

WESTERN SYDNEY
UNIVERSITY



WESTERN SYDNEY UNIVERSITY INDIGENOUS PROFESSORiate



Submission to the 2023
Australian Universities Accord

The artwork used in this document is from a work entitled *Those who came before us* which was co-facilitated, with WSU Indigenous and non-Indigenous staff and students, and led by artist Allan McKenzie, a Wiradjuri-Gamilaroi man from Griffith, NSW.

The Indigenous Professoriate Group at Western Sydney University are glad to provide the observations and suggestions below in response to The Accord Interim Report. We trust that the Review team will consider our recommendations.

We are pleased that the Accord team took note of the many submissions which drew attention to the value of Indigenous leadership and self-determination. In this document we address two key issues, Indigenous self-determination, and resourcing of Indigenous initiatives to drive equity outcomes.

Indigenous People at the heart of Australia's higher education system

Several United Nations covenants refer to the general rights of peoples for self-determination. The International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural rights address civil and political rights within nations and the principle of freedom to freely pursue economic, social, and cultural development. Governments have a responsibility to ensure that self-determination is possible. The United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples affirms this general right to self-determination whilst also enshrining the right to continuing Indigenous cultural practices. These rights relate to collectives rather than individuals. Indigenous people have always acted collectively in higher education, as evidenced by advisory groups such as the [National Aboriginal Education Committee](#), [Indigenous Higher Education Advisory Council](#), [National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Higher Education Consortium](#) and more recently the [Universities Australia Deputy/Pro Vice-Chancellor Indigenous Committee](#). **Ensuring appropriate participation in decision making, which affects Indigenous people, is critical to upholding these covenants.** While these documents are directed at governments, they are instructive at tertiary education sector and institutional level. **A key component of self-determination in tertiary education is ensuring that Indigenous people are well positioned to make decisions about our futures.** Genuinely having Indigenous people at the heart of the Australian higher education system will likely require significant shifts in government and institutional thinking. We are not a passive populace waiting to be swept into higher education to fill national workforce needs, but rather sovereign peoples seeking opportunities to develop and succeed commensurate with our community aspirations.

Indigenous people must have genuine participation and authority in the tertiary education sector and institutional decision processes. For Indigenous people to truly be at the heart of the Australian higher education system, there will need to be effective mechanisms for Indigenous involvement in university and high-level sector decision-making **that extends beyond tokenistic representations to meet broad equality aspirations.** Almost all decisions made in universities will in some way effect Indigenous people, whether it be appointment of senior staff or allocation of finances. Current mechanisms for Indigenous inclusion, such as the appointment of Pro and Deputy Vice-Chancellor's Indigenous and the establishment of the Universities Australian Deputy and Pro Vice-Chancellor Indigenous Committee, are positive developments. Yet not all universities have such appointments, and some evidence suggests that university authorities are often inclined to inclusion only where it is not in competition with other institutional strategic outcomes (Povey et al., 2022; Trudgett et al., 2022). The following are examples of mechanisms for Indigenous self-determination at sector and institutional level.

Sector

- An Indigenous Tertiary Education Commissioner as part of the proposed Tertiary Education Commission.
- An Indigenous Tertiary Education Advisory Council established with authority to make recommendations to relevant Federal ministers regardless of the success of the Voice to Parliament.

University

- Indigenous representation on university Councils, which could include Indigenous co-chairs, an elected Indigenous staff position and an elected Indigenous student position.
- An Indigenous Governance Mechanism which oversees Indigenous funding and contributes to overall university funding discussions.
- Meaningful participation in the appointment of key positions such as Chancellor, Deputy Chancellor, Vice-Chancellor, Senior Deputy Vice-Chancellor/Provost and Deputy Vice-Chancellor positions.
- Indigenous appointments on Academic Senate/Board (ideally at least one elected position).

Overall Recommendation

1. The WSU Indigenous Professoriate Group **strongly support the suggestion in the Interim Accord Report for a more detailed review of Indigenous higher education.**
2. This review should **focus on** matters of university governance and policy development, sector-wide Indigenous leadership and effective sector and institutional power-sharing mechanisms.
3. We also suggest that **an Indigenous Commissioner be established as part of the proposed Tertiary Education Commission.**

Building Indigenous Student Success Through Realistic Resourcing

If we are to successfully achieve the desired large increase in Indigenous students, **a realistic assessment of funding requirements for adequate university staffing and for direct student daily living support is critical.** A significant increase in the numbers of students attending and graduating from universities will not be cost neutral, whether servicing those students comes from existing or new providers.

At present much of the work of enhancing Indigenous success is achieved through the additional cultural and education support offered by (mostly) Indigenous staff working in Indigenous Centres. Funding for Centres largely comes from Indigenous Student Success Program, which currently has a 15% ceiling and floor, which might preclude additional funding for large increases in Indigenous student volume. **Indigenous Centres (such as Badanami – Centre for Indigenous Education) are often poorly resourced by institutions and require a rethink on investment.** The institutional practices in relation to this funding vary considerably across the sector, despite a requirement for an Indigenous Governance Mechanism to oversee the funds.

Indigenous student success can be linked with Indigenous academic (Best & Stuart, 2014; Fredericks et al., 2022; Moreton-Robinson et al., 2011) and professional staff presence (Milne, et al., 2016; Uink et al., 2021). Our students gain significant benefits from seeing other Indigenous present across various roles in the sector – including through interaction with Indigenous academics in academic contexts (Bullen & Flavell, 2017; Moodie et al., 2018). If we are to realise the aspirations presented in the Interim Report **an injection of funding is required to create more positions in the sector as well as opportunities to develop the academic pipeline.** Bringing more Indigenous students into the sector requires intensive connections into schools and communities that begin in primary school through to high school. **This work is currently under-resourced and haphazardly funded.**

Sector wide there is an urgent need for upskilling of non-Indigenous staff in Indigenous cultural capability, **particularly for those with supervisory and line management responsibility over Indigenous staff, to ensure quality teaching and researcher development.** Successive reports (see for example Behrendt, et al., 2011; Grote, 2008) have recommended greater overall cultural capability to ensure that universities and their disciplinary and organizational practices support Indigenous success. Yet, there are no targeted current funds for this vital work, with varied responses across the sector.

Students both undergraduate and postgraduate, require **financial support for daily living, for placements for degrees where practicums are a mandated part of a degree and to be able to take up** the extra-curricular activities, such as internships and international experiences, that so enrich a degree. Additional funding to support such endeavours is likely to greatly increase the success of Indigenous students.

A fairer allocation of funds

Universities have a range of funding sources for the major activities of teaching and research. The research allocation is primarily through the Research Block grant, incorporating the Research Training Program (RTP) and the Research Support Program (RSP) and teaching funds are allocated via the Commonwealth Grant Scheme. **We are suggesting a fairer allocation of these funds to enable Indigenous success and as a clear manifestation of Indigenous self-determination policy.** While there are other sources of institution generated funds, for example through investment portfolios, industry partnerships and philanthropy, our recommendation relates to the major sources of funding as indicated in Figure 1. We propose the allocation (or institutional acquittal) of a proportion of institutional funds that equates to Indigenous population parity (at present 3.8%). Combined with Indigenous governance, this mechanism **would ensure funding self-determination and equity**, allowing for genuine and sustained measures to ensure the pipeline of Indigenous students into higher education, bolster success at university and enhance a highly qualified national Indigenous workforce and enable re-investment back into universities through Indigenous workforce participation.

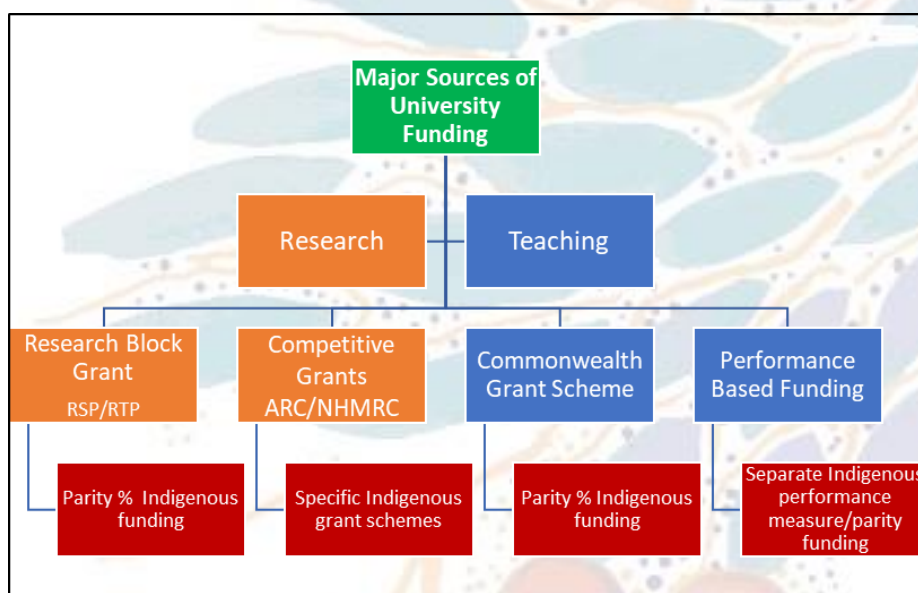


Figure 1. Major Sources of University Funding with suggested resource flow to Indigenous self-determination.

Following the 2016 [ACOLA](#) Review of Australia's Research Training System, a recommendation to double weight the funding for Indigenous Higher Degree Research completions was implemented. Currently this funding is not isolated in block grants, and the funds are not commonly re-invested into Indigenous specific activities. This funding should be directed to Indigenous specific outcomes, with Indigenous oversight.

Overall Recommendation

1. It is recommended that a proportion of all university funding be reserved for Indigenous education purposes and that this should be reflective of the total Indigenous population (currently 3.8%).
2. Identified and reserved allocation of Indigenous Higher Degree completion funds.

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