

Professor Mary O’Kane
Chair
Australian Universities Accord Panel

Dear Professor O’Kane,

Re: CATSINaM Submission on the Australian Universities Accord Discussion Paper: February 2023

The Congress of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Nurses and Midwives (CATSINaM) is pleased to provide the attached submission on the *Australian Universities Accord Discussion Paper: February 2023*.

CATSINaM is the national peak body that represents, advocates, and supports Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander nurses and midwives at a national level, including nurses and midwives working in the Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Services sector. We are a membership-based organisation and are governed by a member elected Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Board. CATSINaM’s advocacy promotes targeted, measurable and actionable workforce solutions to increase the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander nursing and midwifery workforce and to promote Cultural Safety in the education and practise of all nurses and midwives.

Universities and other higher education institutions have a primary role in strengthening the place of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, knowledges and culture in Australian society. Within an ambitious and innovative higher education policy environment, Universities can act to disrupt harmful practices impacting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities in the domains of healthcare by removing access, participation, retention and completion barriers currently limiting the growth of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health workforce.

Due to its size and centrality, increasing and developing the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander nursing and midwifery workforce must be an imperative shared by governments and universities alike and reflected in Australian Universities Accord. Our aim in making this submission is to urge policy makers to set foundations for a vastly improved and redesigned higher education sector that seeks to empower and support the needs, rights and expectations of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. As part of this, we seek a forward-looking transformative reform agenda in nursing and midwifery education and practice to support improvements in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples’ health outcomes and experiences.

This submission was directly informed by CATSINaM nursing and midwifery education experts and researchers. A dedicated member working group was convened to review the Discussion Paper to examine issues most relevant to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander nursing and midwifery students, academic workforce, curricula and research.

Please do not hesitate to contact me in relation to this or any other matter.

Yours faithfully,



Ali Drummond
Acting Chief Executive Officer
Meriam and Wuthathi

11 April 2023

Yumalundi¹ Maiem²

The Congress of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Nurses and Midwives (CATSINaM)

Submission on the Australian Universities Accord Discussion Paper:
February 2023

CATSINaM

Unity and Strength Through Caring

¹ Yumalundi means “hello” in the Ngunnawal language. The Ngunnawal People are the Traditional Owners of the Canberra region.

² Maiem is Meriam Mir for “hello and welcome”. The Meriam le are the people of Mer, Dauar, and Waier, the Murray Islands of Zenadh Kes (the Torres Straits).

We are Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Nurses and Midwives

The Congress of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Nurses and Midwives (CATSINaM) was founded in 1997. We are the national peak body that represents, advocates, and supports Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander nurses and midwives at a national level, including nurses and midwives working in the Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Services sector. We are a membership-based organisation and are governed by a member elected Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Board.

CATSINaM's vision is that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander nurses and midwives play a pivotal and respected role in achieving health equality across the Australian health system for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and communities. This submission was informed directly by CATSINaM nursing and midwifery education experts and researchers. A dedicated Leaders in Indigenous Nursing and Midwifery (LINMEN) and Muliyan³ member co-working group was convened to review the Discussion Paper to examine issues most relevant to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander nursing and midwifery students, academic workforce, curricula and research. The working group included the following CATSINaM members, we are grateful for their sharing their expertise and for their contributions:

- Associate Professor Linda Deravin
- Dr Lynne Stuart
- Dr Pauline Murray-Parahi
- Stacey Butcher
- Mary-Claire Balnavas
- Letitia Del Fabbro
- Dr Ali Drummond.

Lifting Attainment Within Nursing and Midwifery Education

For thousands of years, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples have been caring for Country and community with our unique knowledges and ways of being and doing. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander nurses and midwives are holders of knowledges of Country and culture that engender a unique and significant contribution in developing Culturally Safe and effective Australian health services for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. Despite this strength, compared with non-Indigenous Australians, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples experience profound inequity in health and wellbeing outcomes. While health measures indicate positive gains in some areas of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health, progress has stalled or worsened in other areas over the past decade.⁴ In response, we must prioritise Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander knowledges in challenging racism and in the promotion of Cultural Safety in healthcare.

³ Muliyan is both the research arm of CATSINaM and a community of research praxis or community of independent academics/educational researchers working in Nursing and Midwifery education and training.

⁴ Australian Institute of Health and Welfare. (2020). *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Performance Framework 2020 summary report*. <https://www.indigenoushpf.gov.au/getattachment/65fbaaf3-100c-4df5-941c-a8455922693c/2020-summary-ihpf-2.pdf>

CATSINaM welcomes the forward-looking agenda of the Universities Accord, and we encourage the setting of an ambitious policy plan to deliver new approaches and innovation in the sector. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander nurses and midwives have the exclusive ability to entwine nursing and midwifery expertise with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander knowledges. Unfortunately, however, our numbers are concerningly small and new strategies are required to retain, grow, and strengthen our workforce and roles. Accordingly, this submission considers how Universities can change and evolve to better support educational and career attainment of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in nursing and midwifery education, research, and academia with the fundamental goal of improving the health experiences and outcomes of our communities. Furthermore, we seek to promote Cultural Safety within all domains of nursing and midwifery education to better prepare all nurses and midwives to work with and serve the healthcare needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and communities.

Overarching Comments

Australian universities must invest in understanding and practicing being better relations to the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities (including community-controlled organisations), specifically those communities whose lands universities occupy, and those communities they are funded to serve. The terms of the relational approach must precede any planning and implementation of initiatives designed to ‘support’ or ‘help’ or ‘encourage’ Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. The perpetuation of such premature initiatives reproduces the performative benevolence that has and will continue to inhibit Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples’ intellectual and political sovereignty.⁵

Current sector strategies, such as the implementation of the Universities Australia’s Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Strategy 2022-2025, outline key priority areas that have varied in their progress and success.⁶ We have seen an increase in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander participation, including in leadership roles in the sector, which is encouraging, but the success of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples remain bound to Western ideals of success, namely individual education and employment participation. The focus on the role of universities as enablers of individual education and economic participation, evident in the Universities Accord Discussion Paper and in the associated Job Ready graduates (JRG) package is highly problematic. This assumption ignores the significance of the need for universities to be active in knowledge co-creation, including investment in different knowledge systems, and different knowledges, like Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples’ ways of knowing, and knowledges.

⁵ [‘It’s about the humanity of nursing’ Shifting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health education beyond white possession and towards a relational approach | QUT ePrints](#)

⁶ Universities Australia, Indigenous Strategy 2022-25, viewed 5 April 2023, <https://www.universitiesaustralia.edu.au/publication/indigenous-strategy-2022-25/>

A relational approach that invests in better understanding and practice of the National Agreement to Closing the Gap⁷, is a sound starting point for the university sector.

Strengthen and establish formal partnerships and shared decision-making must include Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities on whose lands universities occupy, and those communities universities are funded to serve (through research grants, government grants etc.).

Build the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community-controlled sector includes investing in the capabilities of the community-controlled sector through workforce development, and co-developed and co-delivered research innovations that enhance services to the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.

Transform government organisations so they work better for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, including the organisations that are government funded, including universities.

Improve and share access to data and information to enable Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities make informed decisions. This should enable transparency on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander-funded initiatives, and accountability to the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities that are being served on the progress of these initiatives. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and their organisations should also be able to access information and data that will enable their informed decision-making regarding their relationships with universities, and on other matters that serve their self-determination.

Australian universities must invest in being better relations with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, which involves being informed by and accountable to us regarding investment in our self-determination and nation-building. Our success in this space is bound to Australian universities ability to truly serve our communities.

⁷ Coalition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peak Organisations and all Australian Governments, 2020, *National Agreement on Closing the Gap Closing the Gap July 2020*, viewed 11 April 2021, <https://www.closingthegap.gov.au/national-agreement>

Reponses to the Discussion Paper

2.3 Equality, participation and democracy

- The principle of *equity* must be included in this discussion, particularly as it relates to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. [Milken Institute School of Public Health](#) explains, “*Equality means each individual or group of people is given the same resources or opportunities. Equity recognizes that each person has different circumstances and allocates the exact resources and opportunities needed to reach an equal outcome.*”⁸ CATSINaM also recommends a separate section recognising the unique equity, participation and democracy issues relevant to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and communities.
- Overall, in matters relating to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, it is important to steer away from the use of a deficit discourse as these frame discussions in terms of what is lacking and failures. In this section, the Universities Accord is encouraged to emphasise a strengths-based perspective on the contribution that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people make to the overall work of universities (professional and academic work). This could include a separate comment on the value of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander participation and the benefit of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander participation, and contribution, to all higher education stakeholders.⁹
- Goals for increased Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander student numbers in universities should be accompanied by goals to increase Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff numbers, especially in the context of industries that require increasing numbers of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander graduates and workforce for services to be more effective, such as nursing and midwifery.¹⁰

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

- Recognition of the significant role Australian higher education has in creating opportunities for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in education, employment and economic participation and development. It is imperative that the objectives and targets of the Accord directly align with the Priority Reforms of the [National Agreement on Closing the Gap](#) particularly (not exclusively) **Socioeconomic outcome area 6: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students reach their full potential through further education pathways** **Target 6: By 2031, increase the proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people aged 25-34 years who have completed a tertiary qualification (Certificate III and above) to 70 per cent.**

⁸ Milken Institute School of Public Health 2020, *Equity vs. Equality: What’s the Difference?*, viewed 4 April 2023, <https://onlinepublichealth.gwu.edu/resources/equity-vs-equality/>

⁹ Fogarty W, Lovell M, Lagenberg J & Heron M-J 2018, *Deficit Discourse and Strengths-based Approaches: Changing the Narrative of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health and Wellbeing*, viewed 2 April 2023, <https://www.lowitja.org.au/page/services/resources/Cultural-and-social-determinants/racism/deficit-discourse-strengths-based>

¹⁰ Congress of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Nurses and Midwives, 2022, ‘*gettin em n keepin em n growin em*’: *Strategies for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander nursing and midwifery education reform*, Congress of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Nurses and Midwives, Brisbane, viewed 2 April 2023, https://issuu.com/catsinam1/docs/catsinam_education_plan_2022_v18.0_final

- Also of high priority is a focus on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander-led development and expansion of Culturally Safe and inclusive approaches to education and research including, growing contemporary Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander intellectual scholarship and research methodologies.
- Universities must leverage and strategically develop Indigenous Student Education Support Units (IESUs) to tailor support services to specific course needs. For example, forging strategic relationships between schools of nursing and midwifery and their local IESUs to create unique models of engagement and relationship development with local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander leaders and communities.

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?

- The significant lack of transparency of funds dedicated or earmarked for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander programs within universities is a profoundly concerning issue as it is not possible to assess investments and outcomes.
- Current financial structures of institutions, regulation and funding hinder participation and equity in access for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. Whilst the HECS scheme and Austudy and ABSTUDY allowances assist with some cost of living, these financial supports do not sufficiently support additional costs including transport, cost of technology, affordability of internet and other resources necessary for university.
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples may also have additional carer or cultural obligations which means extended years of education with limited income is not a viable option. Examination and potential re-introduction of HECs free scholarships for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students is required. Anecdotally, it is understood that these scholarships were previously attractive to mature aged students as they were able to complete studies without accruing significant financial debt. The prospect of accruing financial debt as a mature aged person is a significant disincentive to undertake a program of study. Compared with other students, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander undergraduate students are more likely to be mature age and female, this is an important potential nursing and midwifery workforce pool that must be encouraged and financially supported into and through programs study.¹¹

Q7 How should the mix of providers evolve, considering the size and location of existing institutions and the future needs of communities?

- Place-based education facilities and networks are essential opportunities to increase Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people's access to higher education, particularly to extend educational opportunities to remote and regional Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.
- Training articulation pathways between VET and University based training are a key consideration, particularly to support the growth of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people's successful

¹¹ Inside Policy 2019, *Indigenous Cadetship Support Programs, A literature review*, Prepared by Inside Policy for the National Indigenous Australian Agency, 27 November 2019

participation in higher education. For example, there is a need to pursue a clearly articulated pathway from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health worker to registered nurse or midwife (see GENKE II, 2022). Enabling pathways into nursing and midwifery needs to be further explored to widen the participation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students in the professions. There is strong sector interest in formalising pathways to increase the participation and career options of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health workers, but a nationally coordinated approaches are required.

- The development of a national equity pathways should form part of articulation plans. The equity pathway would extend from AQF Level 5 (Bachelor level) through to AQF Level 10 (Doctorate level). The equity pathway should be developed to include recognition of prior learning and specific bridging elective units for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students entering first year.

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?

- Reform recommendations in CATSINaM's 2022 report '[gettin em n keepin em n growin em': Strategies for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander nursing and midwifery education reform](#)', are fundamental to promoting quality learning environments and to ensuring nursing and midwifery graduates are equipped with skills and knowledge needed to work with and provide healthcare to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and should be referred to.
- A quality learning environment requires learning classrooms that are suitable for different pedagogical and mix-mode approaches. Universities must create learning spaces for the future requiring educators skilled in effective and appropriate online pedagogy.¹²
- Quality learning environments must include innovation for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander teaching for example, consideration of yarning circles as an approach to teaching. There is also a need to engage larger cohorts of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander academics and for the incorporation of Cultural Safety practices such as the 'smoking' of teaching and learning spaces.¹³
- Educators' skills need to also include their ability to engage with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and organisations in a Culturally Safe way and a recognition of occupying Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander sovereign unceded land. Our universities educating their

¹² Webb, J, Ruez-Villanueva, S, Carrière, P. D., Beauchamp, A.-A., Bell, I, Day, A, Elton, S, Feagan, M, Giacinti, J, Kabemba Lukusa, J. P., Kingsbury, C, Torres-Slimming, P. A., Bunch, M., Clow, K, Gislason, M. K., Parkes, M. W., Jane Parmley, E, Poland, B, & Vaillancourt, C, 2023, Transformative learning for a sustainable and healthy future through ecosystem approaches to health: insights from 15 years of co-designed ecohealth teaching and learning experiences. *The Lancet. Planetary Health*, 7(1), e86–e96, viewed 5 April 2023, [https://doi.org/10.1016/S2542-5196\(22\)00305-9](https://doi.org/10.1016/S2542-5196(22)00305-9)

¹³ Doran, F & Wrigley, B, 2022, Cultural Safety: teachers' engagement with an Indigenous pedagogical method in undergraduate nursing education, *Contemporary Nurse*, 58:1, 58-70, viewed 5 April 2023, <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/10376178.2022.2044873>

¹⁴ Doran, F, Wrigley, B, & Rix, E, 2022, "Teaching in Circle" with student nurses contributes to experiential understanding of Cultural Safety, *Contemporary Nurse*, 58:1, 82-94, DOI: [10.1080/10376178.2022.2054840](https://doi.org/10.1080/10376178.2022.2054840)

young people to invest in their communities' futurity, which will add to the complex future of Australia.¹⁵¹⁶

- The implementation of authentic participatory processes for the engagement of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and communities, such as those sometimes used in health care. Shared decision making models in person-centred care could be adapted to higher education context, see for example this [Yarning to make health decisions together](#) resource.
- Key considerations in curriculum development consultation include: consideration of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander student voice in curriculum development, and concerted efforts to integrate evidence-based strategies for supporting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander student success, such as adequate numbers of identified academic and professional staff.

The following matters should be considered in the examination of reforms:

- Investment in mentoring programs between university and industry to increase networks and the translation to practice.¹⁷
- Diversity within the academy, with the embedding and inclusion of other perspectives such as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspectives of learning and teaching.
- Integrated higher education and industry “earn and learn” educational strategies based on partnership and collaboration to provide students with quality educational and clinical experiences. Earn and learn strategies also have the added benefit of providing students with financial support and industry skills development while undertaking study, potentially increasing course completion rates. This is particularly relevant to promoting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander student success in the fields of nursing and midwifery. Enhancing and expanding cadetship programs and the setting of targets for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander nursing and midwifery student participation is also an essential and effective strategy.¹⁸ Appropriate intersectoral programs between higher education providers and Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisations (ACCHOs) should be highly encouraged.
- The provision of scholarships for **online** programs of study and fee-free online line study options for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students.
- National activity that promotes the benefits of near-peer learning. There is evidence that undergraduate students are motivated by the successes of their professional peers and leaders.¹⁹

¹⁵ Doran, F & Wrigley, B, 2022.

¹⁶ Sherwood J, West R, Geia L, Drummond A, Power T, Stuart L, Deravin L., 2021, “Taking our blindfolds off”: acknowledging the vision of First Nations peoples for nursing and midwifery, *Aust J Adv Nurs [Internet]*. 2021 Feb. 4, viewed 5 April 2023, <https://www.ajan.com.au/index.php/AJAN/article/view/413>

¹⁷ Inside Policy 2019, *Indigenous Cadetship Support Programs, A literature review*, Prepared by Inside Policy for the National Indigenous Australian Agency, 27 November 2019

¹⁸ Fawcett, T & Cockburn, T, 2012, Lyell McEwin Hospital – Australia’s largest Aboriginal nursing cadetship program, *Australian Nursing Journal: ANJ, The*, vol.20, no 6, Dec 2021:41-42.

¹⁹ Markowski, M., Bower, H., Essex, R. and Yearley, C, 2021, Peer learning and collaborative placement models in health care: a systematic review and qualitative synthesis of the literature. *J Clin Nurs*, 30: 1519-1541. <https://doi.org/10.1111/jocn.15661>

- Greater investment in clinical simulation is essential for expanding university capacity to develop and grow the nursing and midwifery workforce, particularly to provide quality education within regional, rural and remote settings. This goes hand in hand with the need to review regulation governing required clinical hours for nursing and midwifery students. Policy innovation is needed in this space as there is a paucity of evidence supporting current clinical placement practice hours required for nursing students in Australia. The arbitrary nomination of hours may be a significant impediment to improving conditions for students, particularly Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students.²⁰

3.2.1 Meeting skills needs through higher education

Q9 How should Australia ensure enough students are studying courses that align with the changing needs of the economy and society?

- Through the availability of scholarships and targeted funding initiatives. In the context of national nursing and midwifery education reform and policy development, there is need to explore new funding initiatives and relevant education policy levers to increase our workforce (Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and non-Indigenous) and further develop its capability and influence across the health sector. It is recommended that HEPs continue to offer and actively promote scholarships for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students studying nursing and midwifery with particular attention to scholarships for students to attend clinical placements. Scholarships are promoted on most HEP websites but not many are offered exclusively for nursing and midwifery programmes. Travel scholarships for students to undertake clinical placements are needed. This has been identified as a barrier for students and focus should be placed on the availability of scholarships or ongoing funding for students attending clinical placements. As a key strategy, there should be a broadening of scholarships to support the recruitment and retention of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander nurses and midwives from undergraduate level to post-graduate level and higher research degrees.²¹
- Investigate scope for skills developed in cadet roles to contribute to qualification experience.
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander nurses and midwives are significantly underrepresented in the Australian nursing and midwifery workforce comprising just 1.4%. This is well below parity. A major constraint is the lack of a dedicated and nationally coordinated strategic approach for preparing, developing, and supporting our workforce. Cadetships and Transition to Practice Programs (TPPs) for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students must be a first line national scale nursing and midwifery recruitment, completion and retention strategy for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander nursing and midwifery students. Industry partnership models have great

²⁰ West, R, Saunders, V, West L, Blackman, R, Del Fabbro, L, Neville, B, Rowe Minniss, F, Armao J, van de Mortel, T, Kain VJ, Coronos-Watkins, K, Elder, E, Wardrop, R, Mansah, M, Hilton, C, Penny, J, Hall, K, Sheehy, K, & Rogers, GD, 2022, Indigenous-led First Peoples health interprofessional and simulation-based learning innovations: mixed methods study of nursing academics' experience of working in partnership, *Contemporary Nurse*, 58:1, 43-57, viewed 5 April 2023, <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/35029132/>

²¹ Inside Policy 2019, *Indigenous Cadetship Support Programs, A literature review*, Prepared by Inside Policy for the National Indigenous Australian Agency, 27 November 2019

potential for supporting successful cadetship program and TPPs. Establishing industry relationship is key (see response to section 3.2.4) such as [The Aboriginal Nursing Cadetship Program](#) at the Lyell McEwin Hospital as part of the Northern Adelaide Local Health Network that provides Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students an opportunity to receive payments while undertaking clinical placements as part of their course.

- Waiving of, or reduction in course fees is an important policy option for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander nursing and midwifery students. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander student course completion timeframes can be significantly longer due to disruptions such as family and cultural obligations adding significantly to the course cost overtime.

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

- To ensure a head start for higher education, all age groups must be better prepared and more comprehensively introduced to Cultural Safety and Torres Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples' history and culture. This will better equip future higher education students attain relevant understanding and awareness of the Cultural Safety considerations and expectations within their education and practice environments.²²²³

3.2.4 Collaboration with industry

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

- As outlined above, it would be highly beneficial to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students and to contemporary Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander scholarship and research for the Accord to align with the Priority Reforms of the [National Agreement on Closing the Gap](#). This would include the development of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander-led principles to overlay the Accord recommendations to privilege Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander voices and promote community partnerships, Cultural Safety and self-determination in higher education policy, strategy and practice and higher education engagement with providers, accreditation bodies, government, and industry.
- Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisations (ACCHOs) are seeking to provide more student placements for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and non-Indigenous students. This would widen options for clinical in placements as well as open important opportunities to provide Culturally Safe clinical placements and to promote greater Cultural Safety through educational experiences. To facilitate this, ACCHOs require:

²² Gore, J, Patfield, S., Fray, L. *et al.*, 2017, The participation of Australian Indigenous students in higher education: a scoping review of empirical research, 2000–2016. *Aust. Educ. Res.* **44**, 323–355, viewed 5 April 2023, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s13384-017-0236-9>

²³ Power, T, Wiradjuri, Geia, L, Bwgcolman, Wilson, D, Ngāti Tahinga (Tainui), Clark, TC, Ngāpuhi, West, R, Kalkadoon & Djaku-nde, Best, B, Gorreng Gorreng, Boonthamurra and Yugambah, 2022, Cultural Safety: Beyond the rhetoric. *Contemporary Nurse* 58:1, pages 1-7, viewed 5 April 2023, <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/10376178.2022.2039076?scroll=top&needAccess=true&role=tab>

- accommodation support (for regional, remote and very remote locations). This could be invested in by jurisdictional/local governments to enable student participation in local services as part of their learning experience. This would increase the likelihood of workforce pathways into these communities.
- quality student supervision infrastructure. This should include investment from the Australian Government into the ACCHO sector specifically for student placement.
- flexibility to facilitated placement for all health and non-health professional groups, as required by the ACCHO.
- universities should work closely with ACCHOs to establish elective education opportunities, built upon standard Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health education, that sharpen education and learning for the ACCHO sector, including in Primary Health Care, in the Social Determinants of Health and in advanced Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health education.

Q14 How should placement arrangements and work-integrated learning in higher education change in the decades ahead?

- As noted above, examination of regulatory, policy and education practice norms limiting the expansion and adoption of simulation activities as part of clinical placement education is an essential change strategy to meet future healthcare workforce demands.
- Availability of placements in Aboriginal Medical Services, ACCHOs, and organisations such as the Institute of Urban Indigenous Health are important considerations. ACCHOs should be provided with funding to host students, whether that funding is from government or universities. Costs for this should be reasonably matched to education cost received by universities from governments.
- Recognition that students may not be able to attend placements in their preferred context if staff are not available to support these placements, therefore, work is required to increase identified student support workforce based in industry.
- Greater consideration of work integrated learning (WIL) cost to universities is needed, especially in high need areas like nursing and midwifery.
- Consideration of the individual loss of income cost of undertaking block placements for students. Midwifery students, for example, are required to be always on call for imminent continuity of care births/experience, there is a financial cost to this availability.
- There is considerable scope for innovation through collaboration with industry. For example, nursing and midwifery WILS placement arrangements could change to:
 - Reconsider the number of clinical placement hours required by nursing and midwifery students within their degrees. This is an area of considerable debate with a fragmented evidence base. Substantive research in this area would better inform policy.
 - Provide paid opportunities to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander nursing and midwifery students such as internships that count towards nursing and midwifery hours.
 - Create Culturally Safe placements for students. There is evidence that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander nursing and midwifery students can feel unsafe on clinical placement

compromising their ability to remain engaged with study.²⁴ It is essential for universities to develop procedures to ensure students are placed in safe environments and for opportunities for mentorship while on placement and are provided with tailored supports to ensure their placement success.

3.2.4 Collaboration with industry

Q15 What changes are needed to grow a culture of lifelong learning in Australia?

- All students studying in health-related disciplines in Australian Universities should complete relevant Cultural Safety micro credentials, such as: [Murra Mullangari](#) – Introduction to Cultural Safety and cultural humility.

3.3.2 Pathways for students

Q20 How can pathways between VET and higher education be improved, and how can students be helped to navigate these pathways?

- Relationship building between higher education and industry and between higher education and communities is a primary strategic consideration. Including greater and more strategic collaboration between the vocational sector, universities, and healthcare providers in the same region, that respond to the needs of the community.
- Vocational pathways through the final two years of high school should be built into the curriculum credits for High School Certificate to support more student into the sector.
- Alternate pathways into nursing and midwifery education programs are a fundamental need now, and into the future, and the associated entry support service must enhance their capability to provide individually tailored advice, recommendations and support students to considering what entry pathway is ideal for them, i.e., is a VET or university entry pathway more suitable for the individual's skills, knowledge and experience?
- There is an underlying need to collect and publicly publish data pertaining to the numbers of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander nursing and midwifery students seeking education, being enrolled in education, leaving education without completing courses, successfully completing education, and obtaining employment in the health sector. The data must then inform an ongoing assessment of replacement, recruitment and retention rates for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander nurses and midwives incorporating recruitment from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Worker and Health Practitioner as well as academic supply and demand challenges.
- As mentioned above, there is a significant need to develop a clearly articulated pathway from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health worker to registered nurse or midwife. Enabling pathways into nursing and midwifery needs to be further explored to widen the participation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students in nursing and midwifery. There is strong sector

²⁴ Congress of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Nurses and Midwives, 2022, 'gettin em n keepin em n growin em': Strategies for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander nursing and midwifery education reform, Congress of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Nurses and Midwives, Brisbane, viewed 2 April 2023, https://issuu.com/catsinam1/docs/catsinam_education_plan_2022_v18.0_final

interest in formalising pathways to increase the participation and career options for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in health roles. Appropriate University entry credit packages should be developed in line with this.

Q22 What role do tertiary entrance and admissions systems play in matching learners to pathways and supporting a sustained increase in participation and tertiary success?

- A comprehensive support framework must accompany any approved alternative entry program to demonstrate the universities' ability to support student success. This may include established referral system to Vocational Education and Training (VET) providers within the region.

3.4.1 Collaborating to a purpose – solving big challenges

Q23 How should an Accord help Australia increase collaboration between industry, government and universities to solve big challenges?

- Increasing collaboration between industry, government and universities would include privileging Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander methodologies and funding research that is in partnership with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. Additionally, increase the paid vacation research opportunities for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander researchers.
- Scholarships for higher degree by research (HDR) students should allow recipients to earn additional income.
- Balanced workloads for academics are a key consideration to addressing some challenges as overloaded academic workloads result in high academic attrition rates. The current ratio system of workload modelling ineffectively divides academic time and does not prevent overload. Furthermore, current ratio workload modelling does not capture administrative activity. A reduction in university professional staff across the sector has increased the administrative responsibilities of academics. This attempt at creating efficiency adds to the unaccounted-for workload of academics.

3.4.4 Relationship to ARC Act Review

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

- This requires the ability to think beyond traditional ways of being, doing and knowing. Pushing and innovating methodologies to ensure there is a broad range of voices heard and privileged and more opportunities to co-collaborate.
- Enabling staff to site visit students in remote and rural areas, particularly Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students in community. Also provide equipment for these students like school of air provide satellites for connections etc. Ensuring Culturally Safe education environments for all students- education for all lecturers/tutors on Cultural Safety and the decolonised history of Australia.

3.4.5 Research workforce

Q27 How can we improve research training in Australia including improving pathways for researchers to gain experience and develop high-impact careers in government and industry?

- Through increased availability of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander identified scholarships and support for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff, to reflect the career goals of the academic or professional.
- By increasing access to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander PhD students as well as available Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander research supervisors. There are insufficient Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander supervisors, therefore, appropriately prepared non-Indigenous researchers/supervisors must be supported to fill these gaps. It is essential that all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander PhD students have access to a cultural/research supervisor.
- By encouraging flexibility from employers to support the development and capacity building needs of emerging Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander researchers.
- More investment in philosophical scholarships, not just those that will benefit economic development. We need to invest in thinking, and thinking about thinking, simultaneously to investment in other areas of innovation.

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?

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?

- A strategic focus on increasing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples' completion and success, as determined by their families and communities is fundamental to creating opportunity for all Australians.
- Education close to home is needed to support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students into and through nursing and midwifery education programs, particularly peoples living in rural, remote, and very remote communities. This may mean investing in hub and spoke models that include additional investment to ensure equity in access to the education programs, and education support. For Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, support may include regular staff visits to their rural and report locations and the provision of equipment to support IT connectivity. Ensuring Culturally Safe education environments for all students is essentially.
- Identified mentors for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students. There is a need to increase the number of identified mentors, to provide opportunities for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students to work with identified mentors.

- There is a need for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander identified scholarships that are stand alone and not linked to any hardship criteria. For example, recent HESTA scholarships are focused only on low-income earners/social hardship. From an equity perspective there is also a need for scholarships that are available for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students at all achievement levels.

3.5.3 System-wide approaches to increasing access and equity

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?

- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students' need to be able to see themselves in the curriculum, so that they feel valued, this includes assessments that acknowledge other peoples' ways of learning and knowing. Higher education can take on lessons from the school education system, for example increasing the teaching of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages in schools has been linked to decreasing nonattendance.
- Establish and resource adequate numbers of strategic academic positions for identified academics and professional staff in universities. There needs to be a higher number of these positions, beyond just ticking the box, increased effort needs to be made to not be tokenistic in the recruitment and retention of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander academic and professional staff in universities.

3.6.1 Communities

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

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?

- Authentic community engagement and consultation needs to be a key part of retention and completion strategies in higher education. Community consultation should also include Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander student voices in curriculum development, and opportunities for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander academics to nurture community relationships as part of their roles.
- The Accord should align with and amplify the [Coalition of Peaks' expectation of community partnership agreements](#) setting expectation for HEPs in their engagement with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, whose Country/ies are occupied by the university. This will support exploration of different ways of working with local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities to invest in their intellectual and political sovereignty.

- Funding criteria linked to the demonstration of genuine and collaborative community engagement could be effective in promoting HEP action. Specific funding in government contracts to support the local-focused investment should be routine and included in respective legislation that establishes each university.

3.6.2 Regulation and governance

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?

- Regulatory and governance reform recommendations that require universities to demonstrate evolving relationship with local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and organisations, not just student and staff numbers. Greater local community engagement will positively impact Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander student and staffing numbers.
- Governance reforms should seek greater synergy between university and discipline-specific regulatory standards to better meet contemporary demands and community expectations and establish a national awards program to recognise best practice and universities who exercise them.

3.6.3 Academic workforce

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

- Through establishing ambitious policy environments and policy settings to increase Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander participation in academia, and to increase academic staff numbers with supports for their retention and success. This would include: recognising cultural load that is carried by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander academics, including the racism they experience and investment in communities of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander academics, not just individuals.
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander academics and professional staff need a very clear understanding of expectations when coming into a university jobs. Provide supported pathways for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander academics and professional staff to succeed in universities.
- Recognising that there is a limited pool of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander PhD holders, there is a need to provide realistic, supported, and flexible pathways for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Registered Nurses and Midwives to take up positions in universities.
- Increasing the capacity of all staff in Cultural Safety to ensure safer environments for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders peoples.

3.7.1 Quality experience for students

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?

- A deeper and more complex understanding within universities of the student experience of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health education. Often students find higher education challenging for a broad range of social, cultural, and economic reasons.²⁵
- Develop a better understanding of the diverse settings that graduate Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander nurses and midwives may wish to enter, and work to accommodate the skills needed for these settings, for example rural and remote work-ready requirements.
- Increasing the capacity of all staff in Cultural Safety to ensure safer environments for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and Cultural Safety education of contemporary educators in universities covering intersectionality, not just racism.
- Policies and process (of universities) that support restorative approaches to addressing discrimination. Changing the culture of university from one of persecution, to one that leads through learning and teaching.
- More Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander academics, and investment in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander-specific support.
- To support quality education and student experiences, as raised above, the academic ratio workload model needs examination to ensure that the wellbeing of academics is valued and even privileged. The value of the academic should not be measured by the number of classes they can teach, or the number of grants and publications. They should be valued for quality teaching, and research that leads their field, particularly research that prioritises translation into policy and practice, and research that is co-led by local communities.
- For Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander academics, the sector must appreciate that building the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander academic workforce requires long term investment, and equity when it comes to workload distribution. This includes recognition that 'cultural load', or the relational approach that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander academics practice, requires a lot of time to develop and maintain relationships that result in quality teaching and research.
- In addition, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander academics are building the intellectual sovereignty of their peoples. This too will take time. We don't just need researchers, but philosophers and theorists, who will continue to develop, and refine concepts. These concepts are then applied by researchers and practitioners in their craft, which complement the theorising. The philosophers and theorist then revisit these concepts or create new ones and the cycle continues.

²⁵ Inside Policy 2019, *Indigenous Cadetship Support Programs, A literature review*, Prepared by Inside Policy for the National Indigenous Australian Agency, 27 November 2019

3.7.2 Research quality

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

- Emerging academics, especially Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander academics, need to be given the time and opportunity to develop research skills and expertise within their roles, again acknowledging that they may not have a PhD to begin with. This further identifies the need for mentors who identify as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander.

3.9.3 Job-ready Graduates (JRG) package

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

- Th JRG package focuses on economic development, reducing incentive for courses such as humanities that support thinking and advocacy. This does not align with the needs of the community, which now more than ever needs more compassionate citizens.