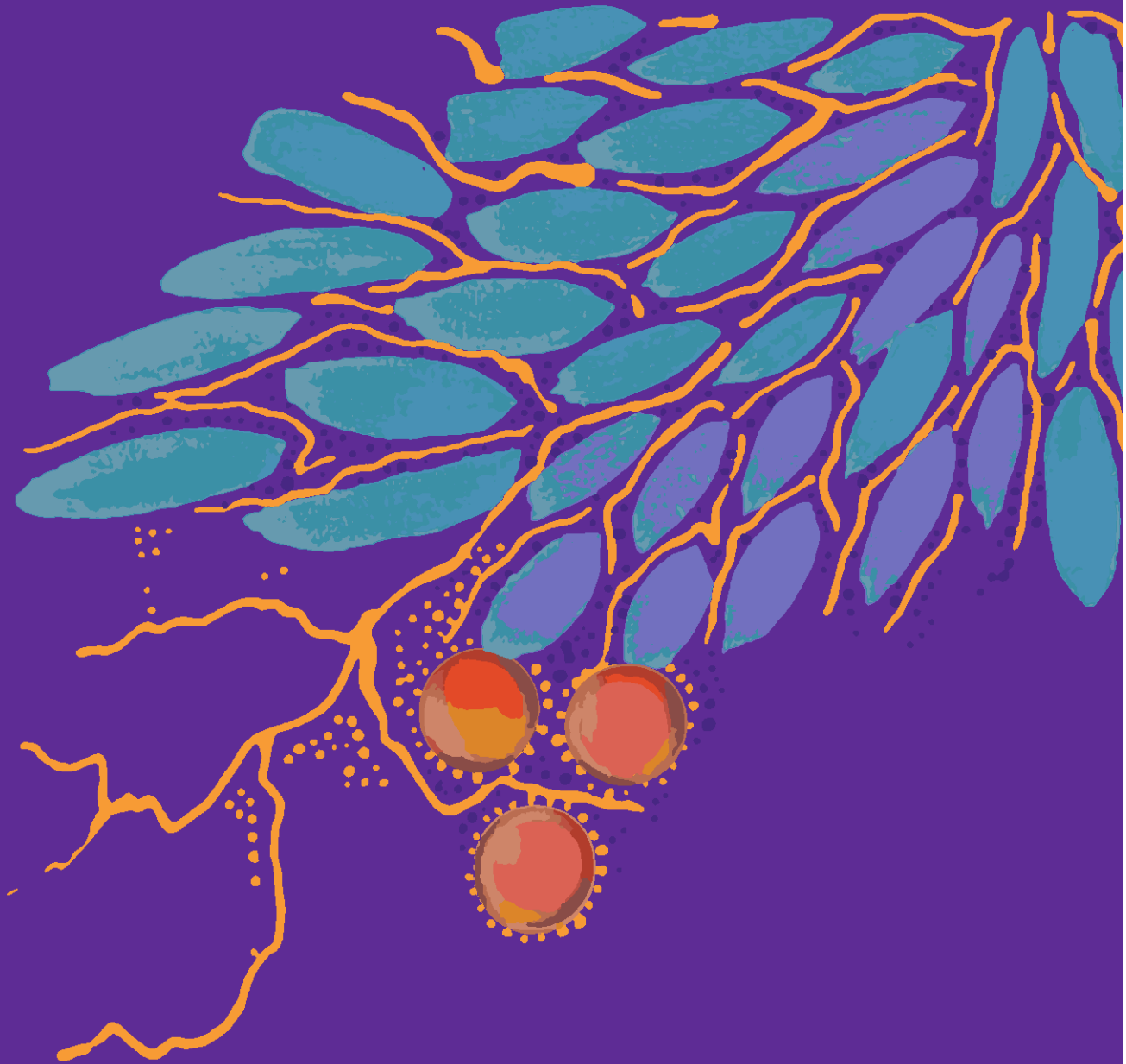


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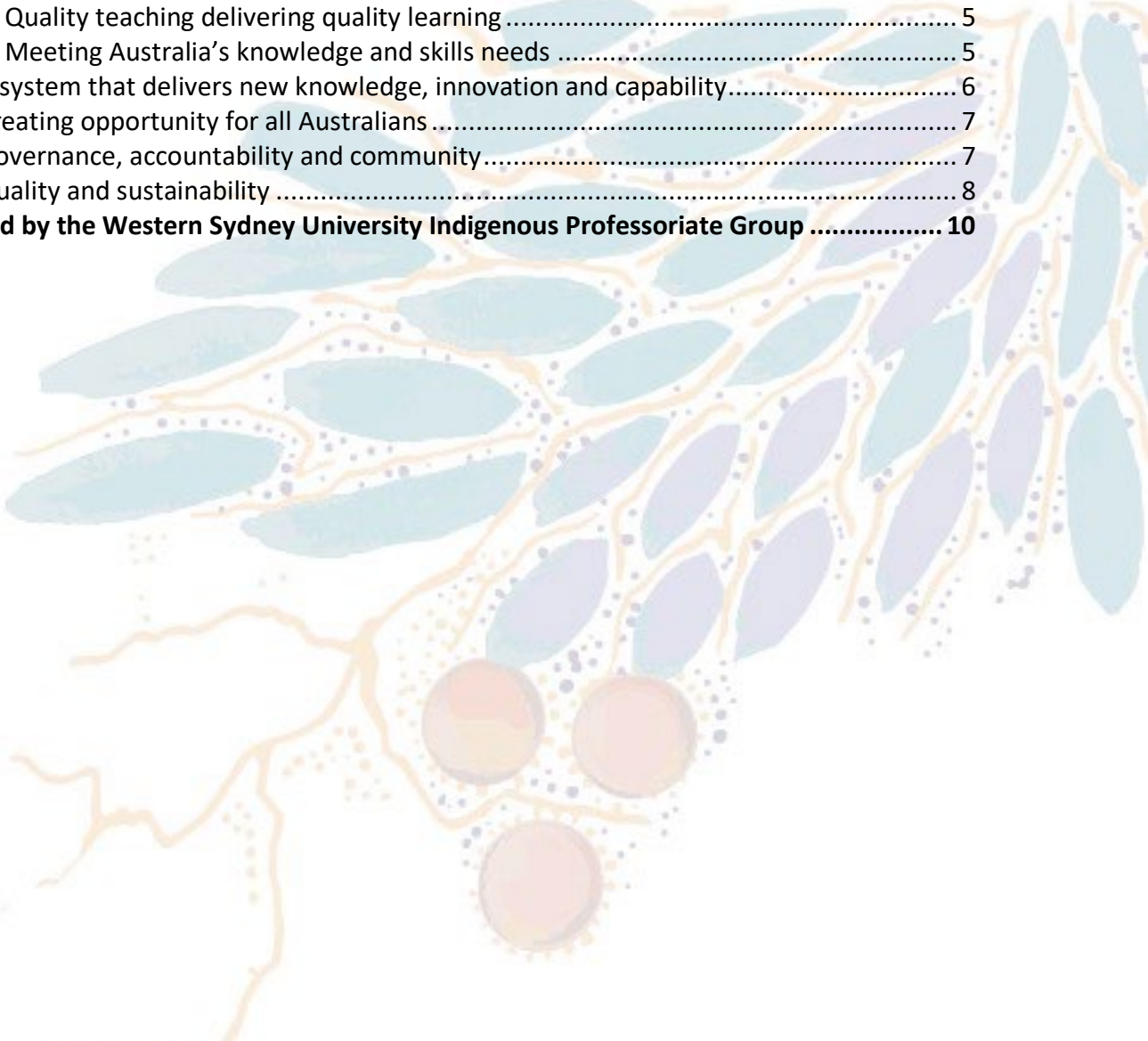
Western Sydney University Indigenous Professoriate



Submission to the 2023
Australian Universities Accord

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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, by artist Allan McKenzie, a Wiradjuri-Gamilaroi man from Griffith NSW.

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

The members of the WSU Indigenous Professoriate group acknowledge the diverse First Nations peoples across the country, whose tenacity and spirit continues on unceded lands. First Nations Australians contribute significantly to the social, cultural and educational fabric of the nation. We pay our respects to our Elders, past, present and emerging. Each of us has benefitted from the guidance of Elders from our own families, communities and beyond. We particularly recognise the scholarly and professional contributions of our First Nations colleagues who have in the past and continue presently, to shape powerful advocacy dialogues within Australian universities.

Observations

Observation 1 – Deficit positionality Of First Nations Peoples

To begin, we want to express our disappointment that The Accord Discussion Paper failed to consider Indigenous Australians as a specific group, with its own set of questions and note that there was limited reference to Indigenous Australians (mentions on seven of 44 pages) overall. Moreover, the Discussion Paper largely situates Indigenous Australians in terms of deficits that need to be remedied, pigeon-holed in the equity and diversity sections of the paper. There are multiple generalised references to Indigenous students alongside other marginalised groups (see for example, pp. 10, 19, 24 36). In addition, there was not an initial Acknowledgement of Indigenous Australians sovereignty and connection to Country (see for example, *Universities Australia Indigenous Strategy 2017-2020*). We condemn such positionality and we urge the Accord Panel to eschew this deficit-based approach by placing greater emphasis on Indigenous governance models within the higher education sector.

The Accord Discussion Paper also encourages respondents to consider *system-wide approaches to increasing access and equity in the teaching and learning space (3.5.3)* and the cultural-safety initiatives highlighted here were useful, emphasising the value of First Nations learning centres “to create and extend culturally safe learning opportunities and environments” (p. 26). However, this reliance on the First Nations learning centres, who have arguably been doing the heavy lifting in Indigenous Higher Education for almost three decades, is hardly aspirational. We believe it is time to move from these inclusion approaches to self-determination, and educational sovereignty through Indigenous leadership and governance. The suggestions we make below are offered in this spirit.

From Deficit to Leadership

The steadfast, sustained advocacy of Indigenous Australians, scholars, professional staff and students is manifold. Within the disciplines, individual institutions, nationally and internationally, Indigenous Australian have driven considerable change in the Australian Higher Education sector over the last three decades. Indigenous scholars, for example are injecting re-oriented life into the crevices and silent spaces of disciplines and the research landscape has been transformed by Indigenous-led scholarship, raising the ethical and obligatory benchmarks for good practice. Indigenous leaders, both in role and function, propel innovation and creative, generative networks within our universities. Nationally, for example, bodies such as the Indigenous Higher Education Advisory Council (2005-2015), the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Higher Education Consortium, Indigenous members of the Australian Research Council, and more recently through the strong leadership of the Universities Australia Deputy and Pro-Vice Chancellor Indigenous group and Indigenous representation on all Universities Australia committees, have actively promoted Indigenous perspectives to government and to universities. Internationally Indigenous scholars have worked to give voice to Indigenous matters, through networking with other First Nations groups in disciplinary forums such as the Native American and Indigenous Studies Association and the World Indigenous Nations Higher Education Consortium, collaborating on research and scholarship, and petitioning for change via the United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues.

Despite the hard lobbying, it is too often the case that Indigenous interests are served only where those interests meet the needs of the majority. This results in change that benefits all but leaves many Indigenous matters unresolved, with a constant tension between what can be achieved and what is *allowed to be achieved*. For example, some universities do not have senior Indigenous leaders at the level of Pro or Deputy Vice-Chancellor, there little evidence of additional funding for Indigenous teaching despite the commitments made in the Universities Australia strategies to Indigenous curriculum, and racism remains a significant issue in our universities. We urge the Accord Panel to fortify the leadership already demonstrated by Indigenous Australians, through careful consideration of not just the equity concerns for Indigenous peoples, but the significant contributions Indigenous Australians bring to the sector as scholars and professional staff. Imagine a Voice to Parliament that not only represents regional interests but includes expertise in nation-critical elements such as higher education or a re-imagined Indigenous Higher Education Council contributing expertise to federal policy (where there is little such expertise currently). Think how matched (ARC) funding could accelerate Indigenous research or how a properly funded National Indigenous Higher Education Strategy could foster accountability for enhanced outcomes. These are amongst some of the many recommendations we make below.

Observation 2 – Industry vs Indigenous community values

In the context of ongoing marginalisation of Indigenous Australian peoples noted above, we draw attention to the risk that the Accord (and government) emphasis on industry and technology will override or ignore Indigenous community engagement. The emphasis on commercialisation of research has the potential, for example, to violate Indigenous Cultural and Intellectual Property rights without appropriate policy safeguards. Consideration should be given to where Indigenous communities, knowledges, and values sit within STEM and/or STEAM imperative. Indigenous businesses and community-controlled organisations are also employers and industries, generation local economies, and servicing major industries such as tourism.

Responses to Accord Questions

1. Introduction: The Role of Higher Education in Australia's Future

1.3 The nature and purpose of Australian higher education

Q1. How should an Accord be structured and focused to meet the challenges facing Australia's higher education system? What is needed to overcome limitations in the current approach to Australian higher education?

Decision making in relation to higher education should explicitly include meaningful consultation and discussion with Indigenous people across stakeholder groups (university, industry, VET) and with specific reference to Indigenous research and outcomes.

Q2. How can the diverse missions of Australian higher education providers be supported, taking into account their different operating contexts and communities they serve (for example regional universities)?

Currently there is little to differentiate those institutions that educate most Indigenous students from universities that have comparably fewer Indigenous students (largely non-Go8) and, which commonly attract the highest achieving Indigenous students. Indigenous Student Success Program funding, a modest supplementary grant scheme available to eligible Table A and B Higher Education Providers, uses a formula based on Indigenous student access, participation, success and regionality. The outcomes based funding directs a larger proportion of the overall funding to those universities with the largest number of students ([University's funding allocation and Indigenous student outcome data from 2017 – 2022 \(XLSX, 278kB\)](#)). Applying a similar weighting to the overall student income would

distribute funding to those institutions taking the larger share of improving Indigenous student outcomes, acknowledging the additional work in enhancing success for Indigenous students whose schooling has not prepared them well to succeed at university.

Q3. What should the long-term target/s be for Australia’s higher education attainment by 2030 and 2040, and how should these be set and adjusted over time?

Targets for Indigenous outcomes in higher education commonly use population parity as the benchmark. Those figures, derived from the national census, are generally two to three years out of date, based on the census collection and publication cycle. This means that annual parity targets will be lower than the actual Indigenous population.

Action: For consideration

1. Reinstating a high-level federal advisory body such as the Indigenous Higher Education Advisory Committee which provided advice to the relevant Minister, on enhancing outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in higher education and research.
2. Distribute overall student funding incorporating Indigenous success measures.
3. Benchmark against ongoing progressive parity goals (as opposed to reactive post-census figures), which account for the growing Indigenous Australian population.

2. Challenges and Opportunities for Australia

2.6 Economic transformation, changing jobs, industries and capabilities

Q4. Looking from now to 2030 and 2040, what major national challenges and opportunities should Australian higher education be focused on meeting?

Despite considerable efforts, Indigenous outcomes in higher education, remain mostly below the Indigenous population parity benchmarks commonly used to gauge success (graduate employment outcomes are comparable). More Indigenous Australian with university qualifications will contribute to improved Indigenous community outcomes and building much-needed national capacity. Improving outcomes for Indigenous people in post-school education is vital and should be a national priority. Lower literacy and numeracy at university entry are reasonable predictors of attrition. A transformed system whereby Indigenous students could enrol in a reduced load, but with full income support would allow institutions to give more time to students for literacy and numeracy development while giving students the financial security they need to succeed. Finally, in light of debates around the Voice to Parliament, how can the higher education sector move beyond tokenistic Indigenous advisory/consultation models, and commit to stronger levels of Indigenous governance within and across universities?

Q5. How do the current structures of institutions, regulation and funding in higher education help or hinder Australia’s ability to meet these challenges? What needs to change?

Financial barriers remain a consistent and persistent impediment to Indigenous student success. There are three key areas which require attention. Direct student funding for daily living, and financial support when students are completing professional practice course requirements, but also for the increasingly mandated work integrated learning or internship placements. A third issue is financial support for Indigenous organisations to ‘backfill’ the positions of staff who may be studying at university. Indigenous organisations such as Aboriginal Health Services often support their staff to attain higher qualifications, but this can be prohibitive if staff who are also students are needing lengthy placements.

Action: For consideration

1. Develop, fund and implement a national Indigenous Higher Education Strategy
2. Allow a reduced study load (below 75%), for ABSTUDY particularly in first year, for Indigenous students who wish to take a reduced load to enable success and the consolidating of required literacy and numeracy skills.
3. Remove the caps for all Indigenous students, not just regional and remote students.
4. Remove 50% pass rate requirement for first year students.
5. Greater investment into Indigenous accommodation opportunities.
6. Escalating Indigenous scholarship stipend scheme (value increasing with progression through undergraduate through to post-graduate).
7. Support combined scholarship with industry/community models of funding for students (e.g., increase workload cap to ensure scholarship funding is not threatened).

3. Challenges and Opportunities for the Higher Education System

3.1 Quality teaching delivering quality learning

Q8. What reforms are needed to promote a quality learning environment and to ensure graduates are entering the labour market with the skills and knowledge they need?

Funding for the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning, including awards for recognising excellence in teaching are vital for fostering quality learning environments for students. The recent Productivity Commission [Advancing Prosperity](#) report recommends ([Rec 8.10](#)) professionalising the teaching role in universities by providing incentives for quality teaching, such as funding for teaching and learning research. While all Australian universities have committed to ensuring that their graduates engage with Indigenous curriculum there are far too few Indigenous staff to undertake this work.

Action: For consideration

1. Create a national Indigenous Learning and Teaching Institute to sustain the coordination of the current national efforts to Indigenise curriculum.
2. Fund learning and teaching research, including Indigenous Learning and Teaching research to ensure evidence-based, quality practice.

3.2 Meeting Australia's knowledge and skills needs

Q10. What role should higher education play in helping to develop high quality general learning capabilities across all age groups and industries?

While there is a current focus on STEM and STEAM, we suggest that maintaining the Humanities, Arts and Social Sciences is critical to ensuring that all graduates have essential critical thinking and 'soft' skills. More specifically we emphasise the importance of graduates having the skills to work effectively with Indigenous Australians. Diversity learning is increasingly vital in a globalised world and supports student's critical thinking skills.

Action: For consideration

1. Maintain funding for the Humanities, Arts and Social Sciences
2. Recognise the value of Indigenous Knowledges to student learning through a focus on ISTEAM which forefronts Indigenous ways of knowing, being and doing in STEAM.

Q11. How should Australia boost demand from people to study in the higher education system?

Action: For consideration

1. Clear pathways from school and VET into university and from university to VET.
2. Incentives and MOUs for organisations to support Indigenous staff to study.

Q13. How could an Accord support cooperation between providers, accreditation bodies, government and industry to ensure graduates have relevant skills for the workforce?

Q14. How should placement arrangements and work-integrated learning (WIL) in higher education change in the decades ahead

Action: For consideration

1. Financially supporting Indigenous employers and employers of Indigenous staff to release staff for study (particularly in Indigenous organisations).
2. Ensure Indigenous staff are not disadvantaged by undertaking study (e.g., co-funded scholarships).
3. Large organisations to contribute to the financial costs of practice placements and work-integrated learning.

3.4 A system that delivers new knowledge, innovation and capability

Q25. How should Australia leverage its research capacity overall and use it more effectively to develop new capabilities and solve wicked problems?

Ensure that research engaging with Indigenous Research Methods and methodologies (more often align with basic research) is adequately supported. Ensure that the basic integrity of research impacting upon Indigenous peoples adheres to Indigenous ethical and protocol standards.

Q26. How can Australia stimulate greater industry investment in research and more effective collaboration?

The ARC articulates a commitment to increase knowledge and innovation for the benefit of the Australian community through funding excellent research, assessing the quality, engagement and impact of research, and advising on research matters. The ARC was officially established in 1988, becoming an independent body with its own legislation in 2001 (the Australian Research Council Act 2001). In 1996 the ARC launched its first Indigenous focused scheme – the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Research Development Program. Since then, there have been several evaluations and iterations of funded support for Indigenous researcher development and the ARC has transformed this scheme now offering the current Discovery Indigenous scheme. There have also been investments through special initiative funding such as the National Indigenous Research and Knowledges Network (NIRAKN).

The number of Indigenous Australians completing doctoral qualifications has increased significantly over the last two decades. It is imperative that national grant programs such as ARC Schemes consider this growth and account for the increased number of Indigenous scholars eligible when apportioning research funding.

Action: For consideration

1. All Category 1 research grants (e.g., NHMRC, ARC) to have mirrored Indigenous-led scheme and at least 50% of all CI's must be Indigenous.

2. Three new ARC grant schemes to support nurture and promote Indigenous led research (research where at least the first named Chief Investigators Indigenous Australian):
 - ARC Indigenous Linkage Scheme
 - ARC Indigenous Future Fellowship Scheme
 - ARC Indigenous Laureate Fellowship Scheme.
3. ARC and other major grant funding bodies must have Indigenous governance mechanisms and identified employment strategies.
4. Mandatory minimum 50K Indigenous PhD and Research Masters scholarships nationally.

3.5 Creating opportunity for all Australians

Q28. What is needed to increase the number of people from under-represented groups applying to and prepared for higher education, both from school and from other pathways?

Q29 What changes in provider practices and offerings are necessary to ensure all potential students can succeed in their chosen area of study?

Action: For consideration

1. Reorient university funding to recognise the additional costs of supporting students whose school education has not prepared them well for higher education.
2. Consider clear pathways for short course and micro-credentials to be pathways to tertiary success.

Q30. How can governments, institutions and employers assist students, widen opportunities and remove barriers to higher education?

Q31 How can the costs of participation, including living expenses, be most effectively alleviated?

Action: For consideration

1. Postgraduate CSP places for Indigenous students
2. Targeted financial support for accommodation costs for Indigenous students (beyond ISSP)

Q32 How can best practice learning and teaching for students from under-represented groups be embedded across the higher education system, including the use of remote learning?

Q33 What changes to funding and regulatory settings would enable providers to better support students from under-represented groups in higher education?

Action: For consideration

1. Invest in quality teaching for all students, including grants for teaching and learning research, and a properly funded national reward and recognition scheme.
2. Targeted funding for Indigenous learning and teaching development and research and application.

3.6 Governance, accountability and community

Q34. How should the contribution of higher education providers to community engagement be encouraged and promoted?

Mandated community engagement funding to ensure universities adequately remunerate Indigenous representatives (e.g., Elders) for their time.

Q35. Where providers make a distinctive contribution to national objectives through community, location-based or specialised economic development, how should this contribution be identified and invested in?

The [Queensland Indigenous Women Rangers Network](#) recently won an international award, the Earthshot Prize, for their sustainability and climate change work. QIWRN is delivered by Yuku Baja Muliku Landowner and Reserves, a Cooktown-based Traditional Owner group who were the successful recipients of a joint [Queensland Government and WWF Australia grant](#) to establish a state-wide women's land and sea ranger network. The network trains Indigenous rangers. Indigenous organisations and communities are directing and developing their own education needs, which universities could support.

Action: For consideration

1. Recognition of Indigenous communities as both sites of engagement and as industry.
2. Grant scheme to foster greater collaboration between Indigenous organisations and universities on education provision.
3. Mandatory 5% investment into procurement of Indigenous-led goods and services.

Q36. What regulatory and governance reforms would enable the higher education sector to better meet contemporary demands?

Q37. How could a more coherent and dynamic national governance system for higher education be achieved?

The United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous People points to Indigenous peoples having rights to control over education and of the states obligation to take effective measures in relation to just Indigenous education (Article 14). Now is the time to develop mechanisms whereby Indigenous peoples have a direct role in decision making and governance. The Voice provides a potential foundation to move beyond consultation frameworks to embrace Indigenous Governance across universities, industry, and government.

Action: For consideration

1. It has been over a decade since the Behrendt Review. A fresh Review is timely and could examine retention, success, and Future Indigenous Governance.
2. Establish Indigenous Co-Chancellors within every university.

Q38. How can the Accord support higher education providers to adopt sector-leading employment practices?

Action: For consideration

1. Strategic focus on building the overall Indigenous professional workforce.
2. Targeted national strategy to ensure preparation of graduates to work effectively with Indigenous Australians through Indigenous Knowledges in all degree programs.
3. A differential preservation age as recommended by UniSuper would allow sector colleagues to scaffold down their 1.0 FTE with Super supplements perhaps to 0.8, to 0.6, to 0.4 across time, hypothetically freeing up internal funds' reallocation for ECR and MCR academic and professional salary and development opportunities.

3.7 Quality and sustainability

Q39. What reforms are needed to ensure that all students have a quality student experience?

Q40. What changes are needed to ensure all students are physically and culturally safe while studying?

Racism and marginalisation remain issues for Indigenous students. Racism can occur inside and outside of classrooms and is linked to student attrition.

Action: For consideration.

1. Mandatory Indigenous learning and teaching education for all university teachers (with an emphasis toward both broad and local frameworks)
2. Maintain funding for Indigenous spaces, such as Indigenous higher education centres, on all university campuses.

Q41. How should research quality be prioritised and supported most effectively over the next decade?

Action: For consideration.

1. Indigenous research methodology and ethics training for all Higher Degree Research students.
2. Professional development training in best Indigenous supervision practices for all who are supervising or undertaking Indigenous research.

Q44. How can the benefits of international education be shared broadly across the system, including in regional areas, and what level of reporting should there be?

Action: For consideration.

1. Opportunities for all Indigenous students to have an international First Nations collaboration experience (currently not allowable under ISSP funding).
2. Explicit funding for Indigenous students through national programs such as the New Colombo plan (little uptake for Indigenous students which may be improved by targeted advertising/marketing).

Q47. What structure of Commonwealth funding is needed for the higher education sector for the system to be sustainable over the next two decades?

Action: For consideration.

1. Funding for Indigenous students to flow to those institutions who are doing the majority of this work.
2. Identified support for Indigenous students to transition from HDR to ECR status (e.g., grants)

Q49. Which aspects of the JRG package should be altered, and which should be retained?

1. Uncap university places for all Indigenous students
2. Remove the 50% pass rate requirement (with responsible institutional monitoring).

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