

Submission from ██████████ in ‘Response to the *Australian Universities Accord Interim Report*’.

This submission, from ██████████ as the ██████████ ██████████ is on behalf of members, and responds to **Section 2.5 - Fostering international engagement**, cited in the *Australian Universities Accord Interim Report (The Report)* (pp. 91-95).

The Report states:

The Review is considering how best to create a sustainable and globally connected international education sector that is central to the mission of institutions, that benefits Australia and its regions, that builds country to country connections through teaching and research, and that remains internationally competitive for decades to come (p.91).

The Review sees international education less as an industry and more as a crucial element of Australia’s soft diplomacy, regional prosperity and development. This makes the quality of the education we provide even more important (page 7).

The Report also discussed embedding and promoting First Nations research and knowledge systems to *improve understanding in the community – both domestically and globally – of First Nations knowledge, culture and history*, whilst acknowledging that:

Australia is home to the oldest living culture, a culture with its own diverse epistemological practices, including deep and enduring histories of oral tradition, as well as storytelling, cultural, scientific, medical and agricultural practices. Valuing and embedding First Nations knowledges in Australia’s university research sector is an opportunity Australia should not miss. Not only will this enable First Nations people to take a leading role in shaping and producing knowledge, but it will also improve understanding in the community – both domestically and globally – of First Nations knowledge, culture and history.

Embedding and promoting First Nations research and knowledge systems will require growing the pipeline of First Nations research students. First Nations students are currently underrepresented in PhD enrolments, making up only 1.7% of total enrolments.¹ Programs should be targeted at incentivising and supporting First Nations students to undertake and complete HDR programs. These programs could be developed and designed in collaboration with First Nations people and academics. There are already many great examples of this across the sector (p.107).

The Report considers that “A smaller student population manifests as fewer Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander researchers and academics, and in the broader community, where Australia misses out on the knowledge, expertise and talent of First Nations people across our society and the economy”... and “The Accord process gives Australia a chance to determine what needs to be done to meet this target and to continue the conversation about First Nations participation, success and self-determination in higher education” (pp. 35; 36).

██████████ position and role in international First Nations higher education

As the ██████████ ██████████ there is a concern that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples are not visible in the Accord’s review of international engagement / fostering international engagement.

¹ Department of Education, *Domestic PhD student enrolments (by equity group)* [unpublished data], Department of Education, Canberra, 2023.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff working in the higher education sector have had a significant role fostering international Indigenous engagement in higher education, for well over thirty years. It is important that the Accord Review Panel members include information on the role of Indigenous peoples in this space and included in the future reforms and policies for higher education in Australia.

Acknowledging the role that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples and communities, within the higher education context, have had in developing and publishing research, and engaging with other international First Nations colleagues, institutions and communities is important and should be used to inform policies and resource allocations to continue building the engagement and collaborative networks already established between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples (staff, students, communities and institutions across the higher education sector) and other international First Nations Peoples and their communities and institutions.

The international Indigenous engagement and collaborative networks established within the Indigenous higher education sector

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples working in education in Australia have been collaborating and networking with other First Nations Peoples, their institutions and communities across the world, since the 1970's. Initially they all came together at education and research conferences such as the World Indigenous Peoples Conference on Education (WIPCE)². WIPCE attendees were also instrumental in working on the design of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) principles, and supporting them.

Since the 1970's, WIPCE has been ongoing, and convenes a conference every three years. A website link to the recent WIPCE conference identifies the strength of First Nations peoples in their continued self-determination to improve education for First Nations peoples across the world, and which includes the revitalisation of their languages and establishment of their own educational institutions and organisations, and improved social and economic outcomes, through improved educational outcomes.

In 2002, at a WIPCE Conference held in Canada, a group of First Nations peoples from across the World, and working in higher education, established the World Indigenous Nations Higher Education Consortium (WINHEC)³. WINHEC members have continued to meet annually since 2002 and have established its governance and organisational structures. NATSIHEC is a member of the WINHEC and is active in its governance processes, having four (4) member seats on the WINHEC Executive Board.

Executive members have portfolios aligned to the Universities Australia's (UA)⁴ themes. One of these portfolios is aligned to the UA 'International' portfolio. The UA's key focus areas published in its Indigenous Strategy 2022-2025 are also included in individual university's Indigenous policies and strategies for education, research, employment, engagement/collaboration, teaching and learning, and the work and study environment to create culturally safe spaces and places to enable cultural capacity building.

² <https://wipce2022.net/background/>
<https://wipce2022.net/wipce-2022-workshops/#page-content>
<https://wipce2022.net/speakers/#page-content>

³ <https://winhec.org/>

⁴ <https://www.universitiesaustralia.edu.au/policy-submissions/diversity-equity/universities-australias-indigenous-strategy-2022-2025/>

Through its international engagement, [REDACTED] members have established international collaborative networks and alliances with international First Nations Peoples and their education institutions and which includes the communities they are connected with/to.

[REDACTED] member representatives, including myself, have also attended and actively engaged in the United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues (UNPFII) over the past 2 decades, having tabled Interventions on behalf of Indigenous Peoples of the Pacific and Internationally through WINHEC. [REDACTED] involvement in the global mobilisation of First Peoples participation in higher education has increasingly provided members with an opportunity to engage in several major initiatives designed to align with the principles and aspirations of the UNDRIP.

The UNDRIP's Articles and their application in the Australian international Indigenous higher education context, has led to the establishment and ongoing developments and best practice movements between Australia's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples working in higher education institutions/universities with their First Nations colleagues and institutions in Aotearoa; Alaska, Canada, Hawaii, Taiwan, Mainland USA, and Norway. The latter are also members of the WINHEC and WINU and are involved on the governance committees that include Indigenous leaders in education, researchers and educators, academics, Elders and students.

WINHEC has also established governance entities such as a World Indigenous Nations University (WINU), the World Indigenous Research Alliance and Journal (WIRA J), and the WINHEC Board of Accreditation.

Australian governments and public authorities need to genuinely engage with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in the development and design of law and policy that will affect them in higher education.

Notably, members of the [REDACTED] and who are employed across the Australian higher education sector, extensively advocate for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples advancement and success in education, research, employment and engagement. They also work collectively with their international First Nations colleagues and institutions through their internationally established organisational partnerships /alliances and governance structures.

The involvement of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, including [REDACTED] members, in WINHEC and its entities has enhanced the contribution of [REDACTED] to the engagement of Indigenous peoples in higher education, nationally and internationally. This was evidenced by the significant contributions that [REDACTED] members made to the preparation of papers tabled at the UNESCO World Virtual Indigenous Circle on Open Science and the Decolonization of Knowledge Forum [2020] and the November 2020 UNESCO World Higher Education Conference, Barcelona, 2022.

The papers tabled at both forums highlighted the 30-year groundbreaking journey undertaken by members and organisational representatives of the World Indigenous Nations Higher Education Consortium [WINHEC], which involved [REDACTED] members, and highlighted the value of the UNDRIP and the work of UNESCO as a critical influencer in helping world Governments and First Nations People overcome historical and contemporary injustices, through culturally respectful, inclusive and responsive education.

A vision for Australia's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples in the future higher education system in regards to International Engagement

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff, students and communities should be included as key stakeholders in progressing international engagement and international collaborations. In particular, with other international First Nations Peoples and their institutions and communities, that

incorporates education, research, knowledge exchange, student and staff exchanges, and community engagement.

Funding and resourcing of international First Nations higher education collaboration and networking that will grow research capability led by First Nations Peoples, is needed in order to ensure a stronger research and innovation base for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff and students is established and financially sustained. The collective cultural educational and research capability of other First Nations Peoples will benefit Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander research students and establish important relationships between our academic and research staff and students with our international First Nations academics and researchers. This will also have a flow-on effect, leading to an increased number of international First Nations academics who can be supervisors of higher degree by research (HDR) Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, and co-researchers with our academics and researchers.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, including [REDACTED] members', role and experiences with international First Nations Peoples can strengthen and further develop Australia's international education and research enterprise from a First Nations perspective, and be a foundation to:

1. increase awareness and understanding in Australia's higher education sector of First Nations Peoples' shared interests with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples;
2. increase awareness and understanding across the higher education sector of the importance of collaboration and engagement for establishing partnerships with international First Nations Peoples as strategic researchers and educators;
3. increase knowledge in the Australian higher education sector of First Nations Peoples and their excellence and expertise in research and education, Indigenous Knowledges and cultural skills and experiences;
4. consolidate [REDACTED] members successes and adapt them into the individual university day-to-day business to meet First Nation students' and staffs' expectations, including new approaches to international collaboration and engagement that includes and involves Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples;
5. include Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples and other international First Nations Peoples in Australia's international collaboration as a core element of higher education's teaching and research mission;
6. expand the international student and staff exchange market to / from other First Nations institutions and communities through research partnerships and offshore teaching models, that will enable First Nations Peoples to grow their own education and research offerings; and
7. promote global connectivity between/with other international First Nations Peoples, and their institutions and communities.

The inclusion of other international First Nations students in Australian universities will enrich the educational experience of all students and staff. The 'embedding and promoting of First Nations Peoples' research and knowledge systems, through collaboration with other international First Nations Peoples, will improve their capability in advancing research and producing knowledge through diverse practices, whilst growing the pipeline of future First Nations researchers, educators and leaders.

The Accord Interim Report noted areas they considered for change, and that were needed *"To create a sustainable and globally connected international education sector that benefits Australia and its regions, and to ensure Australia remains internationally competitive"....."ensuring that international education supports broader Australian foreign policy objectives, for example, strengthening relationships with India and the Pacific"* (p.95).

The inclusion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples - staff, students and communities - should be considered, particularly with regards to the following:

- a. embedding First Nations international education within the mission of the Australian tertiary education system and to the mission and purpose of individual institutions;
- b. ensuring the integrity and accessibility of visa pathways for First Nations international students;
- c. promoting flexibility and innovation in international education for First Nations students, including digital and offshore delivery options;
- d. improving overseas skills and qualification recognition and expanding international professional qualification accords, particularly where the need for First Nations supervisors of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander research students is needed; and
- e. building closer connections between other international First Nations institutions and their international alumni with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples - staff, students and communities.

The [REDACTED] in conjunction with the [REDACTED] endorses the further five (5) considerations by the Review Panel regarding the policy areas under section on *"Putting First Nations at the heart of Australia's higher education system"* (pp.35-36).

Australian Universities Accord Panel consider the following proposals, based on fostering international First Nations engagement and with the inclusion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples incorporated into universities' international business, including to:

- a. increase the scope and mobility of Australian scholarships and programs that are specific for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students exchanging with other international First Nations higher education institutions;
- b. promote and incentivise Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and other international First Nations collective research capability;
- c. recognise the international engagement and collaboration role that [REDACTED] and its members (staff and students in the higher education sector) have had in building the engagement capacity with other international First Nations Peoples, institutions and communities in the areas of education, research and cultural knowledge production;
- d. incentivise collaboration between Australian institutions and international First Nations institutions to reinforce research collaboration and alliances that support First Nations students to study across one or more institutions;
- e. in putting First Nations at the heart of Australia's higher education system, recognise their participation and established collaboration and engagement in the international environment, and incentivise continued and sustained collaboration and engagement that will enhance the research capability of First Nations Peoples' knowledges that will build capability for collaboration and partnerships between [REDACTED] members across the higher education sector and other First Nations Peoples communities, governments, universities and industry.

Conclusion

The [REDACTED] asks the Review Panel to ensure that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples are included in the Accord's review of international engagement / fostering international engagement within the context of collaborating and networking with other international First Nations Peoples, institutions and communities. Including First Nations Peoples in higher education – both domestically and internationally – is a priority, as it enriches not only Australia's knowledge base, but the collective knowledges of First Nations Peoples through their collaboration and overall engagement.