UNIVERSITIES AUSTRALIA

2024 Indigenous Strategy Annual Report

November 2025

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Contents

Acknowledgement

We honour and respect the Indigenous peoples who have been, and continue to be, the Custodians of the lands, skies, and waterways upon which we at Universities Australia, and our member universities, live and work.

We acknowledge that Indigenous Elders and knowledge holders maintain and nourish Indigenous ways of knowing, being and doing. Research, teaching, and the academy, both locally and abroad, have benefitted from the enrichment and innovation these gifted knowledge systems grant.

We recognise all Indigenous staff and students who work and study at Australian universities. The significant contributions they make within the higher education sector impact far beyond the footprint of their institutions.

We acknowledge that sovereignty was never ceded, and that connection to Country and Culture has been maintained, nourished, and continues to thrive.

We pay respect to Elders and knowledge holders, past and present, as we listen carefully, tread lightly, and nurture those who are our future.

Foreword

This is the third annual report under Universities Australia's (UA) *Indigenous Strategy 2022–2025*. It aligns with the 2025 National Reconciliation Week theme, *Bridging Now to Next*, in demonstrating commitment to ensuring Indigenous peoples' priorities are at the heart of all we do. In keeping with the theme of bridging, planning is already underway for Universities Australia's next iteration of the Strategy.

The findings in this report highlight the growing contributions Indigenous peoples are making across the higher education sector. UA celebrate the ongoing achievements of Indigenous students, staff, and communities within higher education, as well as the many allies who walk beside them.

23,000 Indigenous students currently study at our universities, with many more Indigenous people serving as teaching staff, researchers, and administrators within our universities. More universities are benefitting from incorporating Indigenous ways of knowing, doing, and being into their curricula. And an increasing number of senior executive teams are also benefiting from the wisdom and expertise of senior Indigenous leaders in key decision-making roles.

I congratulate our Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Indigenous) Committee for their tireless work in bringing this report to fruition.

The Committee's leadership has meant everything when it comes to setting ambitious goals to advance Indigenous people in higher education — and more importantly — to achieve those goals.

I also thank all those at our member universities who supported the annual survey and other important work in connection with the Indigenous Strategy.

Mr Luke Sheehy
Chief Executive,
Universites Australia

Professor Leanne Holt
Deputy Vice-Chancellor
Indigenous, UNSW

Executive summary

Graduation represents both academic success and cultural pride for Indigenous students across Australia's higher education sector.

Overview

The 2024 report reflects the sector's continued progress in meeting the commitments under the Indigenous Strategy's five key themes. Universities have moved from establishing aspirations to implementing tangible actions and measuring change across these themes. This report is divided into two parts. Part 1 presents the results of universities' responses to the five key themes in the 2024 survey, and Part 2 outlines Universities Australia's activities and responses to its commitments under the strategy over the past year.

Part 1

Strategic documents

All responding institutions reported having at least one Indigenous-specific strategic document in place in 2024, with the average number of such documents per institution increasing to five. Indigenous Workforce Strategies remained the most common (with thirty-four universities having a formal strategy and others developing one), while Indigenous-specific anti-racism strategies and statements were still the least prevalent. Nevertheless, **the uptake of Indigenous-specific anti-racism statements and strategies increased**, with more institutions finalising these dedicated commitments in 2024 than in the previous year. This indicates a narrowing gap in strategic planning, as universities continue to broaden their formal commitments to Indigenous advancement.

Student success

Indigenous student enrolment patterns in 2024 continued to vary across institutions. The five universities with the largest Indigenous cohorts accounted for around 56% of total Indigenous enrolments, consistent with 2023. As in the previous year, the institutions with the highest enrolments at each degree level differed, highlighting diverse strengths across the sector.

Support initiatives remained broadly like 2022–2023, with tutoring, mentoring and pastoral programs still central. In 2024, however, more institutions reported adopting personalised and data-informed approaches, including targeted interventions and additional wrap-around supports within faculties and schools. While interest in data-driven strategies grew, specialised roles such as completion coaches or dedicated analytics positions were not widely reported.

Staff success

The 2024 data indicate ongoing growth in Indigenous staff recruitment and career development, though challenges persist. In 2024, only five universities reported not having a Pro Vice-Chancellor (Indigenous) or equivalent role, with several others recruiting or establishing the position. About four out of five universities have established (or are developing) formal promotion pathways or career advancement mechanisms tailored for Indigenous academic, professional, and executive staff — a marked increase from two-thirds in 2023. Despite these improvements, all institutions continued to report difficulties meeting their Indigenous staffing targets. A competitive job market and the ability of government and industry to attract Indigenous talent remained the key challenges to recruiting and retaining Indigenous academics and professionals. However, many universities reported converting more casual Indigenous roles into permanent or longer-term positions, reflecting efforts to build sustainable career pathways. Sector-wide data showed modest increases in the total number of Indigenous academic staff (with growth concentrated in full-time and fixed-term roles) and significant gains in Indigenous professional staff appointments. This ongoing shift suggests progress in reducing reliance on casual roles and strengthening the Indigenous workforce within academia.

University responsibility for Indigenous advancement

Universities continued to strengthen Indigenous representation and influence in governance and decision-making. Collectively, institutions reported over 110 Indigenous representatives on senior governing bodies in 2024, with the greatest representation on academic senates (or equivalent bodies). All universities now have formal mechanisms — such as Indigenous advisory committees or working groups — to ensure Indigenous perspectives inform key institutional decisions. Notably, about twenty-five institutions indicated that their most senior Indigenous leader reports directly to the Vice-Chancellor, up from twenty-two in the previous year. In the area of procurement, two-thirds of universities had implemented or were developing Indigenous procurement policies by the end of 2024, and several more have integrated Indigenous engagement priorities into broader procurement strategies. This reflects a substantial increase in sector-wide commitment to Indigenous economic participation. Some universities also highlighted new partnerships with Indigenous businesses and communities as part of their advancement initiatives.

Racism and cultural safety

Most institutions have put in place formal mechanisms to address racism and promote cultural safety on campus. By 2024, all responding universities either had a racism reporting mechanism or were in the final stages of developing one. There was also an increase in cultural safety training: all universities now offer some form of cultural safety training for staff (with most programs being mandatory or strongly encouraged), and over thirty universities offer cultural competency or awareness training for students. Every responding institution reported at least one active measure to create a culturally safe environment, ranging from regular cultural audits to visible symbols of recognition such as Indigenous place names, art, and dedicated gathering spaces on campus. Many universities established standing committees or working groups specifically focused on monitoring and enhancing cultural safety. Collectively, these efforts indicate a deepening sector-wide commitment to anti-racism and the well-being of Indigenous staff and students.

Recognising Indigenous values and knowledges

Institutions reported further embedding of Indigenous knowledges and value systems into their teaching, research, and governance structures. Whereas in 2022 many universities began by assigning specific roles to incorporate Indigenous content into curricula, by 2024 the emphasis had shifted to systemic approaches. Common strategies included comprehensive staff professional development on Indigenous pedagogy, curriculum audits to ensure inclusion of Indigenous perspectives across programs, and cross-institutional working groups dedicated to Indigenising curriculum and research. Several universities introduced new requirements or graduate attributes ensuring that all students develop awareness of Indigenous knowledges before graduation. In research, universities continued to promote Indigenous-led scholarship through dedicated internal funding schemes, the establishment of Indigenous research committees or Indigenous-focused research institutes, and targeted programs to build the pipeline of Indigenous researchers. Importantly, Indigenous research and knowledge contributions received national recognition in 2024: for the first time, the Australian Research Council's research evaluation framework (i.e. Excellence in Research for Australia and Engagement and Impact Assessment) included Indigenous Studies as a distinct field, highlighting the impact of Indigenous research on Australia's research excellence. These developments underscore how Indigenous knowledge systems are increasingly being valued as integral to the innovation and distinctiveness of Australian higher education.

Part 2

Part 2 of this report lays out the work of UA in 2024 against its commitments under the strategy to advocate to the public and government.

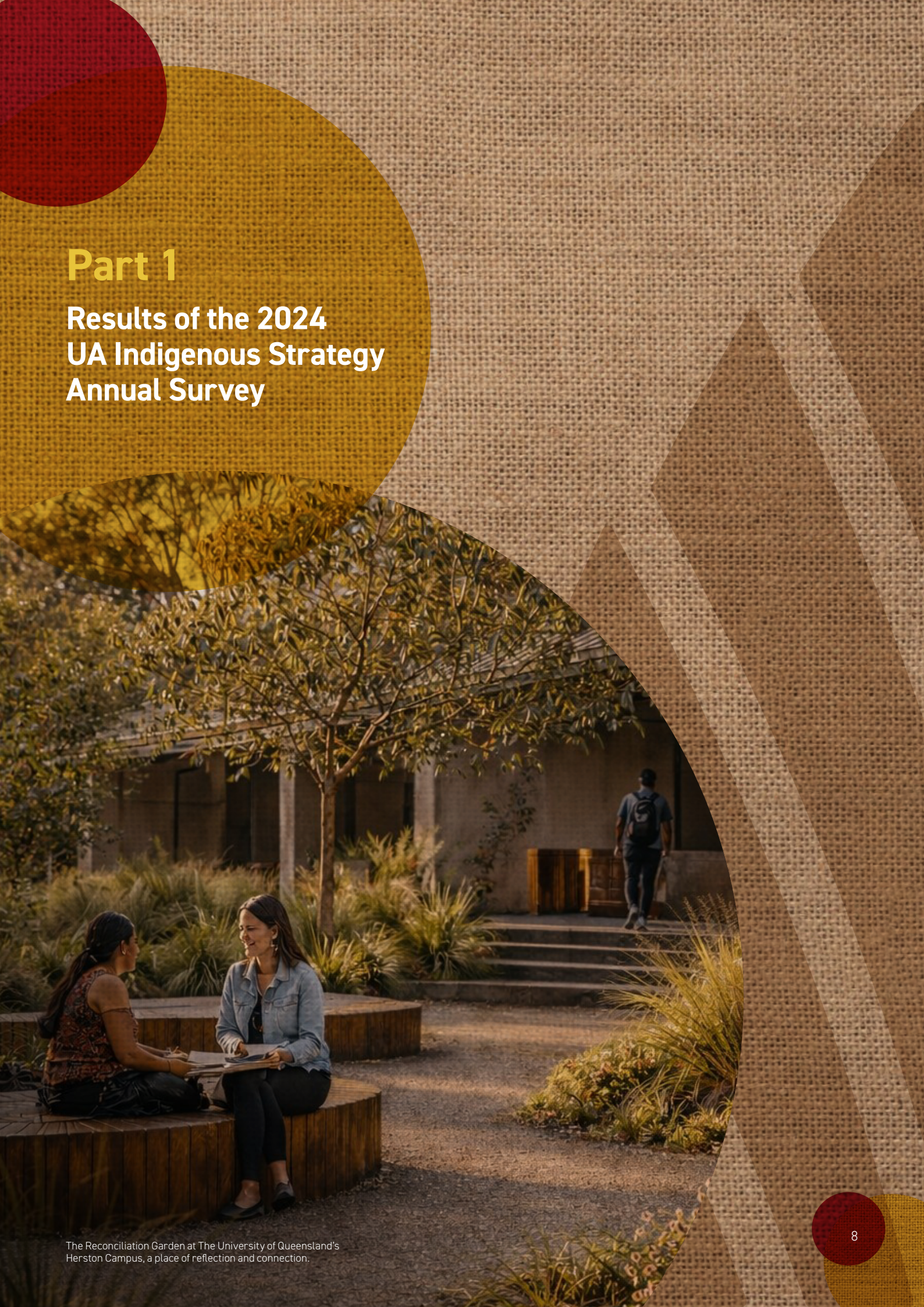
Notably, in 2023 UA:

In 2023 UA continued to advocate strongly for Indigenous higher education priorities and to support its member universities in advancing this work. UA made significant contributions to national policy discussions, including closely engaging with government on the implementation of the Australian Universities Accord recommendations relating to Indigenous higher education. Notably, UA supported calls for a dedicated Review of Indigenous Higher Education and the appointment of an Indigenous Commissioner to the proposed tertiary education governance body. UA also maintained a prominent voice in public commentary, reaffirming the sector's commitment to Indigenous advancement in the wake of the national referendum on an Indigenous Voice to Parliament.

Ensured that Indigenous perspectives continued to inform its broader policy and advocacy agenda. The 2024 UA Conference featured multiple Indigenous-led sessions and panels, showcasing leadership and expertise in areas such as embedding Indigenous knowledges in curriculum and strengthening Indigenous research capability. Across the DVC committees, significant progress was made against the strategy commitments: the DVC Indigenous Committee shaped UA's policy positions and provided strategic guidance on sector-wide initiatives; the DVC Academic Committee advanced shared approaches to Indigenous curriculum inclusion; the DVC Research Committee, in partnership with the Australian Council of Graduate Research, delivered workshops focused on growing the Indigenous researcher pipeline; the DVC International Committee expanded opportunities for Indigenous student and staff mobility; and the DVC Corporate Committee finalised new Indigenous Employment and Procurement Guidelines to support institutions in strengthening their internal practices. UA's partnership with NATSIHEC remained central, ensuring Indigenous leadership continues to guide joint strategic priorities. Further details on these activities is provided in Part 2 of this report.

Part 1

Results of the 2024 UA Indigenous Strategy Annual Survey



The Reconciliation Garden at The University of Queensland's Herston Campus, a place of reflection and connection.

Part 1 of this report presents the aggregated findings from the 2024 survey of Universities Australia's member institutions.

The survey asked universities to report on their activities, achievements, and data related to the Indigenous Strategy's five key themes: strategic documents, student success, staff success, university responsibility for Indigenous advancement, and racism and cultural safety (including the embedding of Indigenous knowledges).

Each of the following chapters (1–6) corresponds to one of these themes and details the sector's progress and examples of practice under that theme.

Examples drawn directly from institutional survey responses are highlighted in indented italics throughout Part 1, to illustrate and support the discussion of findings.

1. Strategic documents

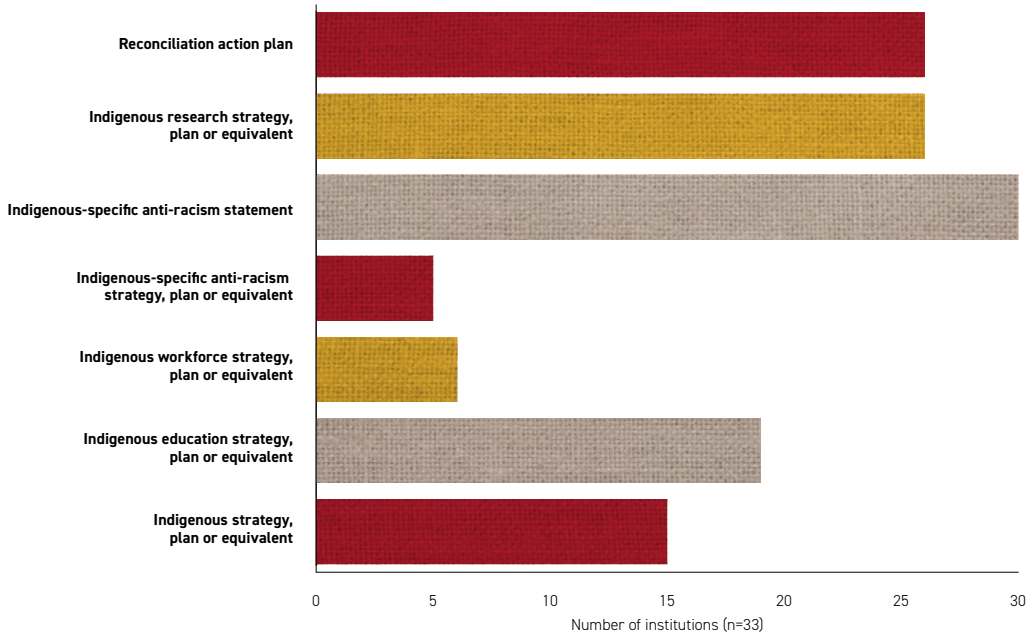
The 2024 survey expanded on the previous year's exploration of strategic documents supporting Indigenous advancement. Institutions were asked to report on all relevant high-level documents, including overarching Indigenous strategies, education strategies, workforce strategies, research strategies, Reconciliation Action Plans (RAPs), and any Indigenous-specific anti-racism strategies or statements.

All responding institutions reported having at least one Indigenous-specific strategic document in 2024, with an average of four to five documents per institution. Indigenous Workforce Strategies remained the most common, with 34 universities having a formal strategy in place and several others developing one.

Indigenous-specific anti-racism strategies and statements were less prevalent but continued to grow. Eight institutions reported having a formal anti-racism strategy, with a further six developing one, and around ten had published Indigenous-specific anti-racism statements. **This represents a modest increase from 2023, when fewer institutions reported having these documents in place**, indicating gradual but ongoing progress in strengthening sector-wide anti-racism commitments.

Figure 1 provides an overview of the types of strategic documents reported by universities in 2024. All institutions reported at least one Indigenous strategy or action plan guiding their efforts. Notably, twenty-two universities (two-thirds of respondents) now have a dedicated Indigenous Education Strategy to drive Indigenous student recruitment, retention, and success (with most of the remainder actively developing one). This is a significant improvement compared to 2022, when such documents were among the least common. About half of institutions reported having a current Reconciliation Action Plan (RAP), while others indicated they had chosen to focus on comprehensive Indigenous strategies in place of RAPs. Among those without a RAP, several noted that consultations with their Indigenous communities had, in recent years, prioritized developing Indigenous-led strategies tailored to their local context over subscribing to the RAP framework.

Figure 1: Indigenous-specific strategic documents reported by institutions (2024)



Institutions could also volunteer any other strategic documents with Indigenous-specific components that did not fit into the predefined categories. A wide variety of additional plans were highlighted, reflecting the diverse ways universities incorporate Indigenous priorities into their planning. For instance, some universities have Indigenous-specific procurement strategies aimed at increasing engagement with Indigenous businesses, while others have faculty- or school-level Indigenous strategic plans (e.g., a Law School Indigenous Strategy). There were also examples of frameworks focusing on cultural capability development, place-based community engagement plans, and internationalization strategies that include Indigenous partnerships.

"Our university's Indigenous Strategic Plan 2023–2027 provides the overarching vision and aligns with sub-strategies in learning and teaching, research, and workforce. In 2024, we launched a new Cultural Competency Framework as a companion document, which all colleges are now implementing to ensure staff and students develop the knowledge and skills to engage respectfully with Indigenous perspectives."

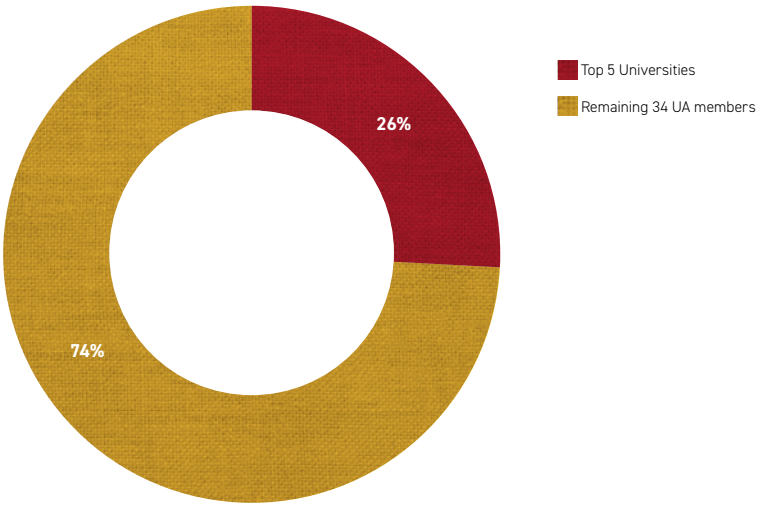
2. Student success

University of Adelaide celebrates Indigenous. The first section presents summary statistics reported for 2024, while the second section discusses programs and initiatives aimed at improving Indigenous student success and completion.

Statistics about students

The survey asked institutions to report the number of Indigenous students enrolled, completed, withdrawn, or articulating to further study in 2024, broken down by level of study. The data revealed that Indigenous student cohorts vary widely in size and composition across universities. As noted in the Executive Summary, Indigenous enrolments remain highly concentrated. Only five universities accounted for just over half of all Indigenous students enrolled in 2024, demonstrating that a small group of institutions continues to carry a significant share of the sector's total enrolment. This pattern reflects similar trends observed in previous years, where growth in Indigenous participation has been unevenly distributed across the sector.

Figure 2: Proportion of Indigenous students of all domestic students



This figure shows that the top five universities enrol 26% of all Indigenous domestic students, while the remaining 34 UA members collectively enrol 74%. This highlights the uneven distribution of Indigenous student participation across the higher education sector.

However, leadership in Indigenous enrolments differs by degree level — for instance, one university might have the highest number of Indigenous doctoral candidates, while another leads in undergraduate enrolments.

In 2024, universities described mixed patterns in Indigenous student progression, with many institutions reporting strengthened continuation for students who were actively engaged in services contributing to student success. Respondents highlighted the value of targeted tutoring, mentoring, wellbeing programs, and culturally safe spaces in keeping students connected to their studies. At the same time, several universities noted that withdrawals were still a challenge for some cohorts, particularly where students were balancing study with work, caring and community responsibilities. Institutions emphasised that flexible opportunities and early engagement remain critical to helping Indigenous students stay enrolled and succeed.

Figure 3a: Indigenous students enrolments, completions, withdrawals and articulations–2024 (n=31)

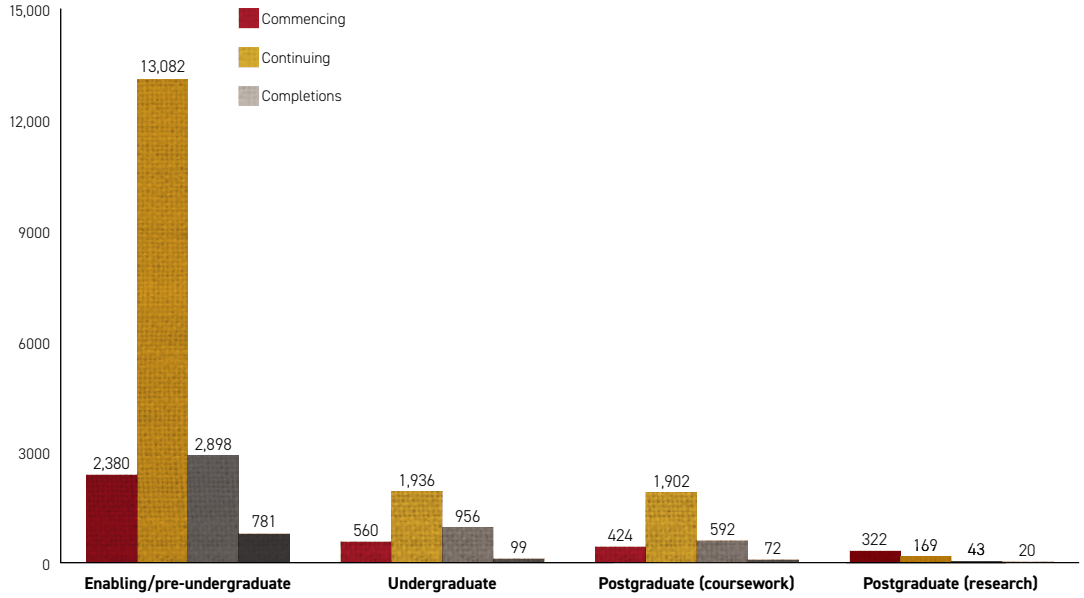
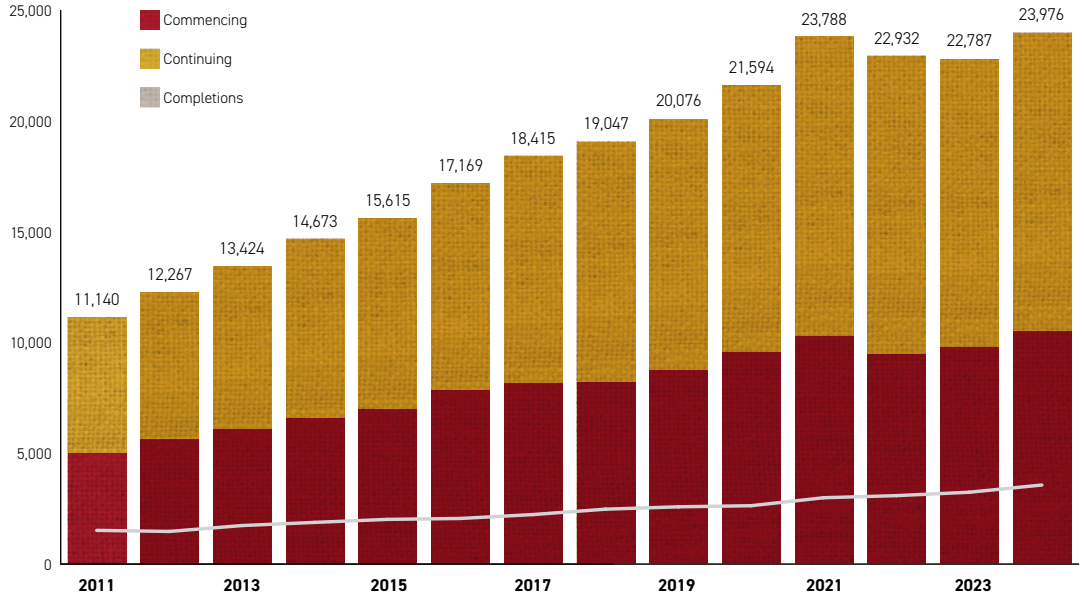


Figure 3b: Indigenous student enrolments and completions



The combined graphs show both the current profile and long-term growth of Indigenous participation in higher education. In 2024, most Indigenous students are enrolled at the undergraduate level, with enabling programs also supporting strong entry pathways, while postgraduate numbers remain smaller. Completions, withdrawals and articulations reflect the different scales of each study level. Over time, from 2011 to 2024, Indigenous commencing and continuing enrolments have grown significantly, alongside a steady rise in completions, highlighting increased access, retention and overall student success across the sector.

Student support initiatives

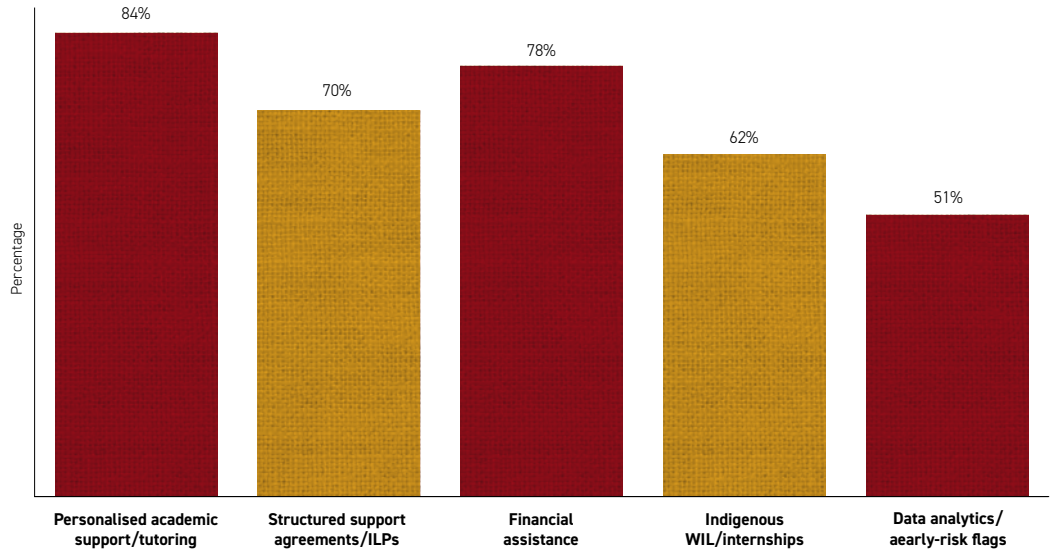
The survey asked institutions to describe how responsibility for Indigenous student success is shared across the university (particularly outside of dedicated Indigenous units) and to highlight any new or improved initiatives implemented in 2024 to boost completion rates. In their responses, universities detailed a wide array of strategies. Many described efforts to extend Indigenous student support into faculties, schools, and academic departments. Common examples included faculty-based Indigenous student liaison officers, mentoring programs pairing new Indigenous students with senior peers or alumni, and collaborative efforts between central Indigenous centres and faculties to track student progress.

In 2024, many universities described a shift toward more personalised support for Indigenous students. Thirty-one universities (84%) reported offering personalised academic support such as tutoring or academic skills programs, and twenty-six universities (70%) indicated that structured support agreements or individual learning plans were used to monitor progress and coordinate referrals. Financial barriers were also a strong focus, with twenty-nine universities (78%) providing some form of financial assistance, including scholarships, bursaries, or emergency funds. In addition, twenty-three universities (62%) expanded work-integrated learning or internship opportunities designed specifically for Indigenous students.

A growing number of institutions also adopted data-driven monitoring: nineteen universities (51%) reported using analytics tools or progress-tracking systems to identify students at risk of disengaging and enable proactive outreach.

Several universities expanded tutoring and mentoring initiatives in 2024. ***Thirty-one universities (84%)*** *offered dedicated tutoring or academic skills support, while* ***twenty-four (65%)*** *delivered structured mentoring programs. Many paired discipline-specific tutoring with guidance from Indigenous staff or faculty mentors, providing both academic and cultural support for students. Respondents noted that a more holistic, wrap-around approach — combining academic support with cultural and wellbeing support — has helped students remain engaged and improved progression for those who participate.*

Figure 4: Indigenous student completion supports offered across universities (n=33)



In addition to new initiatives, universities continued long-standing support programs in 2024. The Indigenous Tutorial Assistance Scheme (ITAS) remained a key academic support service at numerous institutions, with one-on-one or small-group tutoring funded through the Indigenous Student Success Program (ISSP) and university resources. Several respondents also described stronger collaboration between academic units and Indigenous support centres, including discipline-based mentoring and peer support arrangements to help students succeed in professional programs. Across the survey, institutions emphasised personalised assistance, early outreach to students who may be struggling, and a shared responsibility for Indigenous student success across the university.

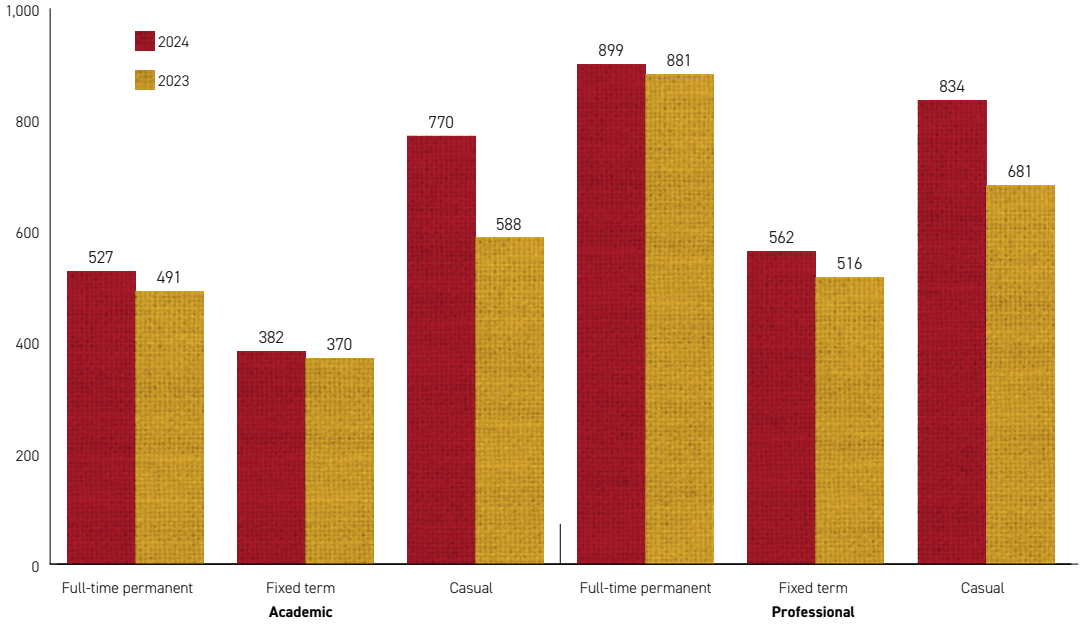
3. Staff success

This chapter examines Indigenous staff employment and career development in universities, covering both quantitative data on Indigenous staffing and qualitative insights into recruitment, retention, and advancement of Indigenous staff. It also addresses the challenges institutions face in meeting their Indigenous staffing goals and the initiatives underway to support Indigenous staff success.

Statistics about Indigenous staff

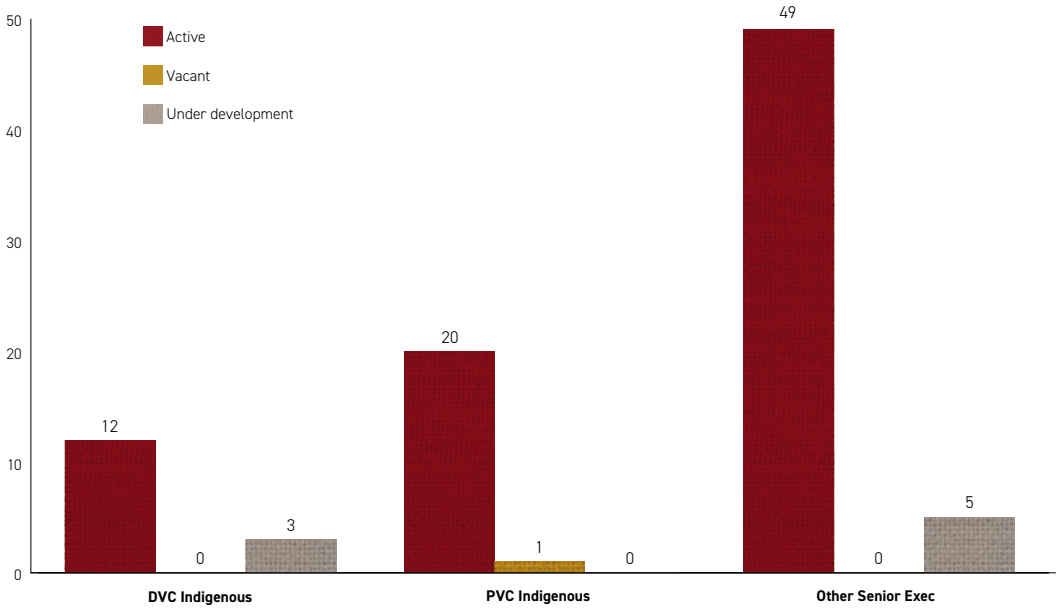
The 2024 survey collected data on the number of Indigenous staff employed across various categories (academic and professional, by employment type), as well as hires and departures during the year. Sector-wide, universities reported several thousand Indigenous staff in total, with increases observed in both academic and professional staff numbers compared to the previous year. Notably, the growth in Indigenous staff was more pronounced on the professional side, echoing the trend from 2023; however, some improvement in academic staff recruitment was also evident. Full-time ongoing Indigenous academic appointments rose modestly (several institutions converted long-term casual lecturers into permanent roles), and fixed-term academic positions also saw an uptick. Meanwhile, the number of Indigenous academics employed casually continued to decline in 2024, suggesting a shift towards more secure employment for many staff. For professional staff, universities reported strong growth in both permanent and fixed-term Indigenous appointments (some institutions undertook special recruitment drives or identified positions for Indigenous candidates), and even the number of casual Indigenous professional staff increased slightly as universities expanded specific project roles and internship opportunities.

Figure 5: Indigenous staff (Headcount) employed by Work contract (n=33)



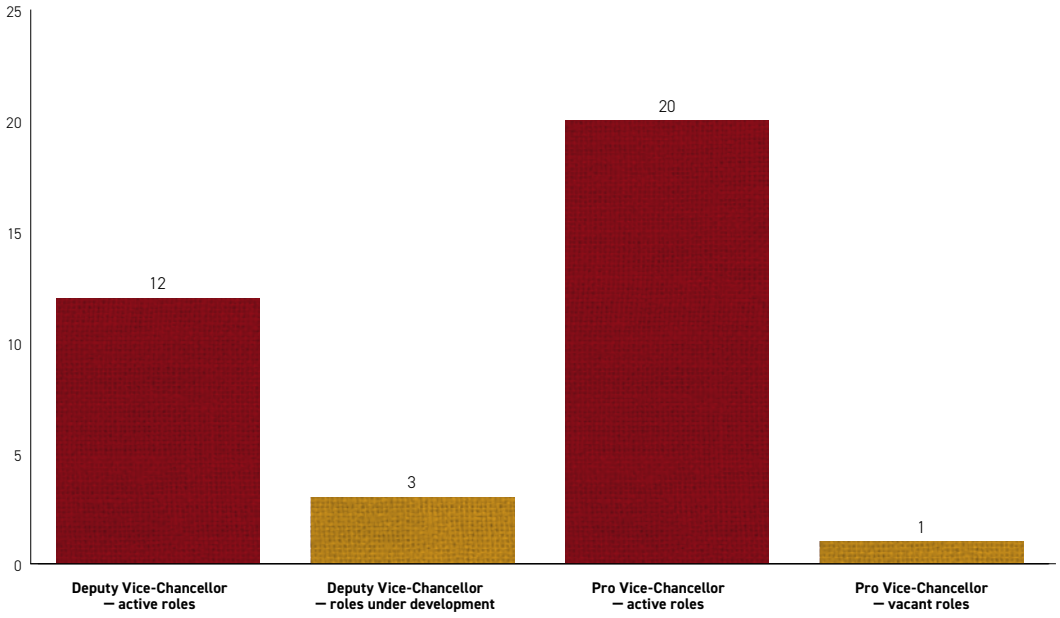
In terms of senior leadership, the number of Indigenous people in DVC or PVC Indigenous (or equivalent) roles increased. By the end of 2024, there were 12 Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Indigenous) positions across Australian universities and over two dozen Pro Vice-Chancellor (Indigenous) or similar roles.

Figure 6: Indigenous-identified senior leadership positions (DVC/PVC and others) — active, vacant, and under development (2024) (n=33)



In 2024, 33 of the 39 responding universities (approximately 85%) reported having an Indigenous person in a senior leadership role focused on Indigenous strategy, cultural leadership, or student and staff success. Common role titles included Pro Vice-Chancellor Indigenous, Dean Indigenous Education, and Director of Indigenous Strategy. This marks a positive trajectory from the situation at the start of the strategy period. Several universities that previously had no Indigenous representation at the executive level have, in 2024, appointed Indigenous leaders to new roles or elevated existing roles to report directly to senior management. Nevertheless, a handful of institutions still lack Indigenous representation at these higher echelons, often citing difficulties in recruiting suitable candidates or ongoing internal restructuring as reasons.

Figure 7: Universities with Indigenous senior leadership (PVC or DVC Indigenous): 2024 (n=33)



Challenges in recruitment and retention

The survey explicitly inquired about challenges universities face in meeting their Indigenous staffing targets. All institutions acknowledged ongoing challenges in attracting and/or retaining Indigenous staff, both academic and professional. The most frequently cited factors in 2024 were consistent with previous years: strong competition from other sectors (government, private industry, and community organisations) that can often offer higher salaries or more attractive conditions, the limited pool of candidates in certain academic disciplines, and the additional workload and pressures often placed on the few Indigenous staff within institutions (which can contribute to burnout or turnover). Some universities also noted challenges in recruiting to regional or remote campuses, where attracting any staff can be difficult and the pool of local Indigenous candidates may be small.

On a positive note, several responses indicated that universities are becoming more proactive and creative in addressing workforce challenges. Nine universities reported establishing Indigenous-identified graduate programs or "grow your own" academic pathways for promising Indigenous graduates. Fourteen described adjusting recruitment practices to be more culturally safe and inviting, and eighteen institutions reported investing in mentoring or professional development programs to support retention and career progression for Indigenous staff.

"A key challenge remains competition with government agencies for Indigenous talent, especially in research and IT roles. We lost two Indigenous staff members to higher-paying government jobs in 2024 despite counteroffers. This underlines the importance of developing non-monetary incentives and a supportive environment to retain our Indigenous staff."

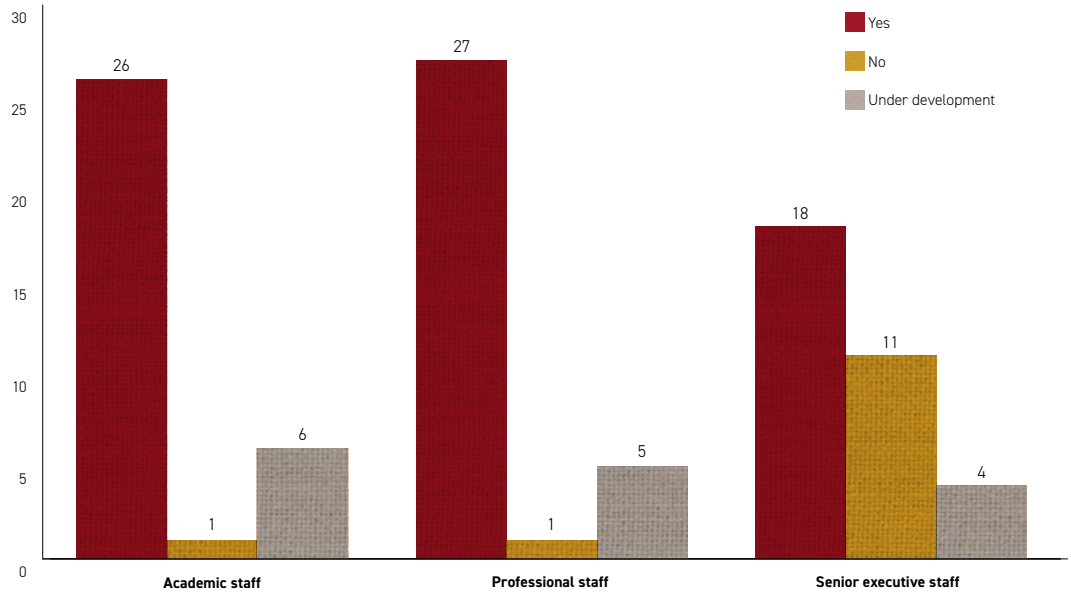
"We found that the additional cultural workload on our Indigenous academics (e.g., extensive committee commitments, student mentoring) was leading to burnout. In response, in 2024 we introduced a formal workload allocation policy that recognises cultural load and community engagement as part of service and hired an additional Indigenous academic in each faculty to better distribute responsibilities."

Career advancement and support

Approximately 80% of universities (31 of 39 respondents) reported having formal or developing career-advancement pathways tailored for Indigenous staff by 2024, including leadership development programs, Indigenous-identified academic promotion routes, and mentoring or sponsorship initiatives.

This includes initiatives such as targeted promotion criteria acknowledging Indigenous leadership and community engagement, professional development programs (often co-designed with Indigenous staff) to prepare them for promotion, and succession planning to build a pipeline for Indigenous staff into management roles. Numerous institutions reported successes in this area. **Seventeen universities** noted Indigenous academics moving into senior lecturer or associate professor roles, while **twenty-one institutions** reported Indigenous professional staff progressing into middle or senior management positions. **Twelve respondents** indicated increases across both academic and professional cohorts in 2024.

Figure 8: Career advancement systems for Indigenous staff — Academic, Professional, Executive-2024 (n=33)



However, the effectiveness of these initiatives varies, and many universities are still in initial stages of implementing changes. The survey responses emphasise that supporting Indigenous staff success requires sustained effort in mentoring, creating networks of peer support (some universities have formal Indigenous staff networks or caucuses), and addressing structural barriers. For example, some institutions flagged that without additional funding or positions, they struggle to create advancement opportunities, or that Indigenous staff are poached by other organisations just as they are prepared for leadership roles.

Overall, the picture in 2024 is one of gradual improvement: the number of Indigenous staff in universities is rising, more institutions have high-level Indigenous leadership and supportive policies in place, and the sector's awareness of the unique challenges and contributions of Indigenous staff is at its highest. At the same time, significant work remains to reach parity in employment and to ensure universities are workplaces of choice for Indigenous professionals and academics. The next phase of the strategy will need to focus even more on innovative ways to grow the Indigenous academic workforce and to foster the next generation of Indigenous scholars and leaders within the academy.

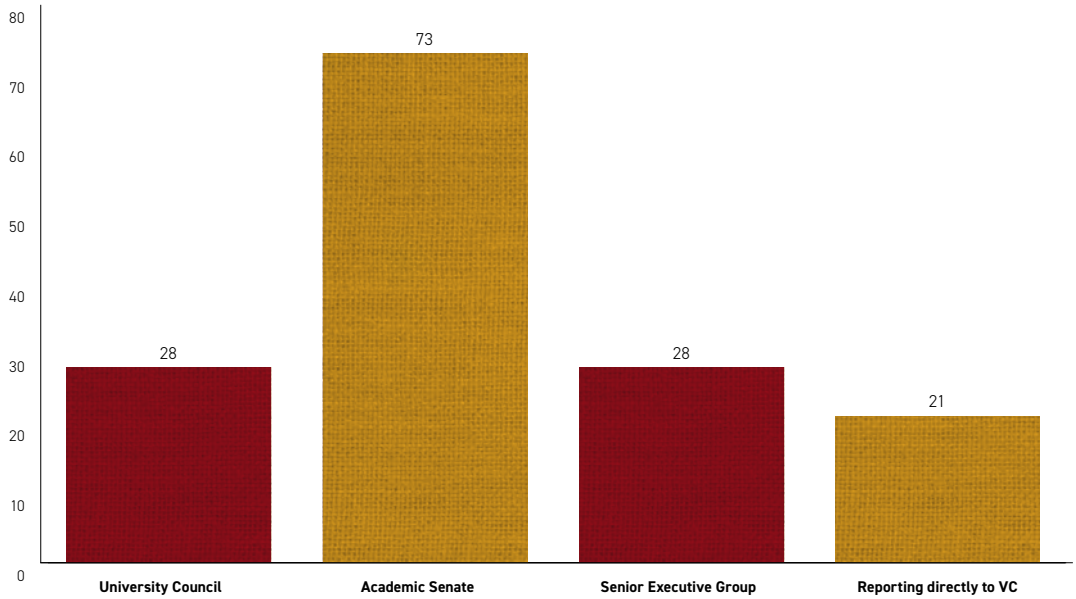
4. University responsibility for Indigenous advancement

This chapter examines how universities organise their resources, governance, and broader influence to advance Indigenous participation and success. It covers Indigenous representation in governance, inclusion of Indigenous perspectives in decision-making processes, and policies like procurement strategies that extend a university's commitment beyond the campus.

Indigenous representation in governance

The 2024 data indicate that Indigenous presence in university governance is becoming more commonplace. Across all responding institutions, more than **100 Indigenous individuals** were reported to hold positions on key governing bodies in 2024, including University Councils or Senates (around 40–45 people), Academic Boards or Senates (around 55–60 people), and senior executive committees (around 25–30 people). Indigenous academic staff and community members frequently sit on Academic Senates or equivalent (making these bodies the most likely to include Indigenous representation), while Indigenous professional staff and student representatives are also present in various governance roles. For example, many universities have at least one Indigenous member on their Council (or governing board), often an external community leader or Elder. On Academic Senates, multiple Indigenous academics (and sometimes an Indigenous student) contribute to deliberations. Senior executive teams, which historically had few Indigenous members, are gradually becoming more inclusive: as mentioned earlier, about twenty-five universities now have an Indigenous senior leader who reports directly to the Vice-Chancellor, ensuring a voice at the executive table. This increased representation helps bring Indigenous perspectives into high-level strategic decisions and signals an institutional commitment to shared leadership.

Figure 9: Indigenous representation on governing bodies (2024) (n=32)



In addition to formal positions on governing bodies, **most universities reported having established Indigenous advisory mechanisms that feed into decision-making**. **Thirty-three institutions** indicated they operate structures such as advisory committees, working groups, reference groups, or councils of Elders to provide guidance on policy, strategy, cultural matters, and institutional decision-making. These bodies serve to advise the university leadership on Indigenous matters and often review major policies or initiatives for their impact on Indigenous communities.

For instance, some institutions have a standalone Indigenous Advisory Council that meets regularly with the Vice-Chancellor, while others embed Indigenous subcommittees within existing governance structures (such as an Indigenous subcommittee of the Academic Board). These mechanisms ensure that beyond individual representation, there is a structured way for Indigenous stakeholders to influence university directions.

Policy and strategy implementation

Universities also detailed how Indigenous priorities are integrated into their broader policy implementation. Over half the institutions indicated that their senior Indigenous leader has a direct reporting line to the Vice-Chancellor (as previously noted), which greatly facilitates Indigenous input at the highest level. Additionally, numerous responses described internal requirements such as mandatory Indigenous impact statements for new policies or significant projects. Some universities require that any new strategic initiative or major policy proposal is reviewed for alignment with Indigenous strategy commitments — for example, ensuring that new campus developments include consultation with local Traditional Owners, or that new student support policies consider Indigenous student needs. Such practices embed Indigenous advancement considerations into the fabric of university operations, rather than treating them as separate or optional.

Procurement and other dimensions

A notable area of advancement in 2024 was the expansion of Indigenous procurement policies. Two-thirds of universities have now **either implemented an Indigenous procurement policy or are in the process of finalising one**, with **23 institutions** reporting an existing policy and four more indicating that theirs is currently under development or awaiting approval. These policies set targets or guidelines for purchasing goods and services from Indigenous-owned businesses, in alignment with broader government and sector efforts to stimulate Indigenous entrepreneurship and economic development. Some universities with mature procurement strategies reported millions of dollars in contracts awarded to Indigenous suppliers over the past year, covering everything from construction and catering to research consulting services. Others, particularly those in the process of developing policies, shared that they have begun pilot initiatives — for example, creating a directory of local Indigenous vendors or requiring that major contractors have their own Indigenous engagement plans. This focus on supplier diversity is an important extension of universities' responsibility for Indigenous advancement, as it leverages their economic footprint to benefit Indigenous communities.

Beyond procurement, universities described other ways they see their responsibility extending beyond campus. These included partnerships with Indigenous community organisations, sharing research findings that benefit Indigenous communities, and advocating publicly for Indigenous higher education (e.g., taking collective stances on national issues such as the Indigenous Voice to Parliament). In 2024, following the national referendum outcome, many university leaders reaffirmed their commitment to reconciliation and Indigenous advancement in official communications, underlining that universities will continue to be places that value and uplift Indigenous voices.

"Our University Council now includes two Indigenous external members and one current Indigenous student. Additionally, an Indigenous Governance Advisory Committee, comprising Elders and community representatives, meets quarterly and advises on all major strategic decisions. This has fundamentally changed how we incorporate Indigenous perspectives at the highest level."

"We launched an Indigenous Procurement Policy in early 2024 with a target to direct at least 3% of our addressable procurement spend to Indigenous-owned businesses. By year's end, we had engaged over 25 Indigenous suppliers, ranging from office supplies to consulting services, injecting an estimated $5 million into Indigenous businesses."

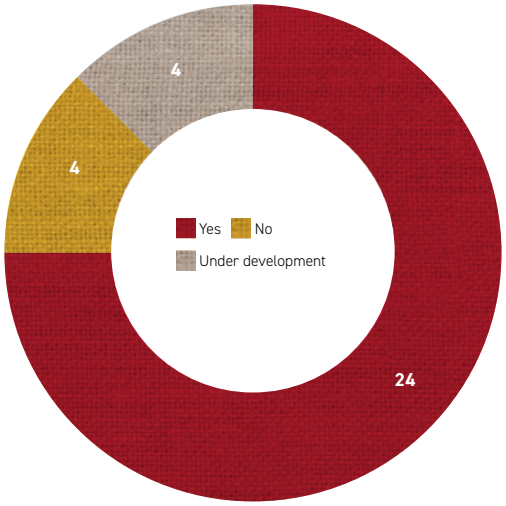
5. Racism and cultural safety

This chapter reports on how universities are tackling racism and fostering cultural safety on campus. It includes the prevalence of formal racism reporting mechanisms, the provision of cultural safety training for staff and students, and other initiatives aimed at creating safe and inclusive environments for Indigenous peoples.

Anti-racism measures

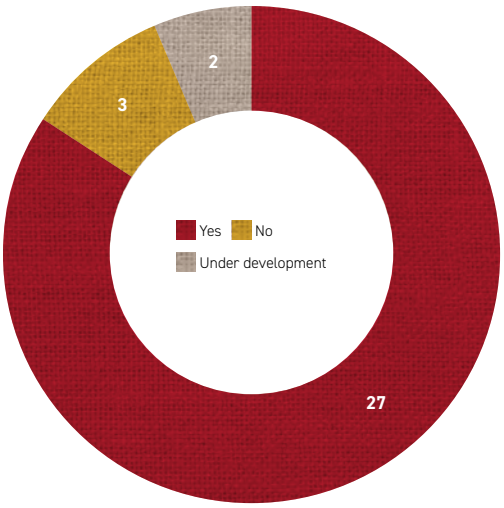
By 2024, most Australian universities have established formal mechanisms for reporting and addressing incidents of racism. According to the survey, twenty-eight universities indicated they have a dedicated racism reporting tool or procedure accessible to staff and students. The few institutions without a full mechanism in place reported that they were either reviewing their processes or developing new reporting systems. In the survey, six universities indicated that they did not yet have a complete Indigenous impact or alignment mechanism, and all six reported that work was underway — either through internal policy reviews, the design of new reporting tools, or consultation processes to establish a formalised system. Typically, these mechanisms allow individuals to report racist behavior or discrimination confidentially, and they trigger investigation and response protocols. In several institutions, the racism reporting system is part of a broader equity or misconduct reporting platform but with specific provisions to manage racial incidents (and in some cases, specifically those affecting Indigenous staff and students). The existence of these mechanisms, coupled with awareness campaigns, is essential in encouraging people to speak up and in holding universities accountable for dealing with racism.

Figure 10: Formal racism reporting mechanism (n=32)



Hand in hand with reporting mechanisms, universities have amplified their anti-racism and cultural safety training efforts. In 2024, training in Indigenous cultural awareness or cultural safety was provided to staff at 100% of responding institutions. In many cases, this training is mandatory for all new staff and is offered regularly (e.g., through online modules supplemented by face-to-face workshops). Approximately two-thirds of universities offered cultural safety or Indigenous awareness training to students in 2024.

Figure 11: Cultural training to student (n=32)



In total, 26 of the 39 responding institutions reported providing structured cultural awareness modules for students — most commonly in health sciences, education, social work, and teaching degrees, where cultural competency is linked to professional accreditation standards. Several institutions also reported making this training a core part of student orientation, delivered online and tailored to local Indigenous contexts, histories, and community relationships.

In terms of content, cultural safety programs in 2024 have evolved beyond basic awareness; they often involve interactive components, Indigenous facilitators, and reflection on power dynamics and bias. Several survey responses highlighted the involvement of Elders or local community members in delivering training, ensuring authenticity and impact.

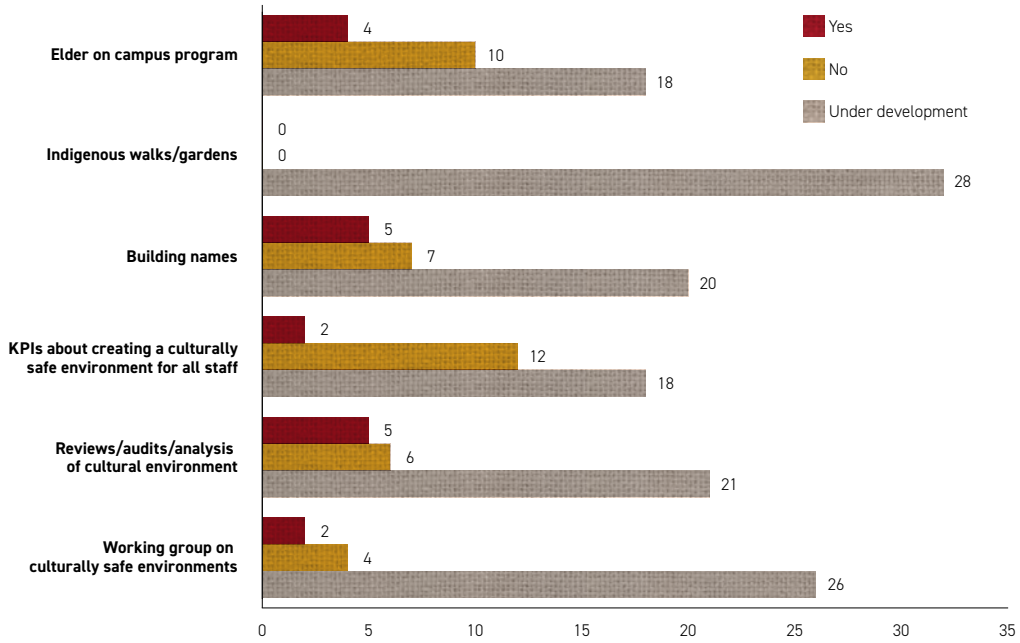
Creating culturally safe environments

Every university reported having measures to promote a culturally safe environment for Indigenous people on campus.

Common measures include having active working groups or committees tasked with monitoring cultural climate, conducting regular audits or surveys of Indigenous staff and student experiences, and visibly embedding Indigenous cultures into campus life. For example, many campuses now feature prominent Acknowledgment of Country plaques, Indigenous artwork, gardens with native plants significant to local Indigenous communities, and buildings or lecture theatres named in Indigenous languages or after respected Indigenous figures. Programs like Elder-in-Residence or Elder-on-Campus exist at several universities, providing cultural mentorship and guidance to both Indigenous and non-Indigenous members of the university community. These initiatives not only support Indigenous staff and students but also educate and engage the broader university population in respecting Indigenous cultures.

The survey also asked about specific features of cultural safety initiatives. The results show that most staff cultural training programs are mixed-mode (with online modules and in-person elements), co-designed with Indigenous experts, and increasingly moving from one-off induction sessions to ongoing learning opportunities. Likewise, some institutions reported introducing cultural competency requirements into course curricula (for instance, medical and nursing programs requiring students to demonstrate cultural safety capabilities before graduating).

Figure 12: Mechanisms in place to create a culturally safe environment (n=32)



"In 2024 we launched a 'Speak Up' online racism reporting portal, which includes an option specifically for Indigenous-related incidents. This has already led to several reports that were investigated and resolved, demonstrating to our community that racism has no place here."

"Our Cultural Safety Training Program was revamped this year with direct input from local Elders. All academic staff attended a yarning circle session as part of the training, which opened many eyes. Importantly, we have made this training an annual requirement rather than a one-off, to ensure continuous reflection and learning.

6. Recognising the value of Indigenous peoples and knowledges

This chapter looks at how universities recognise, value, and embed Indigenous knowledges and perspectives in their core activities, and how they promote Indigenous-led scholarship and partnership. It encompasses curriculum integration, research initiatives, and structural changes that elevate Indigenous knowledge systems within academia.

Embedding Indigenous knowledges in curriculum

In 2024, universities continued to make headway in incorporating Indigenous ways of knowing, being, and doing into curricula across disciplines. Survey responses detailed numerous approaches: some universities have introduced mandatory Indigenous studies units or modules for all undergraduates, others have integrated Indigenous case studies and content into professional courses (like law, engineering, or business), and many have

provided extensive professional development to equip teaching staff for embedding Indigenous perspectives. One noticeable trend is the move from ad-hoc inclusion by enthusiastic individuals to a more coordinated strategy at the program or institution level. For instance, universities have conducted curriculum audits to identify gaps in Indigenous content and then systematically developed materials to fill those gaps, often led by Indigenous curriculum specialists. There is also growing recognition that embedding Indigenous knowledges benefits all students and enhances the distinctiveness and social relevance of the education universities provide.

Graduating students with Indigenous cultural competency

Beyond curriculum content, the 2024 survey asked how institutions ensure that their graduates leave with an awareness of Indigenous knowledges. Responses indicate that a growing number of universities are formalising Indigenous cultural competency as a core learning outcome. In total, 15 universities reported having defined Indigenous graduate attributes or institution-wide learning outcomes that every student must achieve. Practical implementation varied: nine institutions reported that student's complete capstone assessments connected to Indigenous communities or issues, while six require reflective assessment pieces such as an e-portfolio or written reflection on Indigenous knowledge. A smaller group — four universities — noted they are piloting or developing formal assessment tools to measure students' cultural competency. Although not yet universal, the momentum is clearly toward embedding Indigenous cultural competency as a graduation requirement across the sector.

This reflects both an ethical stance and the demands of many professional fields for graduates who can work effectively in culturally diverse settings, particularly with Indigenous communities.

Promoting Indigenous research and leadership

The survey also gathered information on mechanisms used to recognize and promote Indigenous-led research. All universities reported at least one mechanism in this regard. The most common were dedicated Indigenous research positions or fellowships (for example, universities creating Indigenous postdoctoral fellowships or research chair positions), and internal grant schemes or seed funding earmarked for Indigenous research projects. Additionally, more than half of the universities have established some form of Indigenous research network or hub that brings together Indigenous researchers and allies to collaborate and support each other. Some notable developments in 2024 include the opening of new Indigenous-focused research centres, such as an Indigenous Futures Institute at one university and a National Indigenous Health Research Hub at another, often in partnership with external funding bodies. Recognising Indigenous research excellence was also highlighted, with a few institutions introducing annual awards for outstanding Indigenous research contributions or embedding Indigenous categories in their research excellence awards.

2024 was also a landmark year for Indigenous research recognition at the national level. The Excellence in Research for Australia (ERA) evaluation included Indigenous Studies as its own field of research to be assessed, and similarly the Engagement and Impact (EI) assessment considered Indigenous research impact as a distinct category. This inclusion, co-developed with Indigenous scholars, has elevated the profile of Indigenous research and encouraged universities to report and celebrate work in this space. It has also likely contributed to more strategic support for Indigenous researchers, knowing that their work will be formally recognised in national benchmarks.

"Our Bachelor of Education now embeds Indigenous perspectives in every year of study. In 2024 we introduced a compulsory cultural immersion field trip for third-year students, developed in partnership with a local Aboriginal community. This experience has become a transformative highlight of the program."

"To ensure all graduates have baseline cultural competency, we added a requirement in 2024 that each student complete an Indigenous Community Engagement module before graduation. This online module, co-created with Indigenous educators, concludes with students reflecting on how Indigenous knowledge relates to their field."

"We established an Indigenous Research Fellowship scheme offering two new fellowships each year for early-career Indigenous scholars. In its first year, 2024, we saw an increase in Indigenous-led research projects and more Indigenous candidates applying for academic roles, indicating a growing pipeline."

In summary, universities are actively transforming their practices to honour and integrate Indigenous knowledge systems and to empower Indigenous people as knowledge creators and leaders. These efforts demonstrate the sector's recognition that Indigenous participation and perspectives are not only matters of equity but are fundamental to the excellence and relevance of Australian higher education.

Part 2

Universities Australia's activities in 2024

Queensland University of Technology celebrates Indigenous students in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) as they pursue their dream careers and encourage others to follow their passion for the field.

Part 2 of the annual report details the initiatives and actions undertaken by Universities Australia (UA) in 2024 to fulfil its commitments under the *Indigenous Strategy 2022–2025*.

These commitments include advocating for Indigenous higher education priorities in the public and policy arenas, incorporating Indigenous matters into UA's own policy development, overseeing the implementation of the strategy, sharing best practices, and supporting the sector through data collection and reporting (such as this annual report). This section also highlights the work of UA's Deputy Vice-Chancellors Committees in progressing their specific Indigenous Strategy responsibilities over the past year.

UA has made several commitments under the Indigenous Strategy, including:

- Continued advocacy to government on issues affecting the participation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in higher education and research.
- Incorporating Indigenous perspectives in UA's advocacy and policy development across all areas.
- Overseeing the Indigenous Strategy and its implementation, including sector-wide coordination.
- Sharing good practice across the sector through events and publications.
- Developing an Indigenous-specific anti-racism statement.
- Supporting a Lead VC for Indigenous affairs to champion Indigenous higher education among university leaders.
- Gathering data from universities on their progress against strategy commitments, producing an annual report of the findings, and publishing it on the UA website.

In 2024, UA actively engaged with the Federal Government and key stakeholders to advance Indigenous higher education policy. UA contributed to national conversations relating to the National Agreement on Closing the Gap, particularly in areas concerning equity in higher education, Indigenous student success, and culturally appropriate data practices. UA submissions, sector roundtables, and policy engagement were informed by advice from the DVC Indigenous Committee, ensuring advocacy reflected the priorities of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander leaders across the university sector.

As the Universities Accord recommendations moved into early implementation in 2024, UA continued to emphasise Indigenous higher education outcomes as a core priority. UA supported the Accord recommendation to establish a dedicated Indigenous Higher Education Review to evaluate and strengthen Indigenous participation and success across the sector. Consistent with long-standing advocacy from UA and universities, the Accord also recommended restoring demand-driven places for Indigenous students. In late 2024, the Federal Government signalled its intention to bring forward this reform from 2025, aligning with the sector's calls for increased access and equity.

Community advocacy remained a significant part of UA's role. In the lead-up to and aftermath of the 2023 Indigenous Voice to Parliament referendum, Universities Australia took a public stance supporting respectful dialogue and the recognition of Indigenous peoples. After the referendum's outcome, UA released statements reaffirming universities' dedication to reconciliation and the empowerment of Indigenous communities through education and research. UA's 2024 conference in Canberra exemplified its commitment to amplifying Indigenous voices: one of the keynote panels featured prominent Indigenous academics discussing self-determination in university governance, and Indigenous speakers were woven throughout sessions on curriculum innovation, research ethics, and student support.

Throughout 2024, UA facilitated collaboration and oversight of the Indigenous Strategy through its internal governance structures. The UA Board and Executive received updates on Strategy progress, supported by advice from the DVC Indigenous Committee and regular engagement with NATSIHEC leaders. UA also continued corporate ensuring Strategy priorities across its Deputy Vice-Chancellor committees — Academic, Research, International and Corporate — ensuring that Indigenous matters are considered across all areas of university policy and planning.

Advocacy to government and community

Throughout 2024, UA remained a strong advocate for Indigenous higher education. Key policy submissions included input to government on Accord implementation, with a focus on reforms that support Indigenous participation and success, such as restoring demand-driven places and strengthening Indigenous advisory leadership. UA also contributed to Closing the Gap discussions, advocating for stronger tertiary education measures and culturally appropriate data practices aligned with Indigenous data sovereignty. In its 2024–25 pre-budget submission, UA sought increased resourcing for programs that improve Indigenous pathways, scholarships and research opportunities. Parliamentary engagement continued through briefings, hearings and meetings, where UA and Vice-Chancellors highlighted the importance of initiatives such as the Indigenous Student Success Program and other measures that expand opportunity for Indigenous learners.

Deputy Vice-Chancellors Committees

Each of UA's Deputy Vice-Chancellor (DVC) committees holds specific responsibilities under the Indigenous Strategy. In 2024, they undertook the following activities:

DVC Indigenous Committee

Throughout 2024, the DVC Indigenous Committee continued to provide strong leadership and strategic advice to Universities Australia on matters affecting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, staff, and communities. The committee played a key role in shaping UA's positions on Accord implementation, particularly in relation to improving Indigenous participation, retention, and student support.

Members — senior Indigenous leaders from universities across the country — met regularly to identify emerging issues, share good practice, and inform coordinated sector responses. Their insights directly supported UA's policy development, advocacy, and guidance to the sector.

The committee also contributed to the development of UA's Indigenous-specific anti-racism statement, providing advice on cultural framing and practical measures to strengthen safety and inclusion.

In late 2024, the committee began early discussions on strategic priorities beyond the current Indigenous Strategy 2022–2025, including opportunities to enhance national coordination, accountability, and Indigenous self-determination in future sector planning.

DVC Academic Committee

The Deputy Vice-Chancellors Academic committee established an Indigenous focused working group in 2024 and identified five key topics: increasing Indigenous student numbers, increasing Indigenous staff numbers, Indigenising the curriculum, Indigenising pedagogy, and improving the environment for Indigenous peoples.

The working group developed a workplan with the goal to collect good practice examples of creating and integrating Indigenous graduate attributes and understanding challenges in implementing these attributes across the sector. Using a three-phase approach the group will continue to investigate and support how institutions are embedding Indigenous curriculum and pedagogies into the teaching and learning structures with a particular focus on processes.

The working group proposed a call on DVCAs to provide input into a survey re. whether they have a graduate attribute, processes and governance around incorporating Indigenous knowledges and pedagogies to address the attribute, what profession development opportunities exist in their institutions, and case studies of what is working with examples of what they want to learn and the current challenges and barriers.

DVC Research Committee

The Deputy Vice-Chancellors Research Indigenous working group's focus for 2024 was on building the pipeline of Indigenous researchers. This included a workshop in April focused on ways institutions can encourage and support growing the Indigenous research workforce through identifying key challenges and opportunities and through sharing of best practice within the sector. This was organised in partnership with the Australia Council of Graduate Research and in close consultation with the DVC-Indigenous Committee. The face-to-face session was well subscribed to by senior leaders and practitioners from across the sector and was followed in November with an online session which invited participants to reflect on the practical actions which could be implemented within their own institutions.

In 2024, UA also undertook a survey of university research officers based on a set of questions posed by Professor Michelle Trudgett (then Chair of the DVC-Indigenous Committee) at the April workshop. These questions were effectively a litmus of institutional supports for the Indigenous HDR pipeline. This data will provide a baseline for measuring progress against DVC Research committee commitments under the UA Indigenous Strategy.

DVC International Committee

The Deputy Vice-Chancellors International Indigenous Strategy Working Group's membership was updated in mid-2024 and the renewed working group met in October. Priority areas of engagement included ensuring access to tailored global mobility programs for Indigenous students and staff, advocating for positive settings in Government mobility programs and accessing data on global Indigenous connections. Discussions on global mobility opportunities focused on best practice and potential consortia approaches among universities.

There was also discussion on providing feedback to government on the New Colombo Plan which is a priority for 2025 in line with the Government's reform agenda. Another priority is data collection on the international connections of Indigenous staff which could be used to further deepen understanding of the linkages across the sector. Moving into 2025, the group's focus is on further maturing discussions on these areas and actioning the emerging tasks.

DVC Corporate Committee

In 2024, a working group from the Deputy Vice-Chancellors Corporate committee focused on implementing the UA Indigenous Employment and Procurement Guidelines, developed as part of the *UA Indigenous Strategy 2022–25*. The committee worked to strengthen collaboration and ensure universities could meet their implementation goals.

The process was supported by presentations and discussions with sector partners. The Australasian Universities Procurement Network (AUPN) outlined how it could assist with rolling out the procurement guidelines and proposed a workshop featuring successful case studies. Members agreed that centralising resources could help overcome challenges and emphasised the importance of clearly articulating the "why" behind Indigenous employment and procurement objectives.

Professor Sadie Heckenberg and Professor Braden Hill presented findings from the UA Indigenous 2023 survey report and discussed next steps for embedding the guidelines within institutions. The sub-committee also recommended including a UA Indigenous Strategy session at the UA Solution Summit (which was actioned and included in the 2025 UA Solution Summit) to maintain sector-wide engagement.

The committee addressed other priorities, including on employment guidelines, distribution of the UA Indigenous report to all DVC sub-committees, and encouraging universities to join AUPN. These actions reaffirmed the sector's commitment to advancing Indigenous employment and procurement outcomes through strategic partnerships and shared best practice.

Conclusion

Through the University of Adelaide's Aboriginal Pathways Program, students build essential academic and digital skills while deepening their connection to culture, community, and wellbeing.

The 2024 Indigenous Strategy Annual Report demonstrates that the university sector continues to make steady, meaningful progress towards the goals of the *UA Indigenous Strategy 2022–2025*. Universities have moved from establishing intentions to implementing actions, embedding Indigenous priorities across governance, teaching, research, student support, and workforce development. Evidence from the annual survey shows increased strategic planning, strengthened cultural safety practices, greater representation of Indigenous leaders in senior roles, and continued innovation in supporting Indigenous students and staff to succeed.

While challenges remain — particularly in relation to uneven student participation across the sector, recruitment and retention of Indigenous staff, and the need for sustained cultural change — the foundations for long-term improvement are stronger than ever. Universities are increasingly adopting systemic approaches: coordinated curriculum reform, structured pathways for Indigenous researchers and leaders, expanded procurement strategies, and whole-of-institution accountability mechanisms. These developments signal a growing recognition that Indigenous advancement is a shared responsibility and a core measure of institutional excellence.

UA's own work in 2024 further reinforced this momentum. Through strong national advocacy, policy leadership, collaboration with Indigenous peak bodies, and coordination across Deputy Vice-Chancellor committees, UA ensured that Indigenous matters remained central to Accord implementation and national higher education reform.

As the current Strategy approaches its conclusion, the sector is well-placed to build on this progress. The insights of the DVC Indigenous Committee and the commitments of universities across the country point to a more coordinated and ambitious next phase. Moving into 2025 and beyond, the challenge and opportunity will be to deepen systemic change, strengthen Indigenous self-determination in higher education, and support the next generation of Indigenous students, staff, researchers, and leaders to thrive.

Universities Australia remains committed to working in partnership with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, communities, and institutions to ensure that Indigenous knowledges, cultures, and leadership continue to enrich, shape, and define the future of the Australian university sector.

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