



# Universities Australia Indigenous Strategy Annual Report

July 2023



UNIVERSITIES  
AUSTRALIA

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# Acknowledgement

We honour and respect the Indigenous peoples who have been, and continue to be, the Custodians of the lands, skies, and waterways upon which we at Universities Australia, and our member universities, live and work.

We acknowledge that Indigenous Elders and knowledge holders maintain and nourish Indigenous ways of knowing, being and doing. That research, teaching, and the academy, both locally and abroad, have benefitted from the enrichment and innovation these gifted knowledge systems grant.

We recognise all Indigenous staff and students who work and study at Australian universities. The significant contributions they make within the Higher Education sector impact far beyond the footprint of their institutions.

We acknowledge that sovereignty was never ceded, and that connection to Country and Culture has been maintained, nourished, and continues to thrive.

We pay respect to Elders and knowledge holders, past and present, as we listen carefully, tread lightly, and nurture those who are our future.

**Warning:** Readers should be aware that this document contains the names of deceased Indigenous people.

# Foreword

On behalf of Australia's 39 comprehensive universities, we present to you the first annual report under Universities Australia's Indigenous Strategy 2022-2025.

Universities Australia, the Deputy and Pro Vice-Chancellor Indigenous Committee, and the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Higher Education Consortium would like to acknowledge the contributions that have already been made to support Indigenous advancement, not only in universities' Indigenous portfolios, but across entire institutions.

We recognise and thank the many contributors whose invaluable efforts have made such progress possible. It goes without saying that all progress we make belongs to and benefits the whole.

The annual reporting process is an important way for the sector to chart that progress, share good practice, and identify areas requiring further action. This year's report is compiled from qualitative data collected through a survey completed by each of UA's member universities. We wish to extend our appreciation to those who were involved with the fulfilment of this task.

With this report, the higher education sector will continue to build upon good practice and focus on the areas that need improvement. We commend this annual report to you as we move forward, continuing to do the work that is required to support Indigenous advancement within, through, and beyond universities.



**Ms Catriona Jackson**

Chief Executive  
Universities Australia



**Professor Michelle Trudgett**

Chair  
DVC/PVC Indigenous Committee



**Assoc. Professor Sadie Heckenberg**

National President  
NATSIHEC

# Executive summary

## Overview

In March 2022, Universities Australia (UA) members launched the UA Indigenous Strategy 2022-2025.

It both aligns with and expands upon the commitments of the Indigenous Strategy 2017-2020.

The updated strategy reflects the sector's commitment to progressing from aspiration to implementation, and to supporting the advancement of Indigenous peoples within and through universities, taking a systemic approach.

A continuing feature in the updated strategy is UA's publication of an annual report on the progress of the Indigenous Strategy 2022-2025 against its five key themes:

1. **Student success** – a university experience that fosters the completion of a degree and sets students up for favourable outcomes.
2. **Staff success** – where Indigenous staff recruitment, retention, workloads, promotion pathways, pipeline development and professional development are all appropriately supported.
3. **University responsibility for Indigenous advancement** – harnessing the evidence base and resources to champion Indigenous advancement within institutions.
4. **Racism and cultural safety** – continuing to take an active anti-racism stance, including addressing more subtle forms of racism and developing understanding of the impact of the dominant culture on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.
5. **Recognising the value Indigenous peoples and knowledges bring to the university and embedding Indigenous value systems and knowledges into university structures** – by listening to the Indigenous knowledge holders of the world's oldest continuing cultures, Australian universities can mark themselves as unique.

The Australian university sector is committed to supporting Indigenous peoples and matters, and UA, as the peak representative body for the sector, acknowledges its responsibility to collaborate with the sector to further this cause.

## Context

This is the first annual report since the launch of the new Indigenous Strategy 2022-2025.

The report draws information from two main sources:

1. the Indigenous Strategy Annual Survey, completed by UA's members, and
2. data held by the Department of Education.

This year, and for every year under the new strategy, the same survey questions will be used to better enable the tracking of progress over time.

These questions are directly drawn from the strategy's five key themes.

In addition, a new feature of the annual reports will include updates about UA's activities in this space, including from the UA Deputy Vice-Chancellor committees who each have specific commitments under the strategy.

The annual reporting process is an important way for the sector to chart progress, share good practice, maintain momentum and to identify areas requiring further action.

## Summary of key findings

### University activities

- Close to 100 per cent of Australia's comprehensive universities described specific recruitment activities and/or programs for potential Indigenous students.<sup>1</sup>
- More than half indicated a whole-of-university approach to Indigenous student support via referrals to various services.
- More than three quarters had governance mechanisms in place to ensure the representation of Indigenous views.
- Less than half made reference to an anti-racism statement, policy and/or framework.
- Member universities' responses were generally not focused on equipping students with an awareness of Indigenous values and knowledges.

## Universities Australia's activities

- UA has commitments in its Indigenous Strategy, including advocacy, overseeing implementation, sharing good practice, developing an anti-racism statement and producing an annual report on progress.
- In 2022, UA advocated for Indigenous policy through its conference session on the new Indigenous Strategy and developed a response to the now-postponed review of the Indigenous Student Success Program.
- The DVC/PVC Indigenous Committee is developing cultural competency “good practice” principles, case studies, research methodology and anti-racism statement.
- The DVC Academic Committee is identifying good-practice examples, preparing guidance notes on addressing racism and cultural safety, and assessing how to support Indigenous academics and staff.
- The DVC Research Committee has established a working group on Indigenous research and committed to producing guidance on fostering Indigenous graduate research and HDR candidate pathways.
- The DVC International Indigenous Strategy Group was formed to progress international commitments from the UA Indigenous Strategy, and focused on mobility opportunities for Indigenous students, sharing resources between universities and overseas consultation.
- The DVC Corporate Committee held two workshops to develop Indigenous procurement and employment guidelines.
- UA partners with non-profit internship organisation CareerTrackers to create career pathways for Indigenous students.
- UA and NATSIHEC have an ongoing Memorandum of Understanding, including regular dialogue and roundtable discussions, with NATSIHEC representatives invited to various UA meetings.

## Department of Education – Higher education data

- Indigenous student enrolments more than doubled between 2008 and 2021, increasing by 152.6 per cent from 9,490 to 23,967 students, with an annual average growth rate of 7.4 per cent.
- Indigenous student enrolments remain well below Indigenous population parity, representing 2.08 per cent of all domestic enrolments in 2021.
- Indigenous student enrolment growth has surpassed the rate of growth in non-Indigenous enrolments, particularly in undergraduate enrolments.
- Indigenous students more frequently enrol in courses in society and culture, health, and education, than they do in management and commerce, natural and physical sciences, and engineering.
- Indigenous enrolments in Bachelor degree courses grew by an average of 7.3 per cent per year, while enrolments in postgraduate coursework degrees increased by 9.7 per cent per annum on average over the period.
- Award course completions by Indigenous students have continued to grow, with Bachelor award course completions growing by 127 per cent, postgraduate research course completions by 139 per cent and postgraduate coursework completions by 203 per cent since 2008.
- Bachelor degree completion rates for Indigenous students remain low compared to non-Indigenous students, but nine-year completion rates for Indigenous students have increased over time from 46.5 per cent to 50 per cent for the 2013 cohort.

The launch of the UA Indigenous Strategy 2022-2025 demonstrates the Australian university sector's ongoing commitment to supporting the advancement of Indigenous peoples within and through universities. The strategy's five key themes reflect a systemic approach to this cause.

There is always more work to be done, yet this first annual report since the launch of the new strategy provides valuable insights into the progress made by member universities, including specific recruitment activities and programs for Indigenous students, governance mechanisms to ensure Indigenous representation, and efforts to promote awareness of Indigenous values and knowledges among graduates.

As the peak representative body for the sector, Universities Australia acknowledges its responsibility to collaborate with the sector to further advance the strategy's commitments. The annual reporting process will continue to be an important tool for charting progress, sharing good practice and identifying areas requiring further action.

# Part 1

## University activities: Results of the 2022 UA Indigenous Strategy Annual Survey

# University activities: Results of the 2022 UA Indigenous Strategy Annual Survey

Responses to the survey in 2022 were qualitative. Universities provided freeform written responses to the questions, focusing on areas most pertinent to their specific contexts and circumstances. This allowed for maximum flexibility and has provided UA with a useful illustration of the state of the sector's progress on Indigenous matters. These qualitative responses will be used to develop a more detailed, quantitative instrument for use in the 2023 Annual Survey and Report.<sup>2</sup>

The 2022 survey asked members a series of questions under five key headings:

1. Student success.
2. Staff success.
3. University responsibility for Indigenous advancement.
4. Racism and cultural safety.
5. Recognising the value Indigenous people and knowledges bring to the university and embedding Indigenous value systems and knowledges into university structures.

Part 1 outlines the breadth of responses to these questions, with examples for illustration, and with quotations to highlight and promote the work and voices of members of the DVC and PVC Indigenous Committee as publishers and authorities in these spaces. This work is done in tandem with authors who are of significance in these spaces.



# 1. Student success

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“The focus on developing student capabilities should not be wrongly interpreted as placing the burden of responsibility for success onto students rather than on the range of systemic barriers they confront in and out of the university...complex interactions between many variables often mean that students’ academic and pastoral support needs are not always entirely separable and that the academic and pastoral support staff must work closely together to support students as they develop the capabilities needed for success...similarly, this focus does not in any way detract from the importance of the ongoing Indigenous institutional change agenda or the need for universities to take more responsibility for the whole-of-university approach to improving Indigenous higher education outcomes.”

***Martin Nakata and Vicky Nakata<sup>3</sup>***

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Within this category, universities were asked about their Indigenous student recruitment strategies, how they have shared responsibility for student support across the institution and the strategies they are using to improve the completion rates of Indigenous students.

## 1.1. Do you have an Indigenous student recruitment strategy?

Most universities reported having formal, written strategies in place that included reference to a coordinated approach to Indigenous student recruitment across the institution. Formal documentation included policies, programs, frameworks, plans and/or Reconciliation Action Plans (RAPs). Some had frameworks or policies with programs sitting beneath these to ensure the principles were operationalised. Among the various forms of formal documentation, the least common reported by universities were student recruitment strategies specifically tailored for Indigenous students.

Several universities described an ad hoc approach to Indigenous recruitment, a continual recruitment cycle, or varying strategies across different faculties. For example, one university’s Faculty of Business and Law employed a National Indigenous Business Summer School as a key recruitment method, while its Faculty of Health Sciences held an Indigenous Expo and conducted health career-specific high school outreach programs.

Regardless of approach, every university reported having activities in place for recruiting Indigenous students. Universities described activities to enhance Indigenous student access and participation, outreach programs in high schools, entry pathway or direct entry programs, summer school programs and scholarship programs.

More than half of Australian universities referenced a specific ‘officer,’ ‘ambassador,’ and/or team responsible for activities and/or program oversight. The titles of these positions included variations of engagement, program, support, equity and/or participation. This is to be distinguished from offerings of orientation and/or transition support that was referenced by less than half of responses.

Universities referenced the use of alternative and/or pre-programs in more than half of all responses. A number of these respondents specified the process of making these pathways clear access points and including additional promotion.

Scholarships were also a very popular offering. An additional point of interest was the empirical data offered by a university on the increased completion rates of Indigenous students who received scholarships.

Most universities described recruitment activities targeting high school students, though only a few reported targeted cohorts, including:

- Regional and/or remote
- Post Grad and/or Higher Degree Research
- Mature student
- School leavers
- Undergraduates
- STEM
- Online Students
- Women
- Alumni

As one respondent pointed out, alumni are a particularly important engagement cohort in response to creating research pipelines. However, the focus on undergraduate recruitment in the qualitative responses suggests this remains a key area for universities. Quantitative responses in the 2023 Annual Survey will better demonstrate the extent to which the other categories are targeted by universities.

### **Case Study: An early entry program**

This university's early entry program has been running for over two decades; however, it has undergone meaningful change over the past few years to adapt to the impacts of COVID-19. The program is promoted across a range of events for prospective Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students throughout the calendar year, all of which are designed to foster a positive relationship with prospective students well before the point where they undertake the Higher School Certificate (HSC).

The summer component of the program engages students in years 10, 11 and 12. It is a two-day series of activities on campus that give prospective students a chance to experience university life, explore campus, meet current students and learn about the support structures available to them at the University. This is then reinforced through the winter program, which is specifically for year 12 students about to undertake their HSC. The winter program is an academic event designed to build educational capacity and increase motivation to pursue higher education.

Prospective students attend academic workshops and receive tutoring from HSC markers and University tutors. They also receive structured guidance around how to apply for degrees, pathways and scholarships through engagement with academic staff, professional staff and student leaders.

## **1.2. Whilst Indigenous centres play a central role in supporting Indigenous students, how have you shared responsibility across the institution for student support?**

Australian universities acknowledged that support for Indigenous students is a shared responsibility across whole institutions, as well as the sector more broadly. However, the empirical evidence to support these propositions and their practical implications were scarce. In addition, in contrast to sharing responsibility across the institution, an underlying shift has been identified that demonstrates a disproportionate level of reliance upon DVC and PVC Indigenous portfolios for leadership in supporting Indigenous students.

The most common practical measure taken to ensure Indigenous students had the support they needed was through referrals to other support services. This included counselling and/or wellbeing services, mentoring, peer tutoring and/or tutorial assistance. More than three quarters of respondents mentioned this form of support and several of these included data tracking of uptake.

There were also frequent references to sharing of responsibility through various taskforces, committees, portfolios, faculties and/or schools. These groups often undertook the facilitation of discipline-specific support initiatives.

Formal documentation of these shared responsibilities was referenced in just under half of responses. Examples included co-design compacts and collaboration agreements but also strategic plans and RAPs.

Indigenising spaces on campus was referenced by a small number of universities. This is inclusive of initiatives that display Indigenous artwork across campus, Indigenous-named landmarks, and includes Indigenous languages on signage.

### 1.3. How have you targeted the improvement of completion rates of Indigenous students?

Most universities (more than 75 per cent) referenced student services as a key means of targeting the improvement of completion rates of Indigenous students. The term 'student services' incorporated references to scholarship offerings and support, academic and library services, skills and resources, and employability and professional development services.

Many respondents referenced culturally safe spaces as a means of targeting the improvement of completion rates. Several of these respondents specified the provision of culturally safe spaces beyond the designated space of Indigenous centres.

Evidence-based initiatives were described by a small number of respondents. While an exact indicator of evidence-based initiatives being used by universities is beyond the scope of this report and is not reflected in the question posed to universities, in qualitative responses what is not included is of as much interest as what is included.

#### Case study: Student support through a wellness initiative

This university has instituted an Indigenous Wellness Initiative as a support mechanism for Indigenous students. This serves multiple purposes and has had a range of positive outcomes for Indigenous students as well as raising cultural awareness among non-Indigenous students. In their own words:

"As First Nations Australians, we have many different protocols. We are story tellers, and we are collective. [This initiative] is an Indigenous Wellness Initiative that showcases to the broader [University] community how we, as First Nations Australians, assist our students' social and emotional wellbeing journey through academia.

[This initiative] supports students in building the appropriate skills to take care of their wellbeing beyond their [University] journey. The program is facilitated by our First Nations students and consists of 4 main activities:

- Cooking classes to encourage students to develop healthy eating;
- Walking group to support with connection to land, healing and building mindfulness;
- Visual Arts Program to connect with inner creative expression;
- Community Alliance – Brotherhood and Sisterhood Alliance community groups, mentoring of the students through Aunties and Uncles ('wisdom holders') and Brothers and Sisters ('knowledge seekers').

We have found that combining our joint needs of promoting student wellness with the need to raise the cultural awareness of our students has worked very well. It provides a means to demonstrate to our non-Indigenous students the value of Indigenous ways of knowing, being and doing can have a positive, practical impact on their own lives."

It is anticipated that initiatives such as this one will help the university improve both retention and completion rates in the coming years.

## 2. Staff success

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“While there has been some flow through of Indigenous women to senior levels, there is without doubt a pooling of academics within Indigenous studies or within Indigenous education support, access or Indigenous project or program initiatives (Australian Government, 2016). There has not been the same flow through in other areas of employment across the higher education sector. While it is easy to say and dismiss it under the premise that ‘Indigenous people want to work with their own people’, this over simplifies the reality, minimises Indigenous opportunities and also denies the inherent racism and biases embedded within the higher education system that blocks Indigenous progression and maintains the ‘black glass ceiling’....This stratified Indigenous workforce within Indigenous specific areas has resulted in minimal opportunities for progression and witnessed people leaving the sector, changing institutions and increasingly becoming disillusioned with the espoused notions of diversity, inclusion and valuing Indigenous peoples.”

***Bronwyn Fredericks and Nereda White<sup>4</sup>***

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Within this category, universities were asked about workforce strategies and initiatives for attracting and retaining Indigenous staff. They were asked if they have Indigenous staff targets and if these incorporate factors such as the number of Indigenous students and/or the local Indigenous peoples. They were asked to discuss any documented pathways they have in place that recognise the uniqueness of Indigenous staff members’ experience and expertise.

### **2.1. Does your university have a workforce strategy that includes initiatives for attracting and retaining Indigenous staff?**

Most Australian universities have an Indigenous workforce strategy in place, either as a standalone policy or included within a broader workforce framework.

However, the tactics described by respondents within these strategies were quite diverse. About half of the responses mentioned the creation of a culturally safe environment for Indigenous staff – but again, as these were qualitative responses, this figure doesn’t necessarily indicate that the remaining universities do not focus on this activity. Some universities mentioned the creation of an academic or professional pipeline of academic staff, while others talked about specific recruitment activities such as an Indigenous talent register, having Indigenous representation on promotions panels for Indigenous staff and having specific recruitment guidelines for Indigenous Identified positions to increase awareness and cultural understanding across the university.

In terms of retaining Indigenous staff, some universities talked about policies for recognising cultural needs, others talked about flexible work arrangements or Indigenous-specific career development opportunities. As previously discussed, creating a culturally safe work environment was identified as a common theme across many universities. However, some institutions went beyond this and emphasised the need to make the workplace attractive to Indigenous staff and students, placing Indigenous voices at the forefront of decision-making processes and creating an environment where all individuals can flourish.

### **2.2. Does your university have Indigenous staff targets that consider factors such as the number of Indigenous students at the university and the ratio of the university’s local Indigenous population to the broader population?**

More than half the respondents referenced setting targets that parallel population parity at three per cent.

One university made note of moving away from population parity targets due to the complications that arise when making such calculations based upon assumptions about population factors that are not possible to accurately predict. This university had the resources to rely upon their own modelling to inform their Indigenous headline targets.

Nearly half of the respondents referenced consideration of factors outside of population parity that were inclusive of consideration for the number of Indigenous students at the university and/or the ratio of the university’s local Indigenous population to the broader population.

### **2.3. Does your university have documented promotion pathways that recognise the uniquely broad experience and expertise Indigenous staff possess?**

Most universities did not identify a specific, documented promotion pathway specific to Indigenous staff. Those that did made a point to reference the unique expertise and experience that Indigenous staff possess and bring to their university appointments.

Within those that could not point to a specific promotion pathway for Indigenous staff, some referenced informal recognition of the unique skill and experience sets of Indigenous staff and described how this informal recognition had nonetheless informed promotion decision making.

Several universities also pointed out that although they do not currently have documented promotion processes for Indigenous staff in place, this is a planned focus for upcoming renewal of their RAP or broader workforce strategy.

#### **Case study: Consideration of Indigenous knowledges and practices in promotion**

At this university, both Professional and Academic Promotion Policies have been redesigned to better recognise the unique and broad expertise of Indigenous staff. In the case of Professional staff, the selection criteria for job positions have been updated to encourage a broader range of applicants. These criteria take into account not only academic qualifications but also relevant experience that enhances the scope of those who are eligible to apply. This recognises the diverse backgrounds and expertise of Indigenous staff and provides opportunities for them to showcase their skills in a way that benefits the university.

Similarly, in the case of Academic staff between levels A to E, the key criteria for promotion have been redeveloped to ensure that Indigenous staff are not overlooked. Specific guidelines have been included to consider any unique and broad experiences and expertise for roles that involve cultural activity, which prioritise Indigenous knowledges and practices requiring community cultural recognition. This change recognises the importance of Indigenous knowledge and culture and emphasises the value of Indigenous staff's contributions to the university.

It is worth noting that, while there is a minimum qualification requirement for Academic roles, this requirement has been amended for Indigenous applicants to recognise the significant cultural knowledge they bring to the position. This demonstrates the university's commitment to inclusivity and acknowledges the importance of Indigenous knowledge and culture in the academic world.

## 3. University responsibility for Indigenous advancement

“Indigenous early career researchers (ECRs) need to be able to build their careers without the additional burden of racism, the cultural taxation of taking an uneven load of Indigenous work and to have access to appropriate mentorship and advice regarding which work is important for career development and why. The benefits to universities of a productive and successful Indigenous early career workforce are significant and require careful and strategic planning to ensure effective career development. Negative experiences shared by Indigenous ECRs appear to result from a lack of understanding, respect, and genuine commitment on the part of both institutions and non-Indigenous staff.”

***Michelle Lea Locke, Michelle Trudgett, and Susan Page<sup>5</sup>***

Within this section, universities were asked about how Indigenous views are represented within the institution either directly or through a governance mechanism, if they have an Indigenous procurement policy and if they have implemented KPIs for staff in relation to action toward Indigenous advancement.

### 3.1. How does your university ensure Indigenous views are represented either directly or through a governance mechanism to the Council or Senate and to senior executive?

More than three quarters of respondents referenced Indigenous views being represented through governance mechanisms. The specifics of these mechanisms varied greatly but references to Vice-Chancellors via a Deputy Vice-Chancellor or Pro Vice-Chancellor Indigenous were reported in close to 75 per cent of responses.

Specific Indigenous committee/s and/or network/s were also a common mechanism. Direct representation on the University Council or Senate was referenced by some universities, while a few included references to the representation of Indigenous students' views.

#### **Case study: Direct representation and governance mechanisms**

This university has established an Indigenous Identified Position at the level of Deputy Vice-Chancellor (DVC), reporting directly to the Vice-Chancellor and serving on a range of governance committees, including the Senior Executive Team and the University Council. The university also has a Director of First Nations Leadership who is a member of the Vice-Chancellor's Advisory Committee and the Human Research Ethics Committee.

The First Nations Leadership management team (consisting of the DVC First Nations Leadership and Engagement, Director of First Nations Leadership, three First Nations Managers and one non-Indigenous Manager) meet monthly to discuss and make decisions on a range of services and budgets including the expenditure and tracking of the ISSP funding program, the Away from Base funding program, and university appropriation funds. The team hold discussions around risk management, strategy, workforce and finance and are delegated to make both recommendations and decisions in a range of areas.

In addition to the DVC First Nations Leadership and Engagement, the University Council also has one Ex Officio First Nations Australian member, ensuring that there are always at least two First Nations people contributing to the highest levels of decision-making at the university.

### **3.2. Does your university have an Indigenous procurement policy?**

This is an area that is relatively new to universities. Most universities reported being at varying stages of a formal development process and as of December 2022, less than half of universities had begun that process.

Of note is that many responses referred to the efforts of UA's DVC Corporate Committee to develop Indigenous Procurement Guidelines. The impact of these guidelines is expected to be visible in the results of the 2023 Annual Survey.

Membership with Supply Nation – an organisation that partners with government, corporates and not-for-profit organisations to modify and redirect organisational spending towards the Indigenous business sector – was referenced across a range of responses, regardless of whether a university had a specific Indigenous procurement policy.

### **3.3. Has your university implemented KPIs for staff – especially staff in leadership positions, both academic and professional – that require them to demonstrate action toward Indigenous advancement?**

It is important to contextualise this section by clarifying that the term 'Indigenous advancement' had not been defined by UA before distribution of surveys to members. Using the qualitative responses to this question in the 2022 survey, UA will develop a definition for use in the coming years.

Within the limited number of universities that reported having KPIs that demonstrate action toward Indigenous advancement it was more likely for universities to have KPIs for staff in leadership positions than for all-inclusive KPIs.

One university identified leadership positions as those who had significant responsibility in Indigenous education. Another university identified the scope of Indigenous advancement reporting as measurements of Indigenous student completions, Indigenous staff recruitment and Indigenous staff retention.

Several universities reported being in the process of developing KPIs for staff in relation to action toward Indigenous advancement.

While outside of the scope of the question posed to universities, some respondents referenced substitute mechanisms outside of KPIs for demonstrating action toward Indigenous advancement. One such example is actions for Indigenous advancement as determined by a Reconciliation Action Plan and/or Indigenous strategy.

## 4. Racism and cultural safety

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“...Indigenous cultural competency training is still largely driven by non-Indigenous people through white racial frames that inform how and what they seek to know about Indigenous people. As Indigenous educators in Australian universities, we advocate for an “intellectual solidarity” (Leonardo & Porter, 2010) in developing and delivering Indigenous cultural competency training fuelled by a desire to do away with racism. This requires seeing race and racism at the centre of political policy, process, and practice rather than in the margins and where the struggle against the racial subordination of Indigenous Australian peoples becomes the greater good.”

**Bronwyn Fredericks and Debbie Bargallie<sup>6</sup>**

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As discussed in the UA Indigenous Strategy, universities should be safe places, free from discrimination and actions which harm others. Racism continues to be a significant problem in Australia, including on university campuses. In this section, respondents were asked about the specific measures they took in 2022 to combat racism, particularly racism towards Indigenous people.

### 4.1. Has your university developed and implemented an Indigenous-specific anti-racism strategy?

About half of respondents described some form of anti-racism policy, statement, or framework, though a number of these were in development rather than finalised and publicly available. Some universities described anti-racism statements or strategies that were not Indigenous-specific. Some demonstrated how anti-racism policy was embedded in other documents or activities. These included:

- Reconciliation statements
- Equity, Inclusion and/or Diversity strategies
- Codes of conduct
- Anti-racism campaigns, action plans or other initiatives
- Cultural competency and cultural safety initiatives or frameworks
- Strategic plans.

#### **Case Study: Immersive anti-racism initiatives**

This university undertakes bystander intervention training by utilising immersive 360-degree video technology to immerse participants in real-world situations before asking them to decide how they would influence better outcomes. The immersive experience acts as a primer for further training, wherein attendees can develop the tools to appropriately recognise and intervene in these situations.

This complements additional training available to all staff on understanding and combatting unconscious bias, and a network of Harassment and Discrimination Contact Officers, who are trained to support staff and students in responding to instances of harassment or discrimination.



## **4.2. – 4.4 Is cultural safety training provided to all staff? Does this training include addressing the impacts of the dominant culture on Indigenous peoples? Does it address more subtle forms of racism?**

About three quarters of Australian universities reported that they are either currently offering, have offered in the past or are in the process of developing cultural safety training. Delivery of cultural safety training within universities is diverse.

Some are:

- Offered as single onboarding modules.
- Only available to senior management.
- Micro-credentials.
- Only offered to academic staff or fixed-term and ongoing staff members.
- Discipline-specific.
- Ongoing on an annual, biannual or triennial basis.
- Voluntary.
- Offered to students.
- Co-designed.
- Offered alongside supplementary offerings.

In 2023, the UA survey will ask more detailed questions about how these programs have been designed, and how universities engage with existing empirical evidence and literature in the design process.

## **4.5 Does your university formally recognise the cultural load of Indigenous staff and students and make appropriate adjustments, including in relevant HR policies and practices?**

Approximately a third of universities either currently acknowledge and adjust the workload to accommodate the cultural burden on Indigenous peoples within their institutions, or they are actively developing mechanisms to address this matter. Some described HR policies and practices, some had these mechanisms built into enterprise agreements and some talked about incorporating these adjustments into workload models. One mentioned incorporating this idea into their Achievement Relative to Opportunity guidelines.

A smaller number of universities described informal mechanisms to recognise this additional workload. Universities mostly focused on the additional load on staff, in responding to this question, but a small number of universities also mentioned the additional workload for Indigenous students.

## 5. Recognising the value Indigenous peoples, and their knowledges, bring to universities

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“To decolonise and better centre Indigenous knowledge(s) there is a need to advance the benefits of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples in view of existing policy settings and continue to improve the infrastructure that facilitates First Peoples’ self-determination and participation in research and control over research outcomes.”

*Kathy Bowrey, Irene Watson, and Marie Hadley<sup>7</sup>*

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Within this category, respondents were asked to describe how they include Indigenous content in curricula across the university – noting, of course, that faculties often operate quite independently of each other. Despite this complexity, many universities described the value of incorporating Indigenous knowledges, of ensuring students graduate with an awareness of Indigenous values and the benefits of supporting and promoting Indigenous-led research.

### 5.1. How does your university work to include Indigenous content in curricula?

In relation to including Indigenous course content in curricula, several universities referenced having a specific position, team, committee and/or institute responsible for this task. Some universities mentioned the need for a coordinated approach across the institution, which was, for most of these universities, still under consideration, with some outlining specific changes to occur in 2023. Others discussed Indigenising the curriculum as a core component of their RAP.

Several universities described on-Country immersive experiences for some of their courses, requiring academic staff to engage with First Nations communities and build rapport. A number talked about how specific faculties within their institutions were working to increase Indigenous content or increase opportunities for students to engage with Indigenous communities and organisations through professional placements, WIL and coursework activities.

Some universities also discussed the nexus between education and research and the importance of Indigenous research informing curriculum.

### 5.2. How does your university ensure students graduate with an awareness of Indigenous values and knowledges?

Some universities talked about how their efforts to Indigenise the curriculum were having flow on effects for graduates. Some reported delivering an awareness of Indigenous values and knowledges via satisfaction of an Indigenous specific or broad global graduate attribute. Some universities described how the offering of cultural safety training addressed student awareness. Some described extra-curricular activities and non-credit modules.

### 5.3. How does your university recognise the benefits of Indigenous-led research and how is this promoted by your institution?

The most common response in relation to recognising and promoting the benefits of Indigenous-led research was to describe a policy or strategy either in place or under development, with more than half of respondents referring to this kind of approach. Some universities discussed a leadership position responsible for recognising and/or promoting Indigenous-led research, or referenced specific research centres, institutes or labs that took ownership of these kinds of activities.

Some universities used this question to focus on their higher degree research students, discussing Indigenous academic pipelines, as well as Indigenous-specific scholarships, stipends, and other financing mechanisms for Indigenous PhD candidates.

### **Case study: An Indigenous Knowledge Institute**

This university's Indigenous Knowledge Institute aims to advance research and education in Indigenous knowledge systems at the university, promoting research linkages and collaboration across the university and playing a lead role in articulating University research to external audiences. The university's goal is for the Indigenous Knowledge Institute to build on the research and education activities already underway at the University to become a global leader in Indigenous knowledge research and education. Activities at the Institute will include:

- Documenting and supporting the maintenance of Indigenous knowledge in alignment with the priorities of its Indigenous owners.
- Elevating Indigenous knowledge systems and holders within the academy and beyond and supporting the development of Indigenous research leaders.
- Supporting and promoting interdisciplinary research and engagement with Indigenous knowledge in partnership with Indigenous stakeholders.
- Addressing global and local challenges, translating research, shaping policy, and achieving practical outcomes that bring mutual benefits for all stakeholders.
- Developing the next generation of Indigenous research leaders.

## Part 2

# Universities Australia's activities

# Universities Australia's activities

UA has made several commitments under the Indigenous Strategy, including:

- Continued advocacy to government on issues relevant to participation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in higher education and research.
- Incorporating Indigenous matters and perspectives in advocacy and policy development.
- Overseeing the Indigenous Strategy and its implementation.
- Sharing good practice.
- Developing an Indigenous specific anti-racism statement.
- Advocacy by the Lead VC Indigenous to university leaders.
- Gathering data from universities on their progress against their Indigenous Strategy commitments, producing an annual report of the findings and publishing this on the UA website.

UA also provides updates in a range of other ways:

- UA Directorate and DVC and PVC Indigenous Committee oversight of the Indigenous Strategy.
- Annual joint Board meeting between the UA Board and the NATSIHEC Executive.
- Twice-yearly session at UA Plenary where the Chair and Deputy Chair of the DVC and PVC Indigenous Committee and the National President of NATSIHEC are represented.
- Bi-annual reporting on progress against Indigenous Strategy commitments by other DVC Committees to the UA Directorate.
- Regular meetings between the UA Directorate and NATSIHEC, including attendance at NATSIHEC Caucus meetings.

The following section provides an overview of UA's activities over the preceding 12 months.

## Advocacy to government and in the community

As always, UA advocates to government and the community on matters of Indigenous policy whenever the opportunity arises.

In 2022, two key pieces of advocacy included: the UA conference session on the new UA Indigenous Strategy, and the development of contributions to the National Indigenous Australians Agency's (NIAA's) review of the Indigenous Student Success Program (ISSP).

The UA conference session on the UA Indigenous Strategy 2022-25 focused on university structures, student success and Indigenous leadership. Panellists discussed activities integral to Indigenous advancement in Australian universities, which sit under key themes contained in the UA Indigenous Strategy.

NIAA has postponed its review of the ISSP funding, with the current date for this review now predicted for June 2023. In addition to working with the DVC and PVC Indigenous Committee, UA will use the work undertaken in preparation for this review in 2022 to inform our 2023 response.

## Activities of the DVC and PVC Indigenous Committee

The DVC and PVC Indigenous Committee are working on a set of cultural competency "good practice" principles to support student and staff understanding of, and engagement with, Indigenous cultural traditions. These principles will offer guidance on recognising the cultural load carried by Indigenous staff while facilitating cultural competency activities and initiatives.

Acknowledging the limited capacity of current Indigenous staff to support all Indigenous-related activities in universities, the committee is advocating for greater resourcing, as well as acknowledgement and remuneration for their time spent in this space outside of their other responsibilities.

A key issue to be covered in the principles is to recognise the shared responsibility of cultural competency between Indigenous and non-Indigenous staff. This should encourage Indigenous staff to take leadership roles and ownership in implementing cultural competency, thereby reducing the cultural load on them.

Furthermore, the committee is working to produce case studies and a research methodology that will scope cultural competency strategies. This will create a comprehensive picture of what is and what is not working in terms of cultural competency and anti-racism in universities. The committee, in collaboration with UA, is also developing an anti-racism statement that universities can use to inform their own anti-racism statements.

## Deputy Vice-Chancellor Committee activities

Each of the Deputy Vice-Chancellor (DVC) committees has specific commitments under the UA Indigenous Strategy. There are varying approaches taken by the different committees in fulfilling their respective commitments. The activities the committees have undertaken over the preceding 12 months are outlined below.

### DVC Academic Committee

As a committee, the DVCs Academic have approached their commitments under the strategy by identifying innovative and good practice examples that provide guidance to the sector. Working with DVC and PVC Indigenous colleagues, the committee are preparing good practice guidance notes on addressing racism and cultural load and cultural safety in universities.

In addressing racism in universities, committee members shared various approaches, which included anti-racism taskforces, reconciliation action plans that include curriculum redesign, integration of Indigenous knowledges into curricula, cultural safety and awareness training and immersion experiences. All committee members reinforced the need to work alongside Indigenous staff and students in developing and implementing these programs. However, the committee also noted significant load issues on Indigenous staff who, in addition to their regular responsibilities, are often called upon to address Indigenous matters. This is a significant concern as these staff cannot be expected to take ownership of all Indigenous matters in universities.

The committee is currently assessing how success and completion is understood in universities and how to provide additional pipelines to support emergent Indigenous academics and staff into the universities.

Finally, the committee is looking at how universities can mitigate the workload of Indigenous staff to recognise their work in addressing cultural matters as part of their role. Underpinning this work is the development of a strategy that considers belonging at university and how universities can improve Indigenous student and staff sense of belonging to university communities to help address social inequalities and cultural matters.

### DVC Research Committee

The DVC Research Committee has established a working group focusing on matters relating to Indigenous research and researchers. The goal of the working group is to produce good practice guidance on one or more key topics which can foster Indigenous graduate research and higher degree by research (HDR) candidate pathways. The working group met for the first time in September 2022 and identified actions to be taken by the DVCs Research to meet their commitments under the strategy. The working group has planned two workshops for 2023 to assist with producing these principles or guidance. The workshops will:

- focus on sharing and identifying good practice.
- identify challenges and solutions.
- facilitate discussions between DVCs Research, directors of research offices, directors of graduate research, researchers and members of the DVC and PVC Indigenous Committee as appropriate.

The DVC Research working group has also asked all universities to review and document their Indigenous research strategies (whether these exist in a standalone document, or are elements of other appropriate documents), noting that many universities have already done this.

### DVC International Committee

The DVC International Indigenous Strategy Group was formed in September 2022 to provide a forum to further progress the international priorities outlined in the UA Indigenous Strategy.

The Indigenous Strategy Group has focussed their discussions on mobility opportunities for Indigenous students, researchers and staff and on sharing good practice and useful resources between Australian universities. The group has also solicited feedback from overseas peak bodies representing universities in the United States, Canada and New Zealand, to explore Indigenous representation on their governing bodies and the role of First Nations universities in their advocacy work.

The group was able to report on progress and gather views and feedback from the broader DVC International Committee at a face-to-face meeting in October 2022.

## DVC Corporate Committee

The DVC Corporate Committee has established a working group to address its commitments under the Indigenous Strategy 2022-2025. To date, two workshops involving DVCs Corporate, university procurement staff and Indigenous representatives have been organised to gather input for developing model Indigenous procurement guidelines and employment guidelines. Ideas for the Indigenous employment guidelines included:

- Understanding the value proposition of the higher education sector.
- Attracting and retaining-in-sector Indigenous employees including job security and career advancement.
- Acknowledging the additional cultural responsibilities, referrals and requests.
- Promoting pathways and pipelines for Indigenous graduates.

Ideas for procurement guidelines included:

- Using plain English and a clear definition of “majority Indigenous businesses” (Supply Nation or local Aboriginal councils are good reference sources).
- Procurement staff should be empowered to make pro-Indigenous procurement decisions. Staff should not necessarily need to refer to higher-ups for low-frequency and low-value purchase orders.
- In formulating the procurement guidelines, it is important to recognise that many Indigenous suppliers face challenges of scale. To balance this, incentives can also be introduced to encourage purchases from Indigenous suppliers or level the playing field for them.

## Partnership with CareerTrackers

CareerTrackers is a non-profit social enterprise, working with leading employers across Australia to create professional career pathways through leadership development and paid internship opportunities for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students.

CareerTrackers works extensively with both interns and employers to create an optimal environment for success. This includes providing intensive pre-employment training, as well as on-the-job and ongoing support to both the intern and the employer.

To fund the training and support that forms an integral part of the program, employment partners pay a sponsorship fee to CareerTrackers per intern per annum, in addition to the wage that is payable to the intern.

Each participating student completes a 12-week (full-time) paid internship each year (often for multiple years over the course of their study) with a partner organisation matched to their career aspirations and their qualifications.

The end goal is to convert an internship to a full-time position upon graduation.

UA has been participating in the CareerTrackers program since 2019. Our second CareerTrackers intern, Thea Sievers, graduates from her double degree in Criminology and Anthropology (with minors in Indigenous Studies and Social Psychology) from the Australian National University in July 2023. UA is thrilled that Thea has agreed to join UA in a full-time capacity upon graduation.

UA is currently in discussions with CareerTrackers to onboard a new intern for the 2023-24 summer internship period.

## Ongoing engagement with NATSIHEC

UA and NATSIHEC entered an Memorandum of Understanding in April 2019. In 2022, a key activity was formal and ongoing dialogue. This included a roundtable between the UA Board of Directors and the NATSIHEC Executive to discuss sectoral priorities. The roundtable discussed UA's advocacy to government on matters pertaining to Indigenous staff and students, the UA Indigenous Strategy 2022-25, the annual survey and report, and plans for ongoing work between UA and NATSIHEC. There was also some discussion of adjusting the MoU between UA and NATSIHEC to reflect changes in operating procedures, particularly since the creation of the UA DVC and PVC Indigenous Committee in 2021.

NATSIHEC Executive Directors continue to be invited to the DVC Academic, Corporate, International and Research meetings and the NATSIHEC President, along with the Chair and Deputy Chair of the DVC and PVC Indigenous Committee, were invited to observe the Vice-Chancellors' Plenary meetings.

The background is a solid dark blue color. There are three thin, light pink diagonal lines: one starting from the top left and extending towards the right edge; another starting from the bottom left and extending towards the top right; and a third starting from the bottom left and extending horizontally towards the right edge.

# Part 3

## Higher education data



# Higher education data

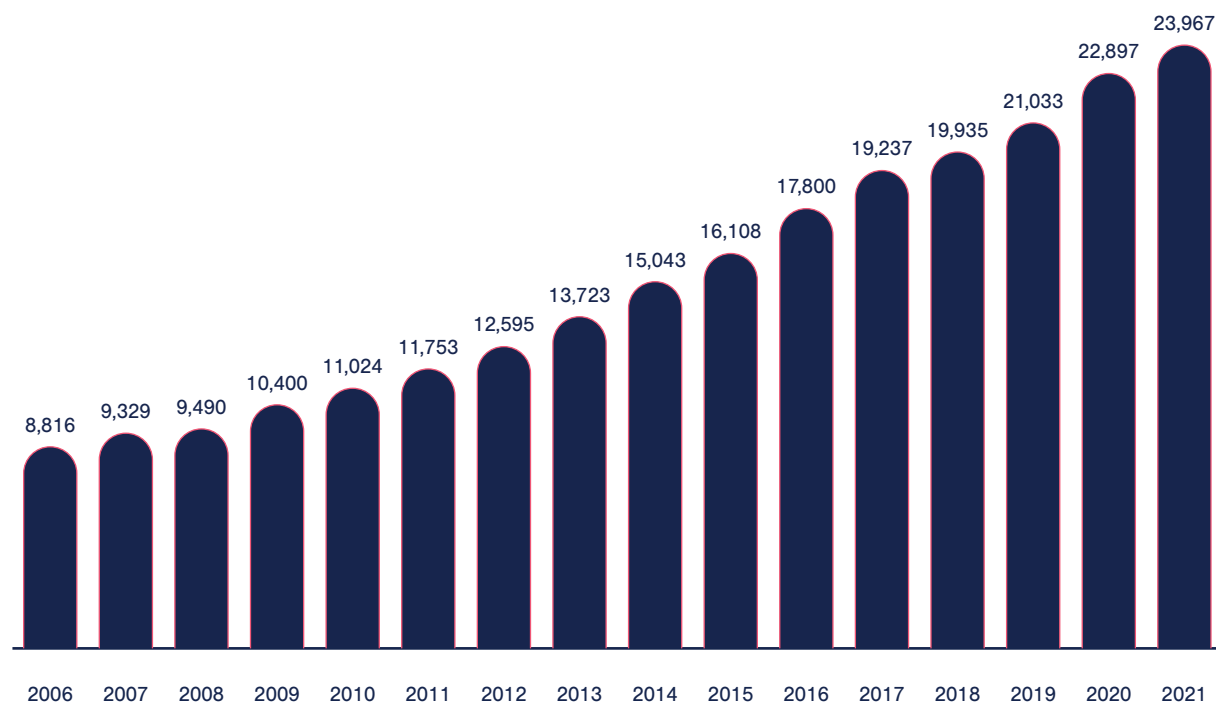
The Department of Education maintains various datasets pertaining to Indigenous student and staff outcomes. Data for 2022 is yet to be released. Below is the most recent data available, current as of June 2023.

Some datasets have not been updated since the previous report and have therefore not been included in this one. Previous data can be found here: [Universities Australia Indigenous Strategy Annual Report May 2022](#).

## Indigenous student enrolments

Figure 1 shows that Indigenous student enrolments more than doubled between 2008 and 2021 – increasing by 152.6 per cent from 9,490 students to 23,967 students, with an annual average growth rate of 7.4 per cent.

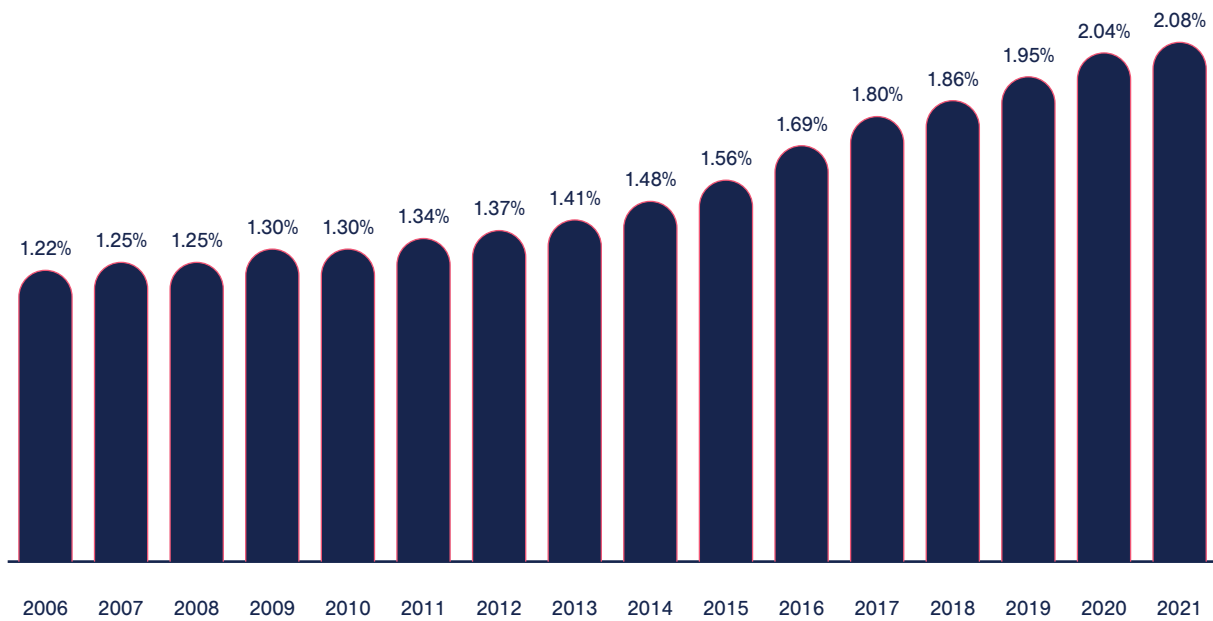
**Figure 1: Indigenous student enrolments, 2006 to 2021**



Source: Department of Education, Selected Higher Education Statistics – 2021 Student data, Section 11: Equity Group.

Despite this significant growth, Indigenous student enrolments remain well below Indigenous population parity (i.e., 3.2 per cent of the total Australian population). As a proportion of all domestic enrolments, Indigenous enrolments increased from 1.25 per cent in 2008 to 2.08 per cent in 2021 (See Figure 2).

**Figure 2: Share of Indigenous student enrolments, 2006 to 2021**



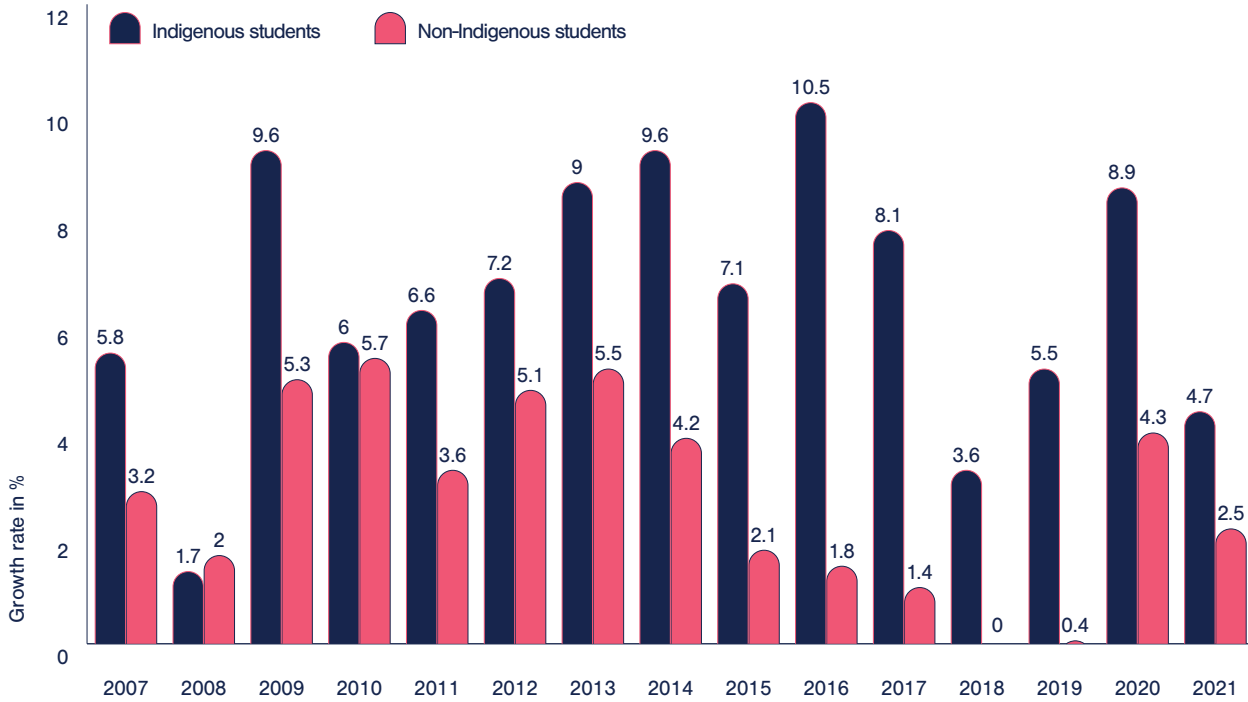
Source: Department of Education, *Selected Higher Education Statistics – 2021 Student data*, Section 11: Equity Group.

Figure 3 (over page) shows that annual growth in Indigenous student enrolments has far surpassed the rate of growth in non-Indigenous student enrolments in recent years, especially undergraduate enrolments.

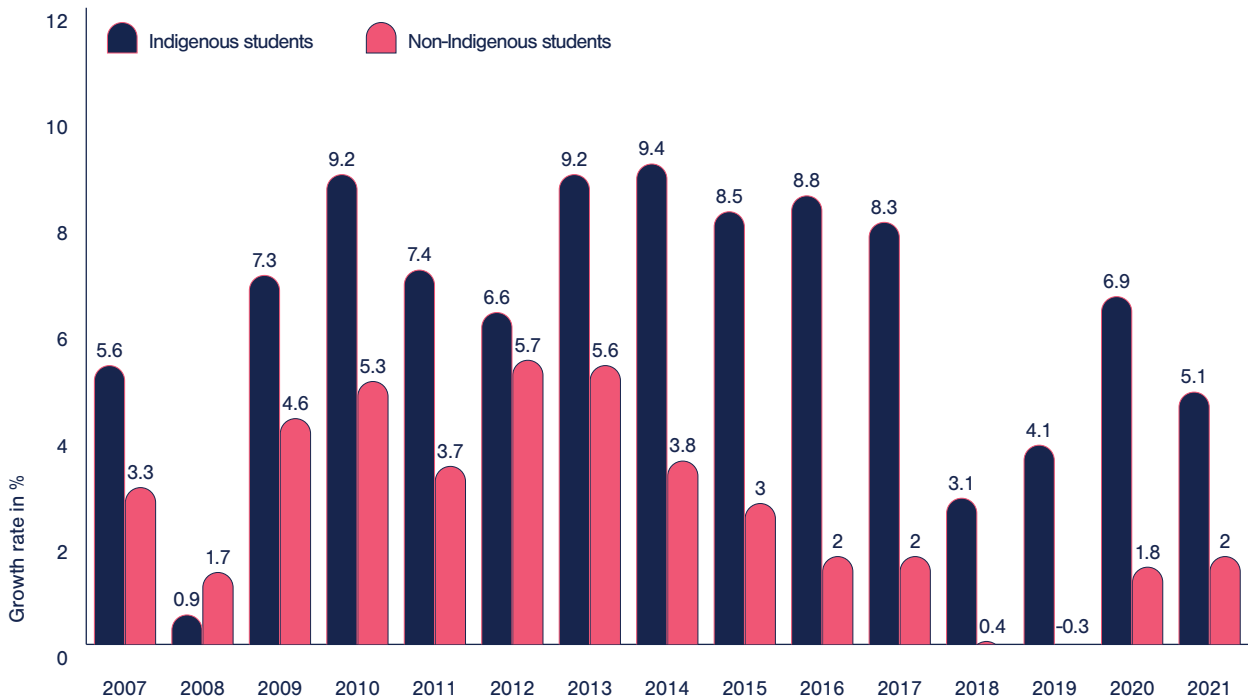
In 2021, Indigenous undergraduate enrolments grew by 5.1 per cent while non-Indigenous undergraduate enrolments rose just 2.0 per cent. Total Indigenous enrolments rose by 4.7 per cent in 2021, compared to a growth of 2.5 per cent in total non-Indigenous enrolments.

**Figure 3: Annual growth rates of Indigenous and non-Indigenous domestic enrolments (total and undergraduate-only) from 2007-2021.**

**Total domestic enrolments**



**Domestic undergraduate enrolments**

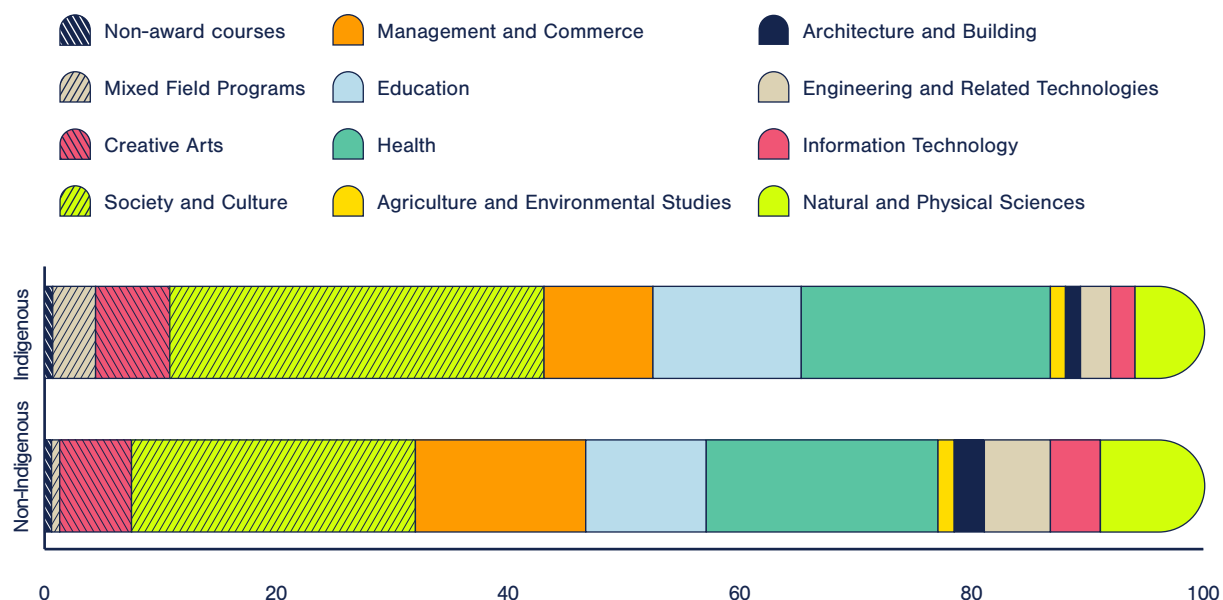


Source: Department of Education, Selected Higher Education Statistics – 2021 Student data, Section 11: Equity Group.

## Enrolments by Field of Education

Figure 4 shows that Indigenous students are more likely to enrol in courses in society and culture than non-Indigenous students (32.3 per cent versus 24.5 per cent), health (21.5 per cent versus 20.0 per cent) and education (12.8 per cent versus 10.4 per cent) and less likely to enrol in management and commerce (9.4 per cent versus 14.7 per cent), natural and physical sciences (6.0 per cent versus 9.0 per cent) and engineering (2.6 per cent versus 5.7 per cent).

**Figure 4: Enrolments by broad disciplines, 2021**



Source: Department of Education, Selected Higher Education Statistics – 2021 Student summary tables.

## Enrolments by course level

Indigenous enrolments in Bachelor degree courses grew by an average of 7.3 per cent per year, from 6,352 in 2008 to 15,885 in 2021, as can be seen in Table 1. Annual average growth for Indigenous enrolments in enabling courses was 6 per cent, from 871 in 2008 to 1,853 in 2021. While Indigenous student postgraduate research enrolments grew by a slower 5.3 per cent per annum on average between 2008 and 2021 – from 393 to 766 – enrolments in postgraduate coursework degrees have increased by 9.7 per cent per annum on average over the period, from 1,138 to 3,775.

**Table 1: Indigenous enrolments, by course level, 2008 and 2021**

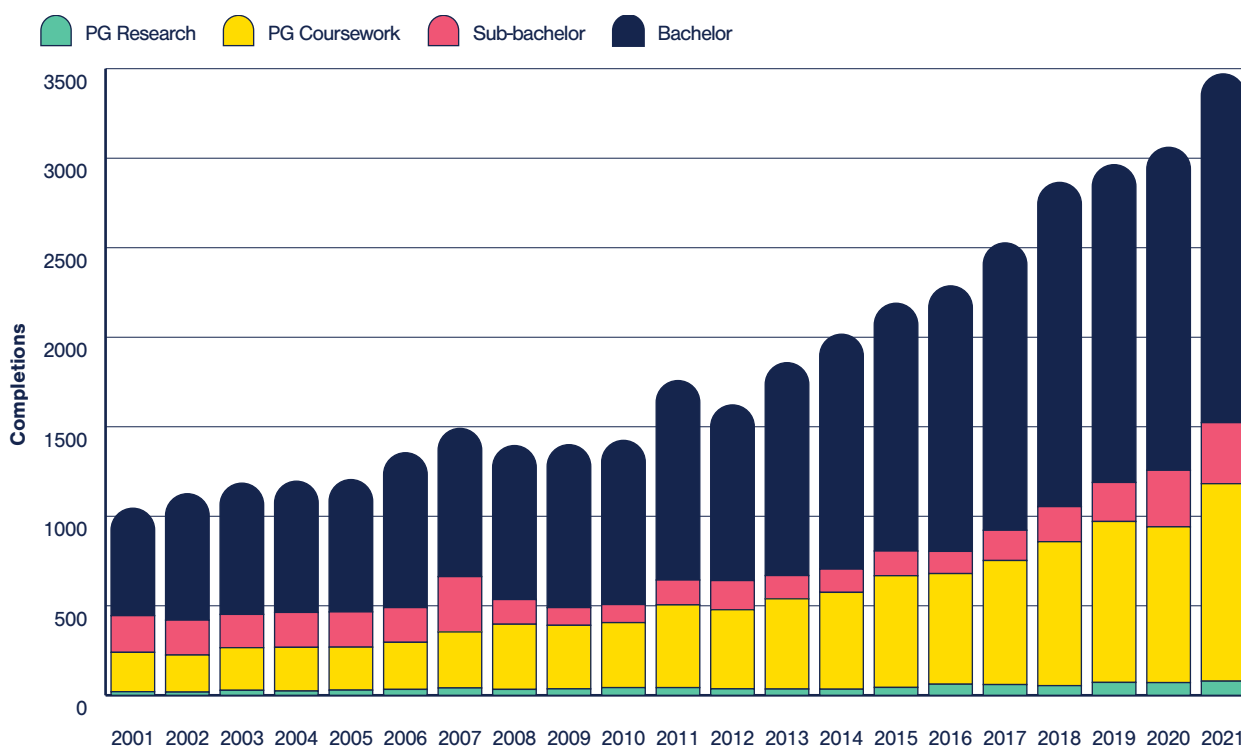
Course level	2008	2021	Growth since 2008	Annual average growth since 2008
Postgraduate research	393	766	95%	5.3%
Postgraduate coursework	1,138	3,775	232%	9.7%
Bachelor	6,352	15,885	150%	7.3%
Sub-bachelor	686	1,518	121%	6.3%
Enabling	871	1,853	113%	6.0%
Non-award	50	170	240%	9.9%
All courses	9,490	23,967	153%	7.4%

Source: Department of Education, Visual analytics – Enrolment time-series. Includes enrolments in Table A, B and other providers.

## Indigenous student award course completions and completion rates

Since 2008, award course completions by Indigenous students have continued to grow, broadly consistent with the growth in Indigenous enrolments. Indigenous Bachelor award course completions grew by 127 per cent – from 860 degrees awarded to Indigenous students in 2008 to 1,948 in 2021. Postgraduate research course completions rose 139 per cent – from 33 per cent in 2008 to 79 per cent in 2021 – and postgraduate coursework completions rose 203 per cent – from 364 per cent to 1,103 (as seen in Figure 5).

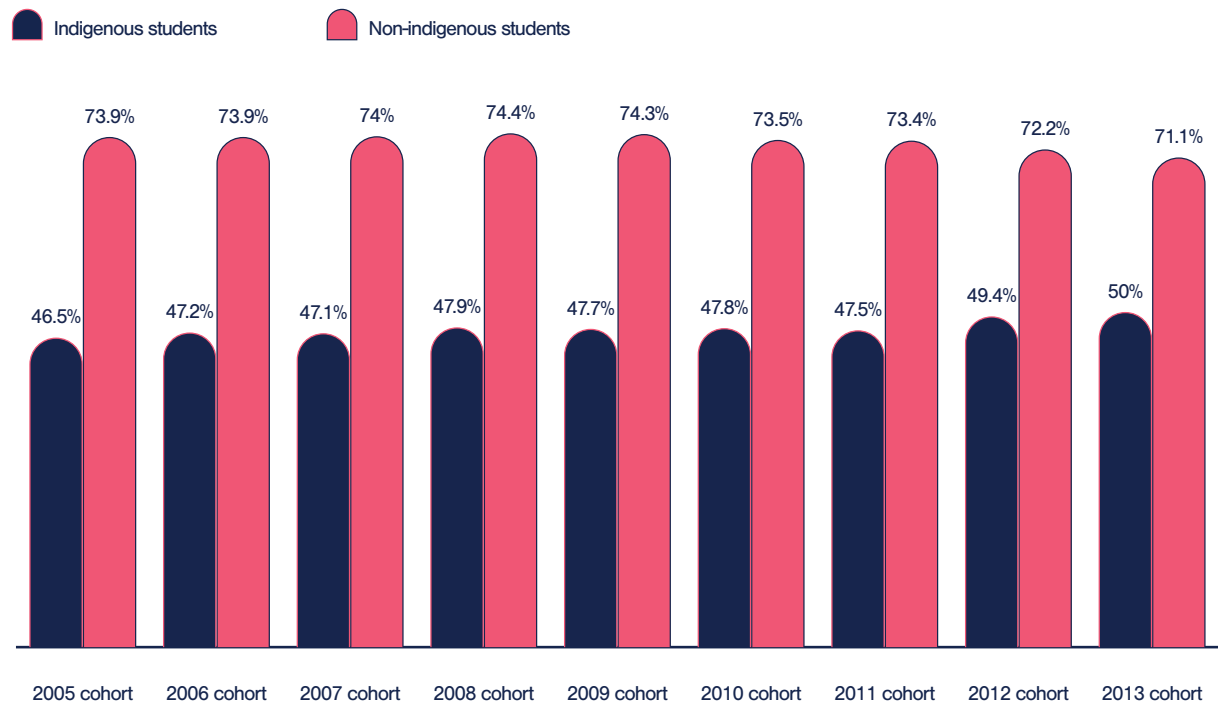
**Figure 5: Number of award course completions by Indigenous students, by course level**



Source: Department of Education, Section 14: Award course completions time series.

Bachelor degree completion rates for Indigenous students remain low compared to non-Indigenous students. While Indigenous students can take longer to finish their degrees, nine-year completion rates for Indigenous students remain significantly below the completion rates for non-Indigenous students (Figure 6). Nonetheless, nine-year completion rates for Indigenous students have increased over time, from 46.5 per cent for Indigenous students who started university in 2005 to 50 per cent for the 2013 cohort.

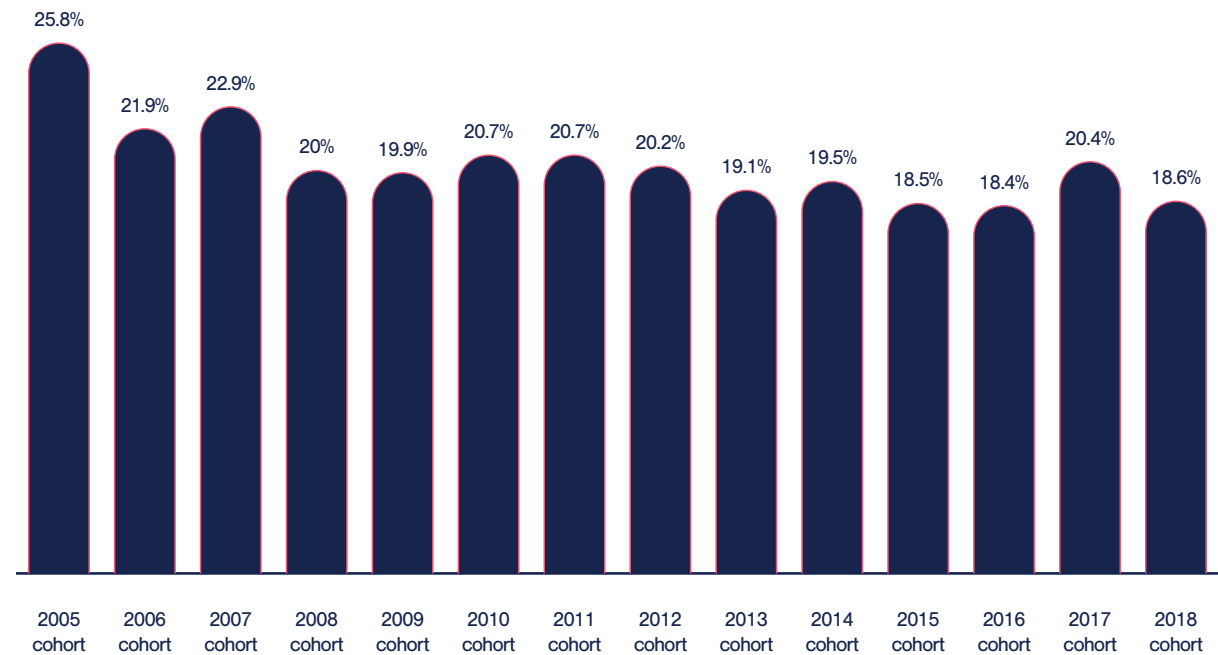
**Figure 6: Nine-year completion rates of commencing Indigenous and non-Indigenous Bachelor degree students**



Source: Department of Education, Completion Rates of Higher Education Students – Cohort Analysis, 2005–2022.

Compared to 2005, there are now fewer Indigenous students leaving studies and not returning within a four-year period. Of the Indigenous students who started university in 2005, 25.8 per cent had left their studies four years later. For Indigenous students who started university in 2016, the attrition rate had fallen to 18.4 per cent – a substantial improvement (Figure 7). The attrition rate for the 2018 cohort is marginally higher at 18.6 per cent.

**Figure 7: Share of Indigenous students commencing a Bachelor degree that haven't returned – after four years**



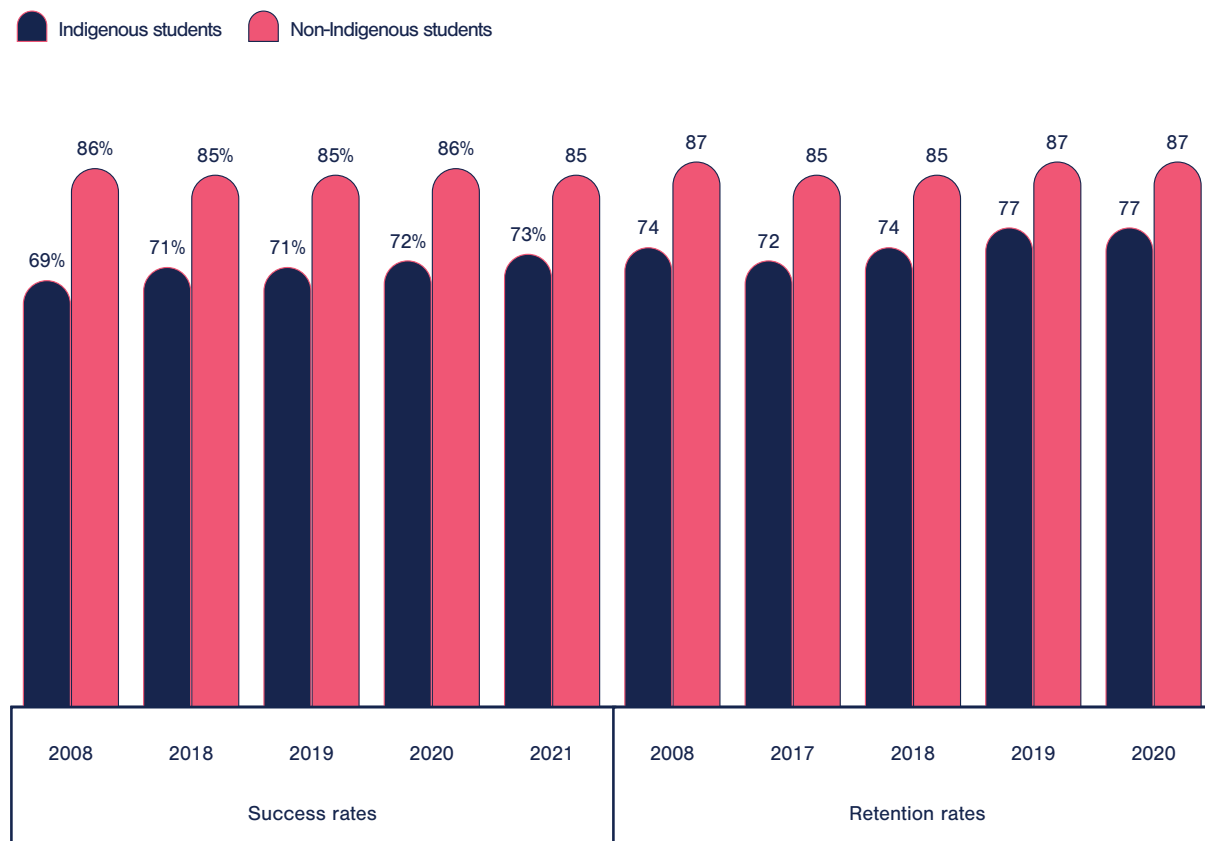
## Indigenous student success and retention rates

Figure 8 shows the success and retention rates of Indigenous students between 2008 and 2020-21.

Success rates calculate the proportion of units that students pass in any given year. Success rates for Indigenous students have moderately improved, increasing from 69 per cent in 2008 to 73 per cent in 2021. For non-Indigenous students, this success rate has consistently been in the 84 – 86 per cent range.

Retention rates calculate the proportion of students who return to study after their first year. Like success rates, retention rates for Indigenous students have improved, from 74 per cent in 2008, up to 77 per cent in 2020. The retention rate for non-Indigenous students has typically remained in the 85 – 87 per cent range.

**Figure 8: Success and retention rates of Indigenous and non-Indigenous students over time**



Source: Department of Education, Visual Analytics—Attrition, retention, and success rates.

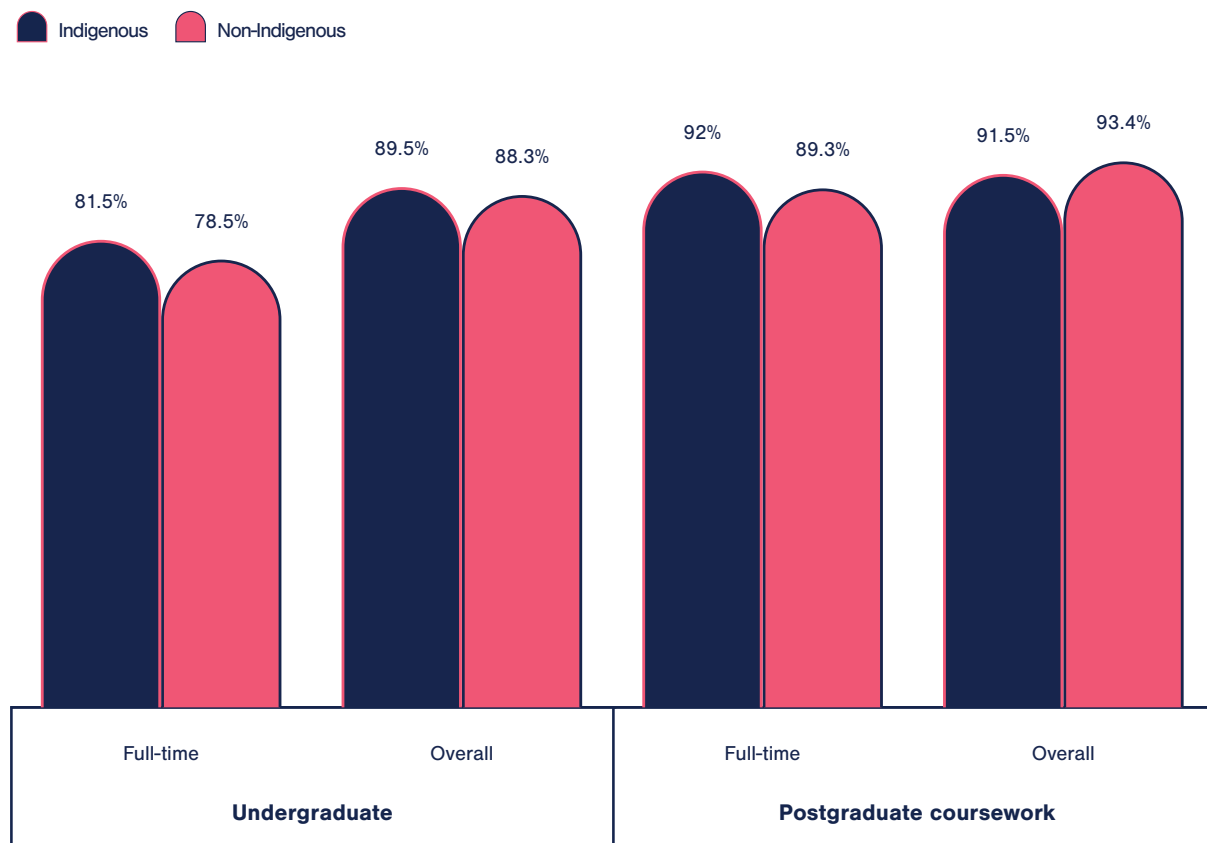
Note: Adjusted retention rate for year (x) is the number of students who commenced a bachelor course in year (x) and did not complete in year (x), and continued in year (x + 1) (retained students), as a proportion of all students who commenced a bachelor course in year (x) and did not complete in year (x). If a student moves from one institution to another in the following year, he or she would be counted as retained in the adjusted retention rate calculation. Success rate for year(x) is the proportion of actual student load (EFTSL) for units of study that are passed divided by all units of study attempted (passed + failed + withdrawn).

## Indigenous employment outcomes

Indigenous graduates generally experience strong employment outcomes, compared to non-Indigenous graduates. In 2022, 81.5 per cent of Indigenous undergraduates were in full-time employment four months after completion, outperforming non-Indigenous undergraduates (78.5 per cent).

For graduates with postgraduate degree, 92 per cent of Indigenous graduates were in full-time employment four months after completion in 2022, compared to 89.3 per cent for non-Indigenous graduates.

**Figure 9: Short-term graduate employment outcomes, 2022**

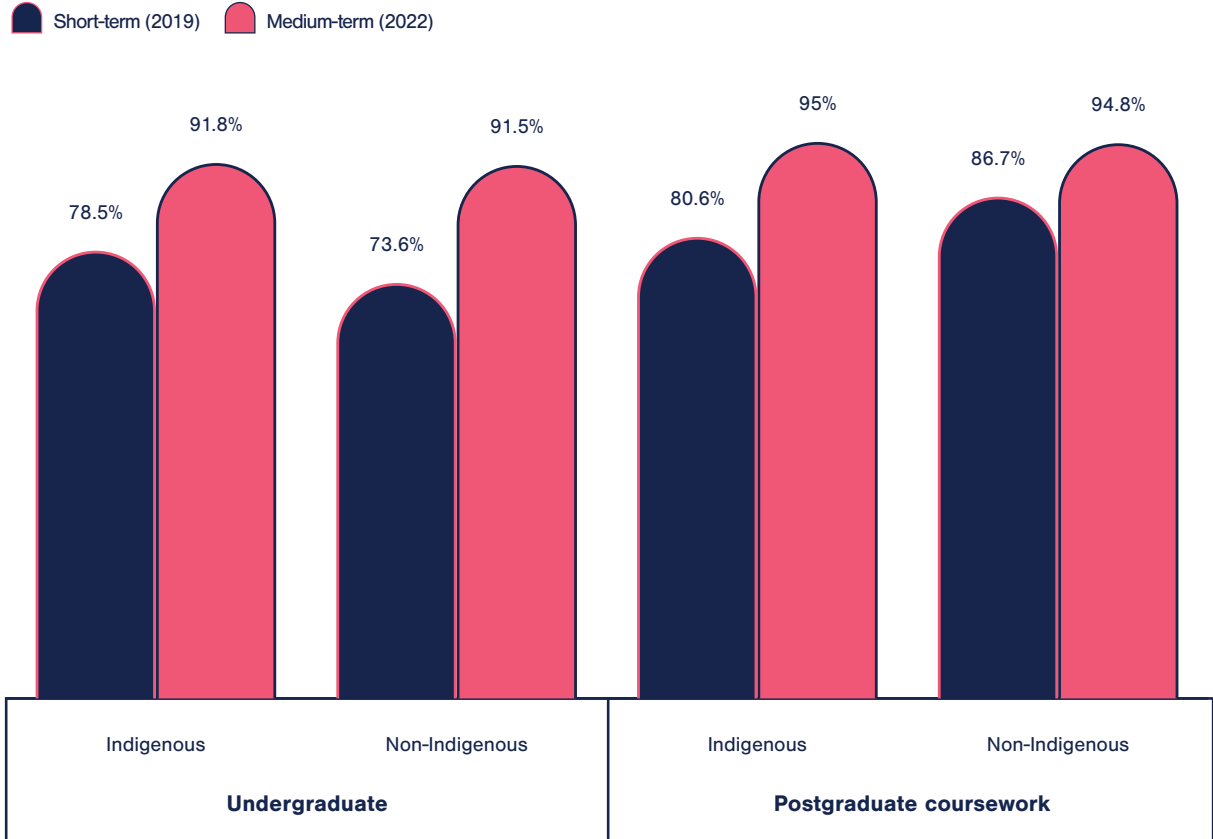


Source: Social Research Centre 2022, 2022 Graduate Outcomes Survey.



Figure 10 shows that over the medium-term – three years after finishing their degrees – employment outcomes for Indigenous graduates are similar to non-Indigenous graduates. While Indigenous graduates with an undergraduate degree have higher full-time employment outcomes (78.5 per cent) than non-Indigenous graduates (73.6 per cent) in the short term, non-Indigenous graduates catch up in full-time employment in the medium term to trail Indigenous graduates by around 0.3 of a percentage point in 2022.

**Figure 10: Short and medium-term full-time employment outcomes, for 2019 graduates**



Source: Social Research Centre 2022, 2022 Graduate Outcomes Survey–Longitudinal.

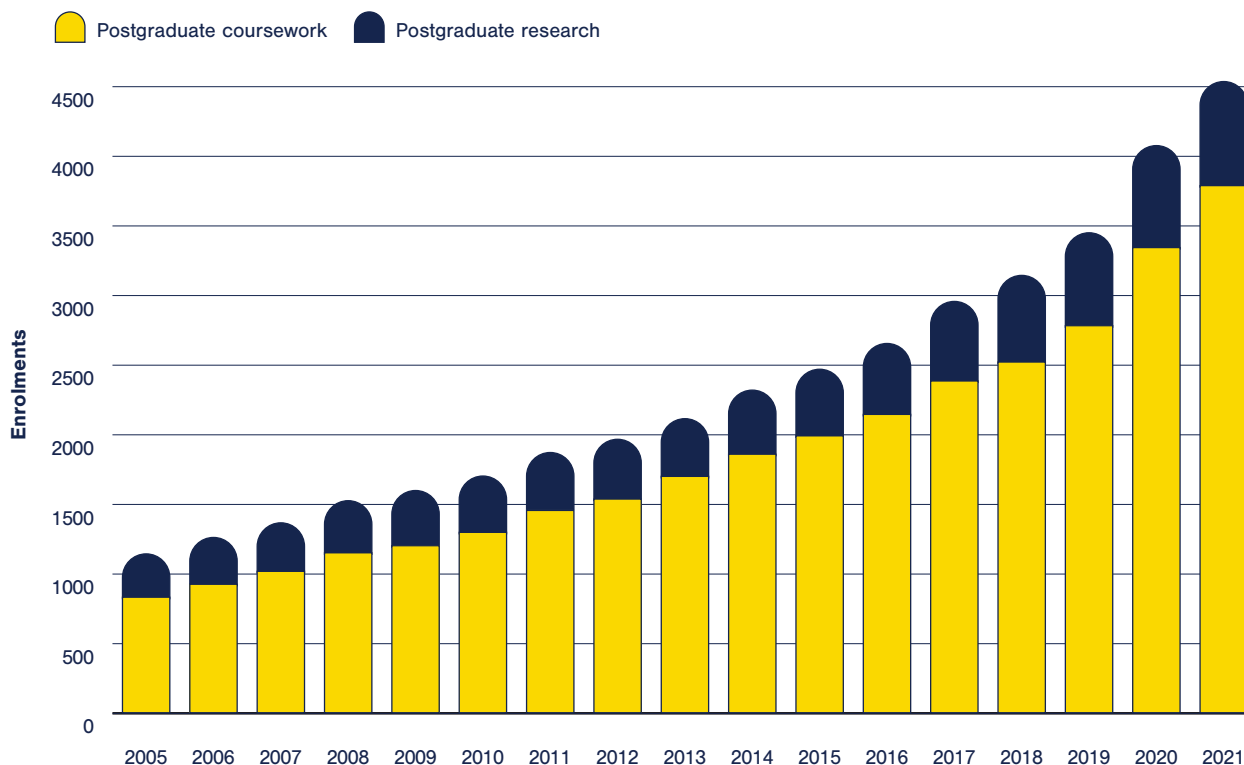
Indigenous undergraduates also continued to earn more than non-Indigenous undergraduates immediately upon graduation, with median full-time salaries of \$66,800 compared to \$63,400 for non-Indigenous graduates in 2019. Three years after graduation, median full-time salaries for non-Indigenous undergraduates were still trailing Indigenous undergraduates by \$2,000 in 2022.

## The pipeline of Indigenous academics and researchers

Universities indicate they are seeking to increase their numbers of Indigenous academics and researchers by building a pipeline of high-performing undergraduate students, postgraduate students and alumni from Indigenous backgrounds who could then transition into staff roles in the future. Indigenous postgraduate student enrolments have increased since 2005 (Figure 11).

The number of Indigenous enrolments in postgraduate research has more than doubled since 2005 – from 330 students to 766 students in 2021. Enrolment in postgraduate coursework degrees has more than quadrupled (growing by 361 per cent) – rising from 819 Indigenous students in 2005 to 3,775 Indigenous students in 2021.

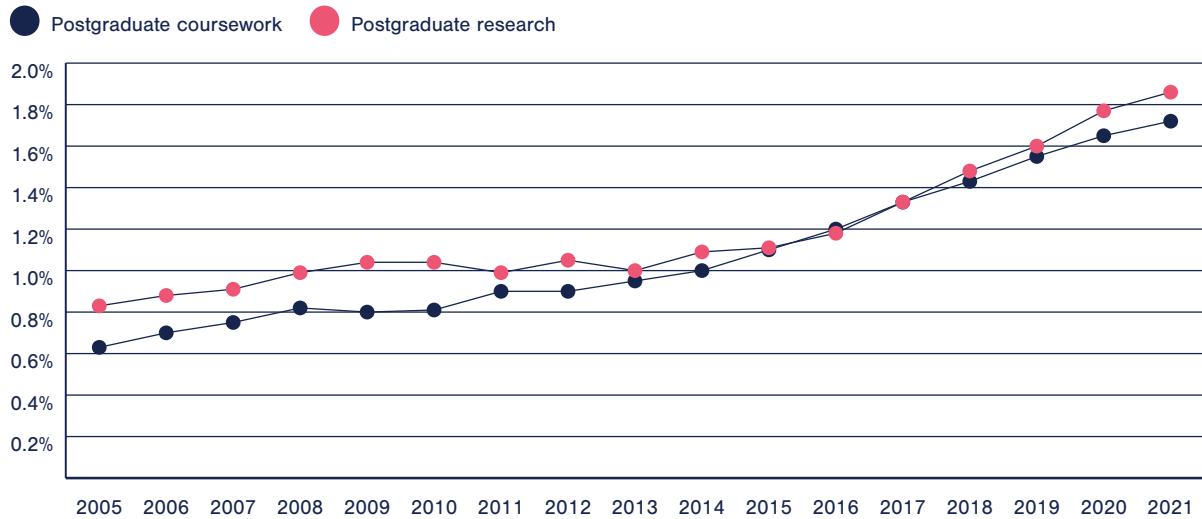
**Figure 11: Indigenous postgraduate coursework and research enrolments, 2005 to 2021**



Source: Department of Education, Selected Higher Education Statistics – 2021 Student Data, enrolment time series.  
 Note: Includes data from Table A, B and other providers.

As a result, the total number of Indigenous postgraduate students – coursework and research – as a proportion of all domestic postgraduate students increased to 1.74 per cent in 2021, from 0.68 per cent in 2005. The share of Indigenous postgraduate research students grew from 0.83 per cent in 2005 to 1.86 per cent in 2021 and the share of Indigenous postgraduate coursework students also grew from 0.63 per cent to 1.72 per cent over the same period (Figure 12).

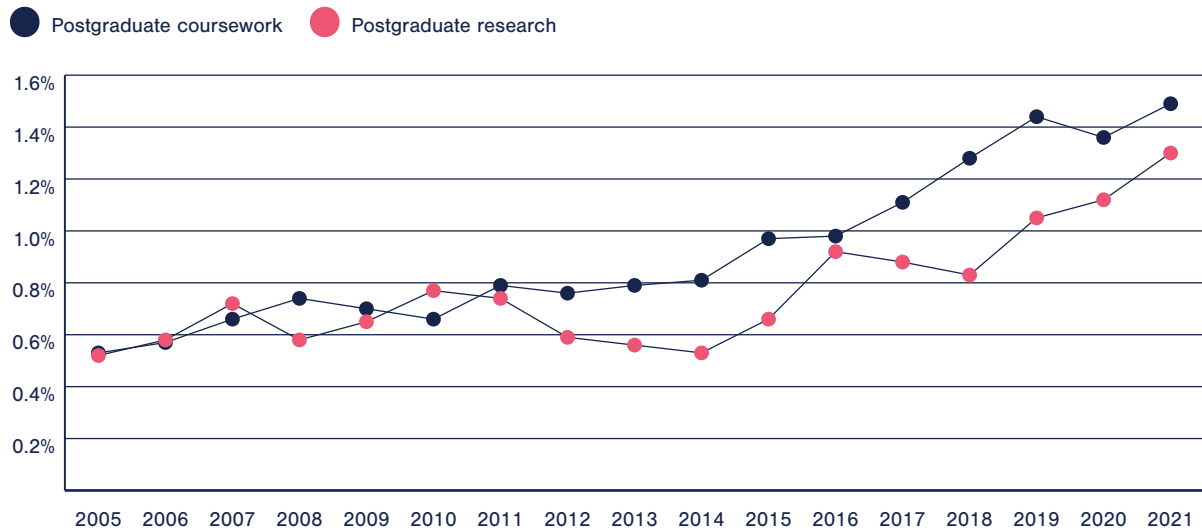
**Figure 12: Indigenous postgraduate enrolments, share of total 2005 to 2021**



Source: Department of Education, Selected Higher Education Statistics – 2021 Student Data, enrolment time series and the Student Enrolments Pivot Table.  
 Note: the total number of domestic postgraduate coursework and research students is derived from the 39 UA member universities. The number of Indigenous postgraduate coursework and research students is based on the enrolment time series visual analytics tool.

Despite the growth in postgraduate enrolments in recent years, Indigenous postgraduate student award completions remain low (Figure 13). In 2021, Indigenous students comprised 1.49 per cent of all domestic postgraduate coursework completions (1,103 completions) and 1.30 per cent of all domestic postgraduate research award completions (79 completions).

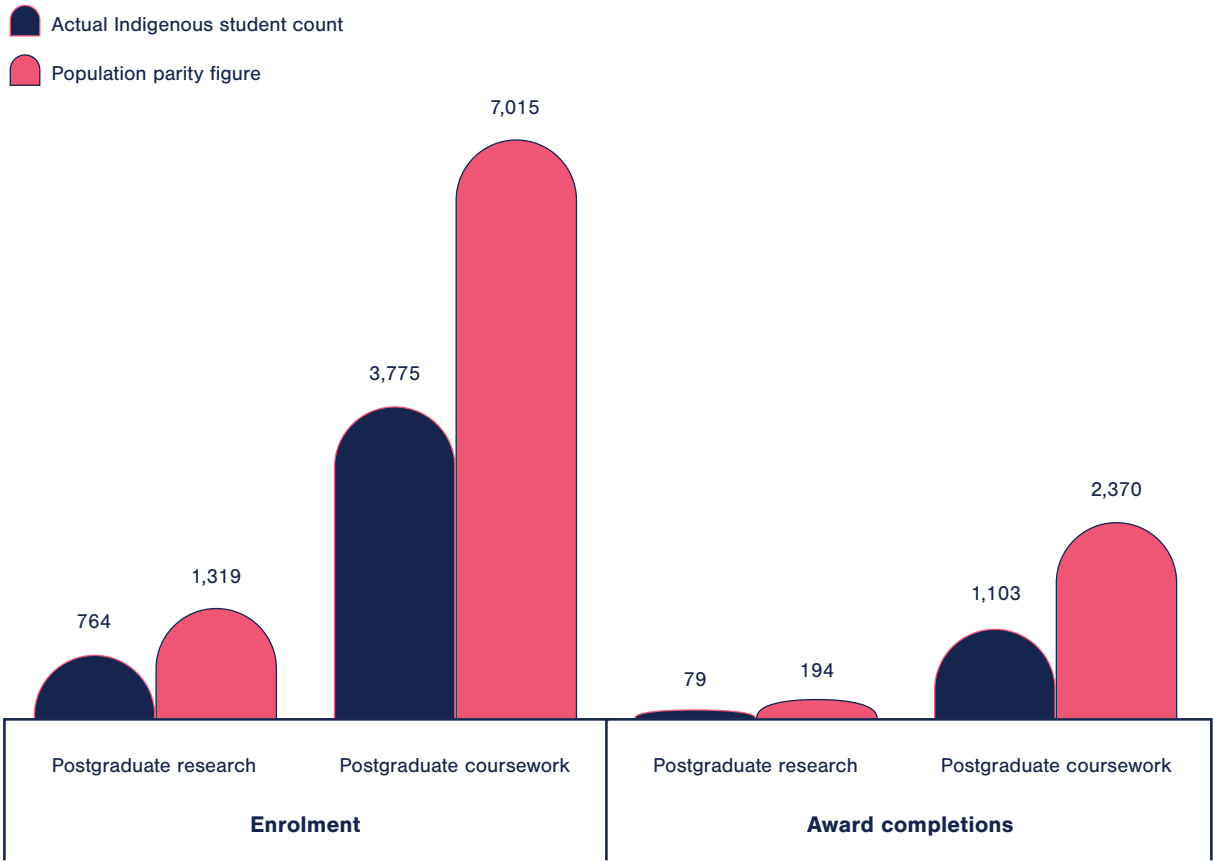
**Figure 13: Indigenous postgraduate award completions, share of total 2005 to 2021**



Source: Department of Education, Visual Analytics – Award course completions time series

To reach population parity of 3.2 per cent, as shown in Figure 14, the sector would have needed to enrol an additional 555 Indigenous postgraduate research students and an additional 3,240 postgraduate coursework students in 2021 and graduate an additional 115 postgraduate research students and an additional 1,267 postgraduate coursework students from Indigenous backgrounds in 2021.

**Figure 14: Indigenous student enrolments and completions at the postgraduate level compared to population parity figures.**

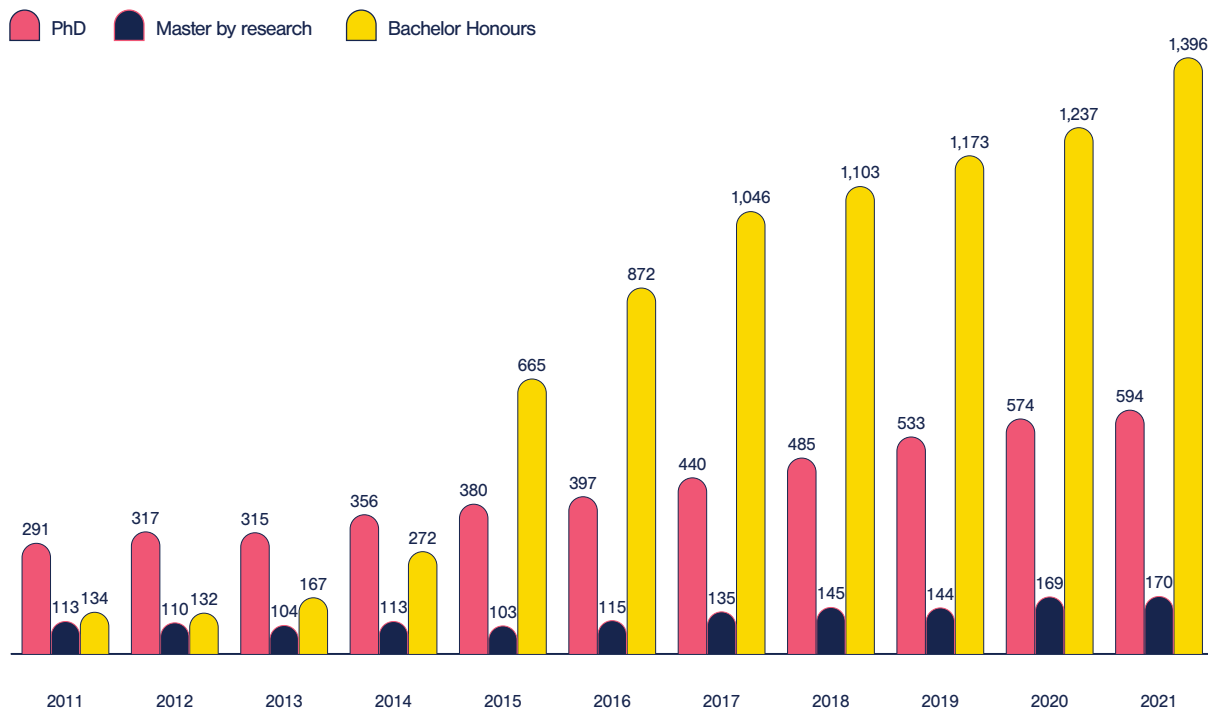


Source: UA estimates based on 2021 actual Indigenous enrolments and award course completions compared to if Indigenous enrolments and award completions are at 3.2 per cent population parity.

## Growth in Indigenous participation in PhD, Master by Research, and Bachelor Honours Programs

As Figure 15 shows, the potential pipeline of research-trained Indigenous students has grown significantly in the last decade, with more than 10 times as many Honours students enrolled in 2021 compared to 2011, and nearly twice as many PhD students. Master by Research student growth has been slower but has also seen marginal improvements.

**Figure 15: Growth in Indigenous student enrolments in PhD, Master by Research, and Bachelor Honours programs, 2011-2021**

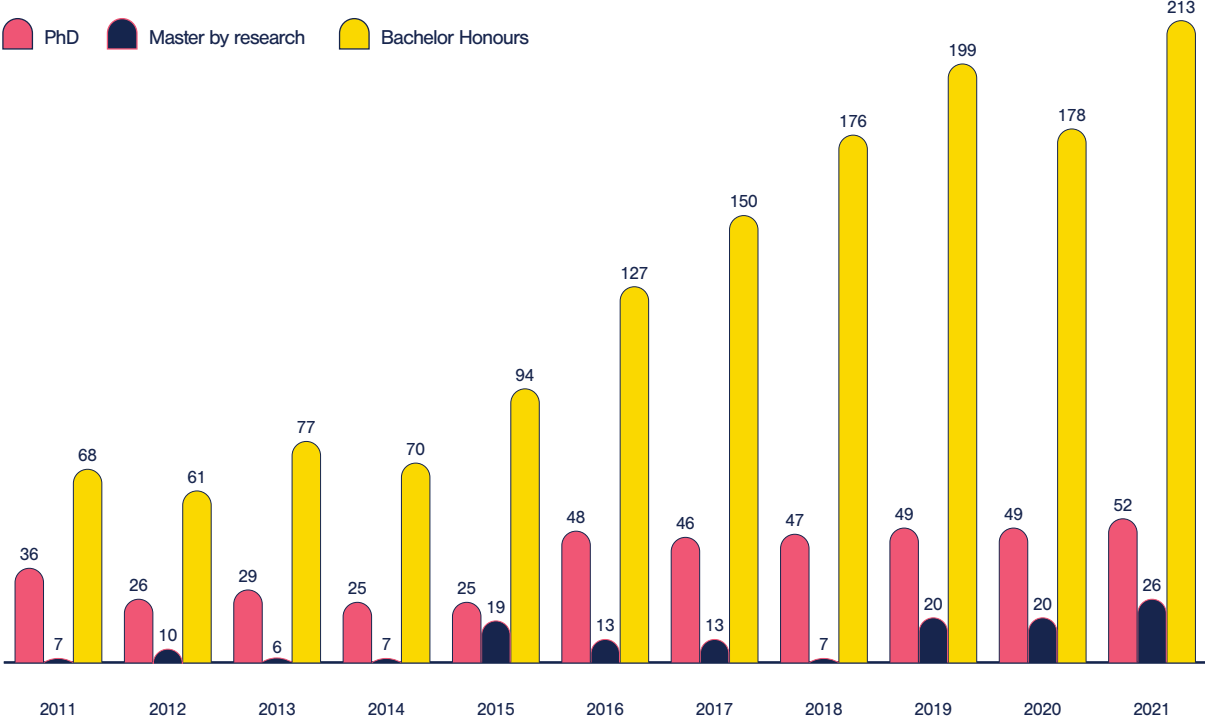


Source: Department of Education, Unpublished HEIMS dataset. Note: This data is not from the same dataset as Figures 9-12. Figures 13 and 14 include Table and B providers only.

What is less than clear in the statistics around enrolments and completions of Indigenous students in postgraduate research degrees is whether there is a correlation between growth in Honours and Masters by Research enrolments and PhD enrolments. Are the graduates from Honours and Masters converting into PhDs within that decade, or have the PhD enrolments come through other pathways?

Figure 16 shows the growth in Indigenous completions of the various forms of postgraduate research degrees over time. While this growth trajectory at the Bachelor Honours level is encouraging, it is worth noting that the graduation of only 52 new Indigenous PhD students in 2021 indicates less than two graduates per Australian university. In terms of building a pipeline of Indigenous researchers, these numbers are worthy of further attention.

**Figure 16: Growth in Indigenous student completions in PhD, Master by Research, and Bachelor Honours programs, 2011-2021**



# Endnotes

- 1 One university did not respond to the survey.
- 2 The qualitative responses from 2022 will be used in 2023 to develop a quantitative instrument, with the existing questions used for continuity with previous years, and sub-questions under each of these to provide increased clarity around the number of universities undertaking the various types of initiatives described in 2022.
- 3 Nakata, Martin, and Vicky Nakata. 2022. Supporting Indigenous Students to Succeed at University: A Resource for the Higher Education Sector. Taylor & Francis Group.
- 4 Fredericks, Bronwyn, and Nereda White. 2018. "Using Bridges Made by Others as Scaffolding and Establishing Footings for Those That Follow: Indigenous Women in the Academy" 62 (3): 243–55. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0004944118810017>.
- 5 Locke, Michelle Lea, Michelle Trudgett, and Page Susan. 2022. "Australian Indigenous Early Career Researchers: Unicorns, Cash Cows and Performing Monkeys" 26 (1): 1–17. <https://doi-org.virtual.anu.edu.au/10.1080/13613324.2022.2114445>.
- 6 Fredericks, Bronwyn, and Debbie Bargallie. 2016. "'Which Way? Talking Culture, Talking Race' Unpacking an Indigenous Cultural Competency Course" 9 (1): 3–16. <https://doi.org/10.5204/ijcis.v9i1.141>.
- 7 Bowrey, Kathy, Irene Watson, and Marie Hadley. 2022. "Decolonising Aboriginal and Torres Strait *Islander Research*" 64 (1): 56–64.

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