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Chair Australian Universities Accord Panel

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Batchelor Institute Submission on Interim Report and Input to the Australian Universities Accord Panel

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the Interim Report and the consultation process.

The question that the review asks of itself and of the Australian Higher Education sector is inspiring and challenging: *How will the changes being proposed combine and work their way through the higher education system to help meet our knowledge and skills needs?*

As a specialist institute and the only First Nations dual sector tertiary education provider in Australia, Batchelor Institute serves a unique role in providing education, training programs and courses for First Nations Peoples. At any level of adult teaching and learning, Batchelor's educational model works because it combines a unique, safe and culturally appropriate approach that can foster learning practices that are strengthened through being part of a learning cohort. Australian Universities are inherently western structures and Batchelor Institute of Indigenous Tertiary Education sits outside this mainstream model, by design we represent First Nations people. Therefore this submission will be about Australian First Nations People responses and representation within the education sector.

We would like to respond with the suggestion that the primary measures of success in our Institution reflect First Nations expectations of an Australian Higher Education system within which First Nations led and Indigenous Knowledge driven approaches, responses, and measures of success are underpinning. In taking that position we also differentiate ourselves because we come from and retain the connected cultural knowledge practices embedded in our First Nations language, culture, and country. Our knowledge base and skills needs are diverse and may be 'out of sync' with typical educational pathways. Our approaches lift participation across the dual sector, multi-lingual and culturally diverse First Nations student body, and our students achieve educational outcomes at multiple levels.

We commend the changes already made to the HESA Act to ensure the Educational Support package is accessible to all First Nations undergraduate students in Australia. For First Nations students based in urban Australia, the location in which they reside is not enough to ensure successful engagement and completion. We also propose a national literacy support program that can provide wrap around services and support to First Nations communities and students around the country. Batchelor's educational model works at any level of adult teaching and learning, because it combines a unique, safe and culturally appropriate approach that can foster learning practices that are strengthened through being part of a learning cohort.

As a First Nations institution, we already embed community partnerships in projects, in research, in service delivery, in governance and in the dual sector nature of our organisation. We have a culture of respect for truth and evidence because it is our voices, our community and family's voices which can speak to the multiple histories of the nation state. Our record of educational inclusion is clear. Our cohort of students and candidates are all First Nations' people, we are remote specialists and we work hard to lift participation and provide opportunities to our communities.

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But how does this strength and certainty in who we are as Australia's only First Nations Higher Education Institution contribute to the kinds of measures of success that might be used across the sector as described in the Accord? And how does this deep cultural orientation to Indigenous Knowledge creation and use and commitment to empowering our communities combine with every other sector and part of Australia? For example, the issues of workforce links from Higher Education to employment outcomes is highly parsed in a dual sector model because the economies of remote communities mean that any jobs go to outsiders and not local people. Our focus on getting recognition for the skills and knowledge that local people bring to remote area settings undermines this trend.

At Batchelor, it is not unusual for adult learners from many different communities and programs to sing out their recognition for one another from current or past educational experiences, or those of parents, siblings or grandparents who also went to Batchelor Institute. This intergenerational acknowledgement is an important rhythm of community life and knowledge transmission. This is true for the Territory but also nationally every blackfella knows or is related to someone who has studied at Batchelor, this is First Nations Educational autonomy, self-determination, governance in action.

The National Centre for First Nations Languages and English Literacy.

Anwerne-kenhe angkentye lyete atyeperre anthurre aneme. Angkentye tyerrtye arrpenhe mape-kenhe atyeperre aneme. Angkentye anwerne – kenhe anwerne apmere-le anyernetyeke re aneme atyeperre (Dr MK Turner OAM, 2023)

[Our language is sacred to us. Every Aboriginal language is sacred for those who speak it. Words are given to us by the land and these words are sacred.] (Dr MK Turner OAM, 2023)

In response to the *National Indigenous Language Survey* (AIATSIS, 20219) and *Closing the Gap Target 16: 'By 2031, there is a sustained increase in number and strength of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages being spoken'* Batchelor Institute becomes the organisation best positioned to offer programs of language revitalisation, maintenance, and protection of First Nations languages. Using the number and strengths of First Language speakers in the NT we will offer courses that focus on language maintenance and development as well as revival and reclamation for the endangered or sleeping languages in the NT and around the country. We will also offer a functional English literacy, numeracy, and digital program to support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students studying in any University from around the nation.

Language maintenance, development, revival and reclamation

First Nations Languages including programs for language maintenance and development as well as revival and reclamation programs have been part of Batchelor Institute from its beginning with the Centre for Aboriginal Languages and Linguistics (CALL) building on the early work of the School of Australian Linguistics (SAL). The National Centre that we propose will not only recognise but also reflect the multilingual and multiliterate nature of communication within First Nations communities including the continuing rich and profound oral and visual literacies. Print literacy in both English and First Nation's languages is still emerging as a social and cultural practice in many communities although the power of the written word and its uses are obvious. The National Centre will recognise the importance of First Nations languages being spoken in homes and on country as a process of land and economic development for all First Nations communities, even those whose language is sleeping. The languages come from the land and the land is strengthened and healthy when the languages are spoken again on those lands.

Functional English literacy, numeracy, and digital capability

Batchelor Institute is currently developing a program that provides a circular and non-linear approach to increasing skills in functional literacy and learning. Dubbed functional for the focus on practical, applicable, context-driven learning objectives, the approach can support Aboriginal and Torres Strait islander people, institutions, organisations, or communities nationally, whether urban, remote or regional. There is no fixed entry or exit pathway and a learner might repeat the same level multiple times, pursuing a range of functional

outcomes or consolidating them. The program is mapped to the Certificate II in General Education (Victoria University) which can provide exit points and a nationally recognised qualification if needed. However, the teaching program will be circular and will offer support from pre certificate one up to first year undergraduate. If the program is not tied to Actual Contact Hours, students needing longer can reapply without penalty and exit from the program is determined by the kind of function the learner seeks - the functional requirement is the guide to what you will learn.

A two-week Orientation to Learning workshop has been designed to identify starting points for First Nations learners to access Language Literacy Numeracy Digital skills and understanding in ways that recognise and add to the strengths, experiences, and aspirations that students bring as First Nation's people. It provides a teaching/learning experience across multiple levels of literacy and numeracy identifying their current levels and interests and creating a learner profile identifying learning experiences and strengths, including proficiencies in language and literacy based on the Australian Core Skills Framework (ACSF).

Knowing that the most vulnerable part of any student's studies is their first 6 months, we would also provide a version of functional literacy geared to serve any enrolled First Nations student in an Australian University who is in their first year, first semester of any undergraduate course. Their learning aim may be to increase capability in writing in English Language; or it may be a process to map successful completion of learning tasks for the first semester; or it could be an intensive unit to get to know themselves as a learner with preferences and strategies to support them in how to learn best, and how and when to seek learning support; and how to celebrate theirs and their peers learning journeys, and successes.

Conclusion

Drawing on the success of Batchelor's provision of higher education nationally, and on proven success in models of vocational education delivery for First Nations adults in remote and regional Northern Territory the National Centre will drive Batchelor's next contribution to First Nations Education in Australia. We recognise that sites of cultural and linguistic strength become the target for relentless negative narratives of disfunction in order to undermine that cultural authority. These are also the sites of historical neglect. Batchelor Institute and this National Centre aim to disrupt the capacity for damage in those narratives and shine a spotlight on our strengths and excellence. With the National Centre we aim to revive sleeping languages through a formalised education program and have first languages spoken in homes and schools across the country. We aim to provide literacy programs that provide access opportunities for First Peoples across the nation. First Nations lead programs are the solution please see attachment for a detailed breakdown of how and why The Centre for First Nations Languages and English Literacy is a step in the direction laid out by this incoming government and the Accord panel.

We suggest that a measure of success for Batchelor Institute's progress against the accord recommendations would be the increased inclusion of multi-lingual approaches to Indigenous Knowledges, as well as to all forms of education across the national, dual sector student body with whom the Institute engages. This could also include an impact elsewhere through partnerships with other Universities.

"Akaltye-arle-anthemeye, teaching is a really sacred thing... akaltye-irrenheke, constantly learning; arintyeke, seeking it as forever ongoing; imereheke, being shown continuously. That is how it was and is. (MK Turner 2010).

We pride ourselves in the strength of our ancestors and our culture and we sit at the intersection between knowledges, and we applaud the panel and the interim report and all that you hope to achieve.

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