students comprised just over one per cent of all domestic postgraduate

coursework completions (1.18 per cent or 764 completions) and all domestic postgraduate research award completions (1.14 per cent or 71 completions).

Figure 26: Share of Indigenous postgraduate award completions, 2005 to 2020

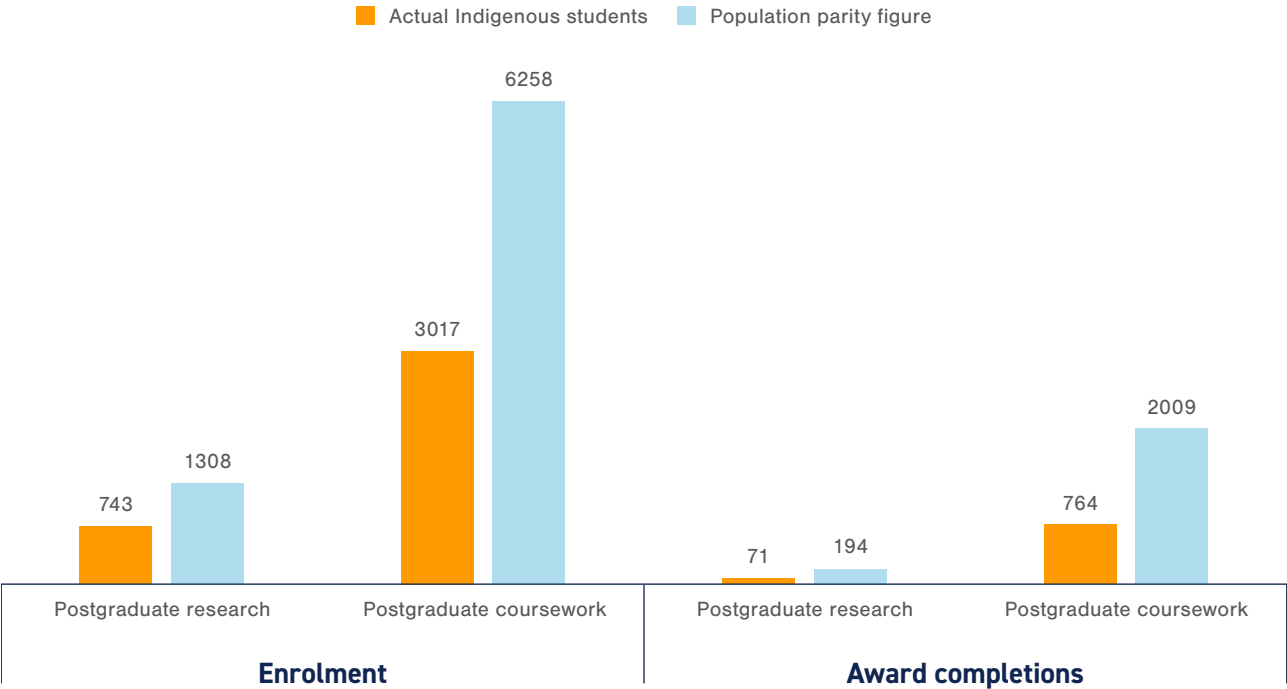


Source: Department of Education, Skills and Employment 2022, Visual Analytics – Award Course Completions Time Series, Table A and Table B providers only.



To reach population parity of 3.1 per cent, Figure 27 shows the sector would have needed to enrol an additional 565 Indigenous postgraduate research students and an additional 3,241 postgraduate coursework students in 2020; and graduate an additional 123 postgraduate research students and an additional 1,245 postgraduate coursework students from Indigenous backgrounds in 2020.

Figure 27: Indigenous postgraduate student, actual and population parity figures, 2020



Source: UA estimates based on 2020 actual Indigenous enrolments and award course completions compared to if Indigenous enrolments and award completions are at 3.1 per cent population parity.



Annual survey

The 2021 survey asked members a series of questions under three key headings¹:

1. Managing the impacts of COVID-19 on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff and students, and on engagement with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.
2. University approaches to combating racism against Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.
3. The content and coverage of cultural safety training and the recognition of cultural load on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff and students.

¹ The survey response rate was 95 per cent.

Managing the impacts of COVID-19



The majority of universities have taken action to mitigate the impacts of COVID-19 on teaching and learning for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff and students, and in taking action to tailor efforts in their engagement with Indigenous communities.

Over 70 per cent of respondents reported having specific initiatives for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff in response to the global pandemic (all respondents reported having strategies for all staff). The Indigenous-specific initiatives included:

- additional support for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff networks
- workshops for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff to discuss challenges and opportunities
- ensuring staff had the right equipment and resources to work from home
- staff well-being checks – workload and mental health
- The University of Sydney launched the Sydney Indigenous Research Network specifically to support researchers during COVID-19
- extensions for internally funded research
- employing teaching assistants to reduce burden of teaching demands
- digital resource repository of resources to support transition to online learning, and
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Staff from the University of Canberra attended a virtual Engoori Workshop, which focused on how to break through complex challenges to create positive workplace cultures.

More than 90 per cent of respondents stated they provided specific assistance to Indigenous students to help them manage the impacts of COVID-19 on their studies.

For example:

- a number of universities had Indigenous student success teams maintaining relationships with students to help ensure they stay connected with their peers and their studies
- redesigned Away-From-Base courses to deliver the residential components online
- subscription to an online app that provides tools to uplift and maintain wellbeing
- tailored tutoring support
- one university created a new role - Indigenous Student Success and Wellbeing Officer
- a monitoring learning management system to identify at-risk students pursuant to providing additional support
- Indigenous Centre outreach to students, and
- establishment of a Higher Degree by Research Indigenous student group that met regularly over Zoom.



Regarding engagement with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, 89 per cent of respondents tailored their engagement in response to the global pandemic with a view to maintaining relationships where face-to-face engagement is not always possible.

Initiatives included:

- QUT sponsored a virtual concert by musician Troy Cassar-Daley in collaboration with the Brisbane Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Community Health Service for residents at Eagleby's Jimbelunga Nursing Centre
- development of online forums for engaging with remote communities
- care packages for community Elders
- UNE partnered with the Armajun Aboriginal Health unit to roll out walk-in COVID vaccinations clinics across the New England and North West region
- streaming services such as UTS' seminar on cultural vandalism streamed by the Dhariwaa elders group in Walgett, and
- The University of Adelaide's Marni Wingku was run on a smaller scale due to COVID-19 restrictions. Here Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students in Years 9 to 12 had the opportunity to participate in workshops designed to reinforce to students that university is a realistic goal that will enrich their lives.

Combating racism

Whilst all respondents addressed racism in central policy, 46 per cent of respondents had anti-racism initiatives that explicitly address racism against Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. The Indigenous-specific initiatives included:

- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff and advisors contributing to university policy on structural discrimination to ensure it addresses racism targeted at Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people
- Indigenous workforce strategy targeting racism through changes to recruitment and selection procedures
- raising awareness about the effects of racism through engagement in discourses on decolonisation
- requiring executive group and senior leaders to publicly support campaigns, initiatives and stances against racism
- embedding Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander course content with the express intention of combating racism, and
- delivery of cultural safety training with the express intention of combating racism.

An additional 30 per cent of respondents had in place Indigenous-specific cultural safety training and other Indigenous-specific initiatives such as Indigenous knowledges into curricula and associated Indigenous graduate attributes that were reported as contributing to targeting racism against Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, without an explicitly expressed intent or policy.

All universities who had Indigenous-specific initiatives were formally measuring progress against their efforts, for example via student experience surveys.

Cultural safety



Overall, over 30 per cent of respondents were delivering Indigenous-specific cultural safety training to both staff and students. The figure for those who provided Indigenous cultural safety training to staff was 59 per cent and 2 per cent to students. Training was mandatory for 53 per cent.

Regarding the content of this training, the majority of those who provided it (81 per cent) included the impacts of dominant culture on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and addressed more subtle forms of racism. This included initiatives that describe the process of colonisation and its impact and ongoing impacts on Aboriginal people and factors such as unconscious bias.

For example, The University of Queensland Core Cultural Learning was developed by the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies. Modules focus on topics such as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures and identities, reflections on the meaning/significance of Country, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Histories and

key concepts in terms of Indigenous engagement: self-determination and autonomy and recognising the role of community and community organisations. Learning activities allow for critical self-reflection and opportunities for participants to achieve greater self-awareness of their personal and professional responsibilities in creating safe and equitable environments for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

For recognition of cultural load on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff and students, 26 per cent recognised this formally for both cohorts. The figure was 31 per cent for staff and 6 per cent for students.

For staff these initiatives took into account cultural load by adjusting workload allocations. For students cultural load was considered mainly in relation to assessment setting and deadlines. If cultural leave provisions only are counted (without workload adjustments), another 32 per cent recognised cultural load (for staff only).



Universities Australia activities



Universities Australia has its own commitments under the Indigenous Strategy 2022-25, which are:

- continued advocacy to government on issues relevant to participation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in higher education and research
- including Indigenous matters and perspectives in advocacy and policy development
- overseeing the strategy and its implementation
- sharing good practice
- developing an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander specific anti-racism statement, and
- advocacy by the Lead VC Indigenous to university leaders.

The key document in reporting against the Indigenous strategy will be the *Indigenous Strategy Annual Report*, which is published on the UA website. The annual survey questions will directly link to Strategy commitments and be repeated each year to track progress over time.

The other monitoring and reporting mechanisms for the strategy are:

- UA Directorate and DVC/PVC (Indigenous) Committee oversight of the strategy
- annual joint Board meeting between the UA Board and the NATSIHEC Executive
- twice-yearly session at UA Plenary where the Chair of the DVC/PVC (Indigenous) Committee, the National President of NATSIHEC and another PVC Indigenous are represented.
- bi-annual reporting by other DVC Committees to the UA Directorate, and
- regular meetings between the UA Directorate and NATSIHEC, including attendance at NATSIHEC Caucus meetings.

Board and Plenary



In 2021, the Universities Australia Board appointed Professor David Lloyd as the new Lead Vice-Chancellor Indigenous to champion Indigenous advancement at the Board and Plenary level. Professor Lloyd is Vice-Chancellor at the University of South Australia and a Deputy Chair on the UA Board.

The UA Board holds a joint meeting with the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Higher Education Consortium (NATSIHEC) Executive at the beginning of each year to discuss key priorities and progress under the UA Indigenous Strategy.

At the most recent joint meeting it was noted that the NATSIHEC and UA priorities are closely aligned and well reflected in the new UA Indigenous Strategy 2022-25, namely student success, staff success, university responsibility for Indigenous advancement and racism and cultural safety.

The Universities Australia Plenary has appointed three Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander observers to attend two Plenary meetings per year. These are the DVC/PVC Indigenous Committee Chair, the NATSIHEC National President and one other PVC Indigenous.





The National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Higher Education Consortium (NATSIHEC) is a member-based organisation comprising Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff of all levels from universities.

Universities Australia and NATSIHEC have held annual joint Board meetings for the past five years. These joint meetings – held at the start of each year – ensure leadership oversight of progress made

under the Universities Australia Indigenous Strategy. They also identify key areas of focus for the year between key Indigenous and non-Indigenous leaders across the sector.

The Universities Australia directorate also maintains an ongoing dialogue with NATSIHEC representatives and regularly attends NATSIHEC meetings to discuss progress under the Strategy and other issues relevant to Indigenous higher education.

Deputy Vice-Chancellor/Pro Vice-Chancellor Indigenous Committee

Established in February 2021, the Universities Australia Deputy Vice-Chancellor/Pro Vice-Chancellor Indigenous Committee is comprised of the DVC or PVC Indigenous or the most senior Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff member in an Indigenous-specific role.

The Committee's role is to advise Universities Australia on all matters relevant to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander inclusion and advancement in Australian universities - in particular, to advise and drive work under the UA Indigenous Strategy.

Under the strategy, the DVC/PVC Indigenous Committee will also be developing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander-specific cultural competence best practice principles.

Including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander leaders from across the sector as part of the UA DVC Committee leadership structure was essential in the development of the new Indigenous Strategy 2022-25 and will continue to be central in monitoring and implementation.



Deputy Vice-Chancellor committees

The four other DVC portfolio committees each have a responsibility to complete particular activities under the Indigenous Strategy. These are:

- DVC Academic – incorporating Indigenous knowledges into curricula
- DVC Corporate – develop Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employment guidelines, drawing on successful elements of institutional strategies across the sector. Also, develop model Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander procurement guidelines
- DVC Research – fostering Indigenous graduate research and higher degree by research candidate pathways, recognising the availability of additional completion funds from the Research Training Program for supporting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander candidates, and
- DVC International: support efforts to increase Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students' participation in international mobility experiences, through:
 - exploring best practice across the sector and options to support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students' access to engage in online global internships
 - progressing conversations with the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade to advocate for expanding target destination countries for New Colombo Plan-supported mobility experiences, and
 - ensuring DFAT maintains a positive perspective and prioritises New Colombo Plan mobility plans that include Indigenous/First Nations content or experiences.

DVC International will identify and share best practices to support international students to more comprehensively engage with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and practices.

DVC International will document and share with the sector their approaches and best practice with respect to international students' engagement with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures and communities.

In addition, DVC committees are required to:

- liaise with the DVC/PVC Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Committee on matters relating to Indigenous advancement
- report regularly to the UA Directorate on their specific commitments under the Strategy, and
- share good practice on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander advancement and make relevant materials available to the UA Directorate.



Advocacy

Throughout 2021 Universities Australia continued to advocate for initiatives to support the advancement of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in Australian universities through avenues such as government submissions including pre-budget submissions and in regular meetings with senior government officials. One of the key initiatives advocated by UA is the extension of all demand driven Commonwealth Supported Places to all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, not just those in regional or remote areas.

Another key initiative was through the development of the new Indigenous Strategy 2022-25 which brought together all member universities in joint commitment and was ratified by all member Vice-Chancellors.

A key advocacy event in 2021 was the Universities Australia Conference, which included a session on Indigenous student success and completion rates. The session explored Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander student outcomes, what it means to be 'successful' at university and analysis of student completion rates. The session was identified as an area where universities could be doing better and is a focus under the new Indigenous Strategy 2022-25. The session was chaired by Professor Adam Shoemaker Vice-Chancellor of Victoria University and Professor Bronwyn Fredericks Pro Vice-Chancellor Indigenous at The University of Queensland. Speakers were Professor Braden Hill Pro Vice-Chancellor Equity and Indigenous at Edith Cowan University, Professor Reuben Bolt PVC Indigenous (now DVC) Charles Darwin University and Ms Inala Cooper Director of Murrup Barak University of Melbourne.

Public submissions

Public submissions that addressed Indigenous issues made by Universities Australia in 2021 were to:

- the National Indigenous Australians Agency's (NIAA) Indigenous Skills, Engagement and Employment Program (ISEP) Discussion Paper, where UA recommended that based on the valuable employment outcomes a university qualification provides, particularly for Indigenous graduates, it is recommended that the ISEP include higher education as a supported skill development avenue to employment – 10 September, and
- the NIAA's Indigenous Digital Inclusion Plan Discussion paper where UA provided supporting evidence regarding poor digital access experienced by many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander university students – 29 October.

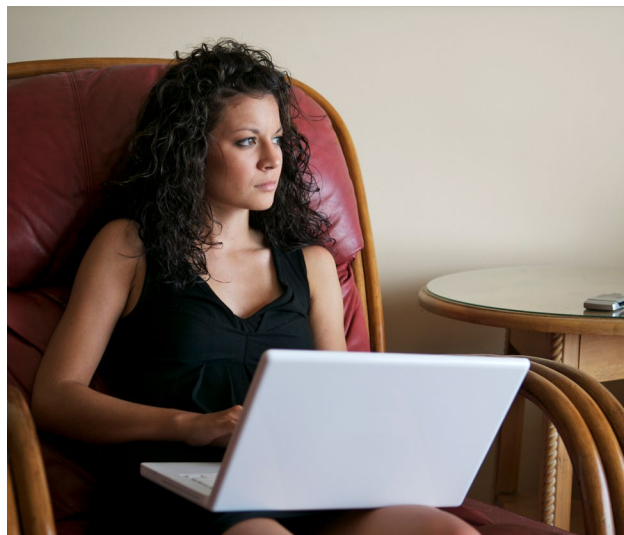


Partnership with CareerTrackers



CareerTrackers is a national non-profit organisation that supports Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander university students to intern with organisations to develop their workplace skills and to create employment networks.

In 2019, Universities Australia became an official CareerTrackers partner, with interns undertaking paid work experience with the organisation over the course of their studies. Our first CareerTrackers intern worked with UA in 2019 and 2020 in the strategic communications team. In 2020, Universities Australia welcomed its second CareerTrackers intern, working in the academic policy team, who in 2022 is entering their third year with UA.





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