

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education and Research Strategy

The plan sets out the ACU National strategic vision for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander education and research over the period 2008-2010. As such, it sets out the key areas in which action is required, and each action area has a number of goals and associated strategies to guide the implementation of the plan.

In developing the plan the following policy documents were kept in focus:

- the University Mission statement, Strategic Plan and Statement on Reconciliation adopted by Senate in 1998;
- the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Policy, agreed to by State, Territory and Federal Ministers;
- the statement of priorities identified by the Indigenous Higher Education Advisory Council and the AVCC response to it (September 2006);
- practice in Australian universities as summarised in the Australian Universities Quality Agency report titled *Serving the Cause of Indigenous Issues: Thematic Analysis and the Institutional Audit Reports of AUQA (September 2006)*.

1. Students

1.1 Goal - Ensure that all students who graduate from ACU National are exposed to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander issues during their study

A competent workforce is integral to ensuring that services have the capacity to meet the needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. Numerous State/Territory and Commonwealth policies now recognize the importance of ensuring that those working in both mainstream and Indigenous specific services are appropriately trained to address Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander issues. DEST has recently launched its Reconciliation Action Plan, which seeks to make mainstream programs work better for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and to build workforce capacity to respond to the needs of Aboriginal

and Torres Strait Islander peoples. This has implications for the curriculum content and teaching methods for all higher education providers nationally. It also requires strategies to ensure Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander involvement in the development and delivery of related course materials.

Strategies:

- Review and update of current curricula for inclusion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander content across all course offerings;
- Develop Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander content in consultation with Indigenous people;
- Promote and support an ACU National commitment to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander content in curricula being delivered by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples;
- Encourage and support student engagement with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and organisations;
- Promote student involvement in ACU National cultural activities that are of significance to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.
- Develop online and web based resources about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander information and organisations.

1.2 Goal - Ensure that appropriate recruitment and support is in place for all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students at ACU

The National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Policy is the foundation of all Indigenous education programs. It calls for equity in access to education services, equity of educational participation and equitable and appropriate education outcomes. It also requires that all education providers have appropriate strategies in place to recruit and retain Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students.

Strategies:

- Provide and disseminate appropriate information and advice to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples to enable informed enrolment and study decisions;
- Continue to enhance the current administrative and academic student support programs for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students on each campus;
- Develop an administrative manual for ITAS and IESIP processes and procedures to ensure national consistency;
- Provide a culturally secure environment where the academic, social and cultural needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students can be met; and

- Identify innovative means to provide support for remote area students, including the use of technology and appropriate local level linkages.

2. Teaching and Learning

2.1 Goal - Consolidate and enhance existing strengths in relation to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander education

A major strength for ACU National in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander education has been the away-from-base programs. Historically, there has been an imbalance between the numbers of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students enrolled in these programs and those studying on a full-time internal basis. The residential programs have attracted relatively large numbers of Indigenous students to education and business courses at Diploma and Degree level, and there is now scope to increase Indigenous participation in other areas.

Strategies:

- Continue to provide and support current away from base (residential programs) and full time Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander education activities;
- Increase the post-graduate Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander student numbers across ACU National;
- Identify opportunities for expansion of offerings and increased Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander enrolments;
- In consultation with Faculties and Centres, develop strategies to increase participation by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students across all courses; and
- Give priority to a review of the possible future role of the University in the delivery of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health related courses.

2.2 Goal - Ensure that approaches to teaching and learning meet the needs and aspirations of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students.

It is important that the delivery of education to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students takes account of a range of factors, including geographic location, disadvantage across a range of social indicators, and cultural influences on learning. A significant challenge for universities is that of developing meaningful engagement between universities and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities so that appropriate curriculum and pedagogy may be initiated to meet the learning needs and life contexts of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students.

Strategies:

- Facilitate online access to educational resources for students in remote locations;
- Value Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander knowledge and experience and draw upon this in the delivery of teaching and learning programs;
- Support the development of career pathways for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students enrolled at ACU; and
- Establish linkages with schools, the vocational education sector and industry to facilitate recruitment, career planning and pathways in education.

3. Research

3.1 Goal - Consolidate and enhance the existing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander research program

ACU National is committed to supporting and encouraging Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander research and to do so must address issues of research culture, research training, community engagement, research partnerships, collaboration, and research funding.

Strategies:

- Ensure that the emerging fields of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander research align with the ACU National research strengths and the Research Quality Framework as it affects this University;
- Encourage and support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff to pursue their research interests by monitoring workload and ensuring sufficient time is available for this purpose;
- Work with ACU National Research Services to identify and pursue opportunities for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander research funding; and
- Strengthen research partnerships within ACU National and with external agencies.

3.2 Goal - Ensure that ACU Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander research is of benefit to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities

ACU National has a role in engaging collaboratively with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities in research activities relevant to the needs of those communities, so that unique learning will occur which will be of benefit to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and will inform ACU National's teaching and learning, scholarship and research.

Strategies:

- Develop research questions in consultation with communities and align them with community identified priorities and needs;
- Conform with nationally endorsed ethical standards and community protocols for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander research;
- Ensure a commitment to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander involvement at all stages in the research process; and
- Ensure dissemination and transfer of research results to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.

3.3 Goal - Increase access, participation and success of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students in postgraduate studies, particularly higher research degrees

ACU National maintains that a culture of research is integral to learning, scholarship and intellectual inquiry and that a high priority is the research training of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students. While ACU National has experienced a small increase in the number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander postgraduate students, there is considerable scope to increase enrolments in this regard. This requires a commitment to improve access to postgraduate study for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, as well as to appropriate supervision of higher degree research students.

Strategies:

- Develop a plan for building the capacity of staff to supervise higher research degree indigenous students and for the preparation of indigenous postgraduate students;
- Identify scholarship opportunities for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students and facilitate access as appropriate; and
- Provide appropriate advice to ensure pathways into postgraduate study are based upon informed choices.

- Facilitate opportunities for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander postgraduate students to network through attendance and participation at relevant conferences.
- Assist in building the capacity of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander postgraduate students by involving them in research projects and programs.

4. Community Engagement

4.1 Goal - Maintain and strengthen the ACU National relationship with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and ensure input by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community members into ACU National activities

ACU National has established relationships with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities in the development and implementation of its activities. With a focus on issues such as access, social justice and equity, ACU National has a strong commitment to community engagement. The Indigenous Units across ACU National have been proactive in engaging with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and leading the university in developing programs and initiatives.

Strategies:

- Continue to receive advice and input from the National Indigenous Advisory Committee (NIAC) and the local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander advisory committees; and
- Facilitate partnerships and networking with the Institute for Advancing Community Engagement.

4.2 Goal - Continue to build relationships with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities

In line with ACU National's commitment to working in partnership with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and other external stakeholders, it is important to formally value and recognize the input from key persons in these processes.

Strategies:

- Identify and progress opportunities for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples to have adjunct or joint appointment with ACU National;
- Value and support representation by ACU National's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff on key external committees; and
- Create opportunities for mutual support, capacity building and information sharing.

5. Staff

5.1 Goal - Ensure that staff across ACU National have an appreciation and understanding of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander issues

Given the increasing emphasis on the inclusion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander issues in all course content, along with the ACU National commitment to justice, equity and reconciliation for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, it is critical that all staff are committed to the achievement of these outcomes.

Strategies:

- Support staff training and awareness raising activities in relation to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander issues;
- Increase opportunities for interactions between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and non-Indigenous staff of ACU National; and
- Promote involvement in cultural activities such as NAIDOC week, reconciliation and ACU National Indigenous week.

5.2 Goal - Establish and support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff leadership across the university

In line with the findings of the review of the Indigenous Units (2006), it is important to create linkages between these units and other Faculties and Centres of ACU National. It is also important to streamline the activities of the Indigenous Units across the campuses, and this calls for more consistency, communication and leadership in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander issues across ACU National.

Strategies:

- Develop and implement staff development programs for all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff of ACU National;
- Implement a mentoring program for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander academic staff;
- Appoint a Chair in Indigenous Studies to provide overall leadership in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander issues across ACU National; and
- Continue to appoint Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander academic staff to membership of senior university committees.
- Provide support to the Indigenous Employment Co-ordinator in the development and implementation of Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander cultural awareness training.

6. Monitoring and review

6.1 Goal - Ensure that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander teaching and research across ACU National is of the highest possible standard and meeting desired outcomes

As part of its commitment to quality in teaching, research and community engagement, ACU National has, as one of its primary goals, to provide an excellent higher education experience for the entirety of the student body, through upholding the principles of free enquiry and academic integrity. In doing so, it aims to provide teaching, research and community engagement activities that are valued by students and the community.

Strategies:

- Develop an internal monitoring and review plan for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander activity across ACU National; and
- Ensure compliance with ACU quality management policy.

6.2 Goal - Ensure accountability requirements of external stakeholders are met

There are four indicators used by the Australian government to track the progress of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students in higher education: access, participation, retention and successful outcomes. ACU National's performance against these indicators needs to be monitored annually.

Strategies:

- Report against the DEST indicators for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander higher education;
- Become more responsive to state and national policy as it relates to ACU National's activities and strengths in relation to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander issues; and
- Monitor and report against contractual arrangements with external bodies.

7. Partnerships

7.1 Goal - Improve collaboration in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander activity across ACU National

There is a need to strengthen the linkages between the Indigenous Units and other parts of the University and to ensure that opportunities for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander input into decision making processes is maximized.

Strategies:

- Encourage the appointment of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff representation on university committees, such as Faculty Boards, Review Committees and other university service committees such as library and student orientation;
- Encourage cross centre/faculty teaching where mutually supported arrangements can strengthen collaboration and input by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff; and
- Encourage cross appointments between Indigenous Education Units and other parts of the university to ensure Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff have access to development and academic input in their own disciplinary area.

7.2 Goal - Foster collaborative research partnerships across ACU National.

Research in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities has seen a move away from investigator driven type projects, to more collaborative and participatory based models. This requires the formation of multi-disciplinary research teams with a commitment to working collaboratively and in partnership with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.

Strategies:

- Encourage multi-disciplinary research collaborations in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander issues across ACU National; and
- Develop a research agenda and specific areas of specialised activity in relation to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander research for ACU National.

7.3 Goal - Foster strategic partnerships with external partners and organisations.

In addition to research partnerships with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, a range of strategic partnerships with external agencies are important. These include professional bodies in relation to curriculum design and accreditation, industry bodies in relation to graduate outcomes, communities in relation to workforce requirements, and government and other bodies where ACU National can be more responsive to their needs or provide specialist input.

Strategies:

- Work with professional bodies for curriculum review and implementation to improve outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students;
- Work with religious groups and other non-government organizations for scholarships and other types of support;
- Work with governments to support the implementation of policy as it relates to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander education and research; and
- Work with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and industry groups to ensure there is a good fit between education programs and workforce requirements.