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## Reconciliation post-referendum: What's next for universities?

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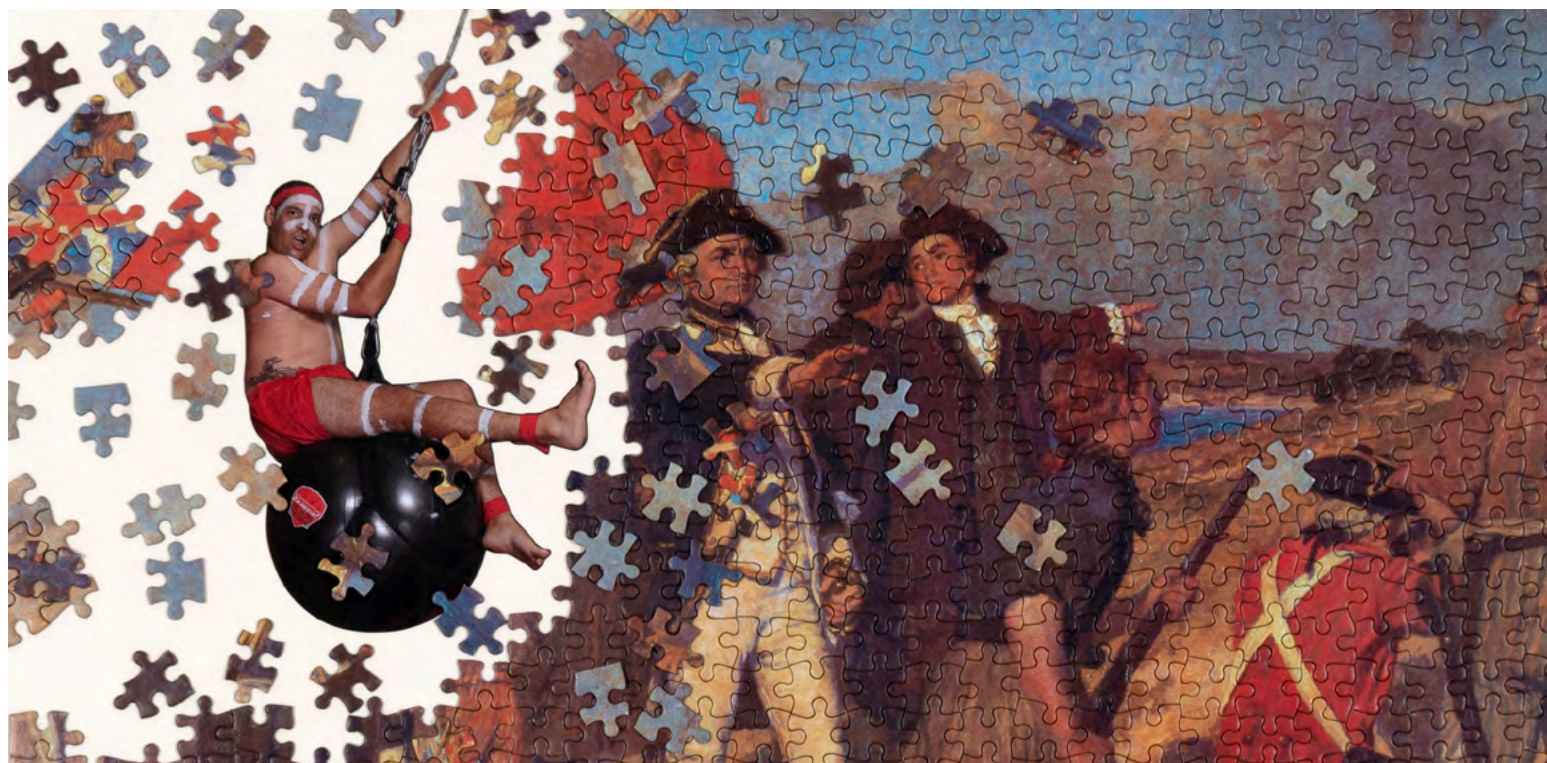
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NATIONAL RECONCILIATION WEEK 2024



# Post-Referendum: What's Next for Universities?

Yohann Devezy, Professor Braden Hill, Professor Martin Nakata

Cover artwork: Tony Albert – *You Wreck Me #34* (detail) 2020, printed photograph and vintage Captain Cook ephemera on archival paper, 57cm x 76cm. Murdoch University Art Collection. Photographed by Eva Fernandez. Image reproduced courtesy of the artist and Sullivan + Strumpf Fine Art. © Tony Albert 2024.



Playing on Australia's self-deprecating humour, *You Wreck Me #34* by respected First Nations artist Tony Albert not only offers an hilarious reimagining of pop music singer Miley Cyrus's infamous video clip *Wrecking Ball*, but a sharp and timely questioning of our national history. Unlike the original version, which depicts a naked Cyrus straddling a wrecking ball, Albert's interpretation takes on a more political tone, with the artist sitting atop a suspended exercise ball, ploughing through a vintage jigsaw puzzle featuring an image of Captain Cook. Painted up for ceremony, Albert's impersonation here recalls the reductive representations that are often imposed on First Nations People. Albert created this artwork to deliberately coincide with the 250th anniversary of Cook's arrival on Australian soil. Year-long celebrations, including a new \$50 million monument to Cook sparked national debate and protest around the necessity of yet another monument dedicated to a divisive historical figure. Albert's farcical interpretation asks the viewer to reflect not only on who is written into history, but who is written out and why. The revolutionary spirit captured in *You Wreck Me #34* cheekily asserts that the continued memorialisation of one figure be replaced by a multitude of voices that have shaped Australian history. Albert's depiction is not so much a call to action, but rather the act of a trickster, imploring us to rethink national narratives using quintessential Australian larrikin humour.





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# Silent Chains

by Prof. N M Nakata, James Cook University

Now more than ever,  
We need to take a long, hard look  
at ourselves  
And ask:  
What have we allowed ourselves to  
become part of?  
What have we all been loyal to?

We need to elevate,  
Rise above and look back  
At where we are  
And what we are doing.  
We have been occupied for over  
200 years,  
North America, for 400 years,  
Africa, for 600 years.

These lands, these people,  
No further along socially,  
Economically,  
Politically,  
Than we are as Indigenous Australians.

In colonial situations the world over,  
Indigenous people continue to be  
Dependent and unfree.  
And in postcolonial countries,  
Where colonialists no longer hold  
the reins,  
Indigenous people remain  
Dependent and unfree.

Now more than ever,  
We have to ask why.





# Acknowledgments

We would like to acknowledge the Traditional Custodians of the land on which our universities operate, and we pay our respects to their Elders, past and present. We extend this respect to all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and recognise their ongoing connection to their lands, waters, and cultures.

This report is a collaborative effort made possible by the contributions and dedication of many individuals and institutions. We extend our gratitude to the panel members—Chanelle van den Berg, Pro-Vice Chancellor First Nations at Murdoch University; Professor Braden Hill, Deputy Vice Chancellor, Students, Equity and Indigenous at Edith Cowan University; and Professor Martin Nakata, Deputy Vice-Chancellor Indigenous Education & Strategy at James Cook University—for sharing their invaluable insights and expertise.

We are particularly grateful to the First Nations people who generously shared their time and knowledge during National Reconciliation Week. Following the referendum on October 14, 2023, it is essential to recognise that First Nations people are in various stages of healing. Some may not be ready to engage in reconciliation conversations. We must respect and honour their diverse experiences and emotions. Therefore, we are very grateful for their contributions, which have been invaluable in enriching the discussions and deepening our understanding of the critical issues at hand.

We are deeply thankful to the National Reconciliation Week 2024 Event attendees for their active participation, thoughtful questions, and engagement in the reflective activities. These contributions have provided significant data that will inform and shape our future reconciliation efforts.

We would also like to acknowledge Reconciliation Western Australia, whose Big Yarn event and activity format strongly inspired our reflective activity (<https://www.recwa.org.au>). This was crucial in shaping the way we gathered and utilised the valuable insights from participants.

We extend gratitude to Murdoch colleagues who supported the event logistically, particularly the Office of Pro Vice-Chancellor Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion. We also thank Cassandra Edwards, who produced the powerful video that opened the panel discussion.

Finally, we acknowledge the support of all 30 universities represented at the event, as well as the 6.2 million Australians who voted YES in the 2023 Referendum (Australian Electoral Commission, 2023). Your commitment to advancing the rights and recognition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples inspires us to continue striving for a more just and equitable society.



# Indigenous Cultural and Intellectual Property Statement

This report contains Indigenous Cultural and Intellectual Property (ICIP) shared by the Indigenous leaders who participated in the panel discussion and some of the report's authors. The cultural knowledge, practices, and perspectives presented in this report are the intellectual property of the respective Indigenous communities, individuals who contributed to the discussion, and authors.

The content of this report is intended for educational and informational purposes only. It should be treated with the utmost respect and care in alignment with principles of cultural integrity and respect for Indigenous rights. When using or sharing the ICIP contained in this report, please ensure proper citation of the report and acknowledgment of the authors and or panellists.



## Panellists and Authors' profiles

### **Professor Martin Nakata (Co-Author/ Panellist)**

Professor Nakata is Deputy Vice-Chancellor Indigenous Education & Strategy at James Cook University. He is a leading Indigenous academic in Australia, and the first Torres Strait Islander to graduate with a PhD.



His mother is a traditional owner of islands in a remote region of Australia and his dad was born in Japan. He grew up in the islands where he did all his schooling years and has an intimate understanding of the languages and customs of the Torres Strait Islander people.

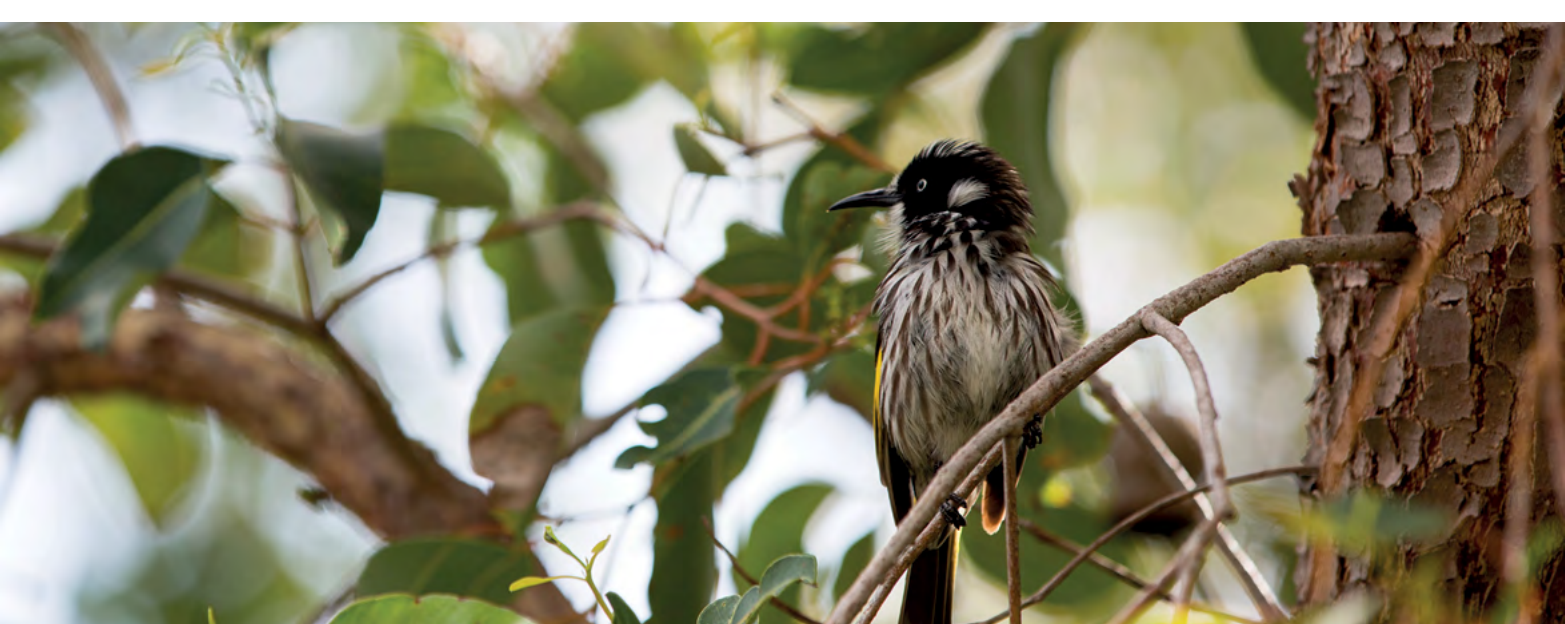
He has had an extensive academic career in the fields of Indigenous education, Indigenous Studies, and Indigenous Knowledge. His current research work includes two longitudinal studies of the academic preparation of Indigenous students for university studies, and the academic performance of Indigenous school students in Math and Science.

He has been the co-editor of the Australian Journal of Indigenous Education for the past ten years and continues to serve on editorial boards of academic journals in several countries as well as in Australia.

### **Professor Braden Hill (Co-Author/ Panellist)**

Professor Braden Hill is a Nyungar (Wardandi) man from the Southwest of Western Australia and the Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Students, Equity and Indigenous) at Edith Cowan University. Professor Hill previously held the role of Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Equity and Indigenous) and Head of Kurongkurl Katitjin, Edith Cowan University's (ECU) Centre for Indigenous Australian Education and Research. He has significant experience in Aboriginal education, as well as leading a range of equity initiatives including Sage Athena SWAN, Respect Now Always, Reconciliation Action Plan and Disabilities and Access Inclusion Plan within the tertiary sector. His current portfolio responsibilities include leading ECU's commitment to Australian Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander advancement, Equity and Diversity initiatives and working across the University to provide an environment that welcomes, and facilitates the success of, students and staff from a range of diverse backgrounds.





### **Chanelle van den Berg (Panellist)**

Chanelle van den Berg is a Noongar (Binjareb) woman from Pinjarra in Southwest Western Australia. She currently holds the role of Pro Vice-Chancellor First Nations at Murdoch University. With a background in primary teaching, Chanelle has previously held positions including Head of the Kulbardi Aboriginal Centre and Director of Student Success, Pathways, and Aboriginal Education. Chanelle brings substantial expertise in Early Childhood Education, Aboriginal education, and enhancing access and participation in the tertiary sector. Her leadership has led to the development and implementation of student success initiatives for international students and Aboriginal students alike. During her time at Murdoch University, she was responsible for implementing strategies such as the Reconciliation Action Plan, the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Students and Education Strategy, and The Aboriginal Workforce Strategy. Additionally, Chanelle's efforts were pivotal in advocating for the establishment of Murdoch's School of Indigenous Knowledges, showcasing her commitment to Indigenous education.



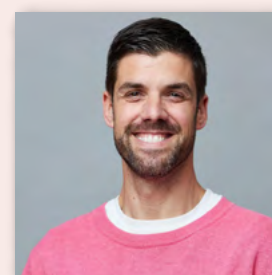
### **Jenna Woods (Facilitator)**

Jenna is a proud Wardandi Noongar woman with family connections throughout the Southwest of Western Australia. She has been a long-term staff member of Murdoch University and is currently the Dean of the School of Indigenous Knowledges. Her primary teaching background is in Community Development, focusing on the theory and practice of community development, particularly in relation to Indigenous knowledges and practices.



### **Yohann Devezy (Co-Author/ Coordinator)**

Originally from Bordeaux, France, Yohann moved to Australia in 2012. After graduating with a Bachelor's degree in Counselling in 2023, he works now as an Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion Project Coordinator for Reconciliation and as a University Counsellor for First Nations students at Murdoch University. These roles intersect at the heart of his passion—advocating for mental health, diversity, inclusion, and broader social justice issues. His advocacy for reconciliation is driven by the lived experiences of loved ones, and he is committed to cultivating a more inclusive environment where Indigenous voices and knowledge are not just respected but embraced. Yohann is a published author who seeks to create beautiful children's books with messages that can be shared across generations, underpinned by embracing inclusivity, diversity, and stories that can make a difference.





## Introduction

The Uluru Statement from the Heart, issued on May 26, 2017, called for the establishment of a First Nations Voice enshrined in the Australian Constitution and the creation of a Makarrata Commission to supervise a process of agreement-making and truth-telling between governments and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. The Uluru Statement was the result of extensive consultations with Indigenous communities across Australia, representing a collective call for constitutional reforms to empower First Nations people and ensure their voices are heard in the political process (<https://ulurustatement.org>).

Following the Uluru Statement, significant public discourse and political debate emerged around the implementation of its recommendations. Various advocacy groups, community leaders, and politicians engaged in discussions to build support for the idea of a Voice to Parliament. These efforts were aimed at educating the public about the importance of constitutional recognition and the practical benefits of having a dedicated advisory body for Indigenous affairs.

In 2023, the Voice to Parliament referendum marked a pivotal moment in Australia's Reconciliation Movement. It aimed to determine the country's future by empowering First Nations people with a say over their own collective futures. This referendum was the culmination of generations of tireless work by elders, community members, and advocates in the social justice space, striving for a self-determined future for Indigenous Australians (Reconciliation Australia, 2023).

In the years leading up to the referendum, numerous campaigns and educational initiatives were launched to raise awareness and garner support for the Voice to Parliament. These initiatives emphasised the need

for a structured and formal mechanism to ensure Indigenous Australians could contribute meaningfully to policy and legislative decisions affecting their communities. The momentum built over these years set the stage for the historic referendum in late 2023. On 14 October 2023, Australians were offered the opportunity to vote on enshrining a First Nations Voice in the Constitution.

However, over 60% of the Australian population voted 'No', and the Referendum did not pass (Australian Electoral Commission, 2023). The swift rejection of the Referendum was a profound disappointment and hurt for many, reminding First Nations people of the numerous times they have heard "No; No, you don't belong; No, you aren't welcome; No, you aren't valued" throughout their lives. This result deeply affected Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community members, reinforcing feelings of racism, discrimination, exclusion and devaluation and posing significant challenges to the ongoing work of reconciliation (Anderson et al., 2023; Biddle et al., 2023; Williams et al., 2023).

To further explore the impact of the Referendum's outcome, this video features reflections from First Nations staff and students at the University, sharing their personal experiences and thoughts in the aftermath of the result. <https://vimeo.com/1015521434/3c1cecf9c?ts=0&share=copy>

The failure of the 2023 Referendum has profoundly challenged the reconciliation work. It has necessitated a re-evaluation of strategies and approaches, pushing advocates and allies to reflect on the persistent gaps in understanding and support within the broader Australian society.



In 2024, National Reconciliation Week's theme, "Now More Than Ever," serves as a poignant reminder that the fight for justice and the rights of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people must continue unabated. Despite the devastating referendum result, the 6.2 million Australians who voted YES remain dedicated to renewed commitment, deeper dialogue, and stronger action to achieve meaningful progress towards better outcomes for First Nations people (Reconciliation Australia, 2024).

Universities have a critical responsibility in reconciliation as places of learning that shape future leaders and the workforce. Through education, research, and community engagement, universities are uniquely positioned to address historical injustices, amplify Indigenous voices, and integrate Indigenous knowledge systems into the academic curriculum. This commitment is essential, as graduates equipped with this understanding are prepared to drive powerful social change and contribute to a more just and inclusive society.

Universities have a responsibility to lead by example, demonstrating a commitment to reconciliation through policies, practices, and partnerships that support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. This commitment to reconciliation is crucial for universities as it aligns with their core values of equity, diversity, and social justice, ensuring that all members of the community have the opportunity to succeed and contribute to a more just and inclusive society.

In 2024, Murdoch University, Edith Cowan University, and James Cook University joined forces to host a collaborative National Reconciliation Week (NRW) event themed "Post-Referendum: What's Next for Universities." This event was an essential platform for reflecting on the ongoing relevance of reconciliation in the wake of recent national changes, particularly following the Australian Indigenous Voice referendum.

Held on 27 May 2024, the event featured a **panel of esteemed First Nations leaders**, including Chanelle van den Berg (Pro Vice-Chancellor First Nations at Murdoch University), Professor Braden Hill (Deputy Vice-Chancellor, Students, Equity and Indigenous at Edith Cowan University), and Professor Martin Nakata (Deputy Vice-Chancellor Indigenous Education & Strategy at James Cook University). Facilitated by Jenna Woods, Acting Dean of the School of Indigenous Knowledges, the discussion explored the critical roles universities play in reconciliation, emphasising the need for increased Indigenous leadership, representation, and the integration of Indigenous knowledges into academic research and professional practice.

The event was accessible both in person, held at Murdoch University's Rosemary van den Berg Room, and online. This dual format allowed for broader participation, with **over 350 people attending online and in person, representing 30 universities** and fostering an inclusive dialogue on reconciliation's future in the tertiary sector.

In addition to the panel discussion, attendees were encouraged to engage in a reflective activity, the results of which were collected through a form. This activity aimed to capture participants' thoughts and insights on reconciliation, providing valuable data to inform future initiatives.

This report highlights the key outcomes of the event, addresses the attendees' questions, and summarises the data from the reflective activity. It underscores the collective commitment of the participating universities to continue their journey toward reconciliation, emphasising the importance of equity in achieving equality, justice, and institutional integrity in their ongoing efforts.



## Panel conversation highlights

The panel conversation provided deep insights and engaging discussions on the priorities and actionable steps needed to advance reconciliation within universities. The panellists shared their perspectives, insights and experiences as First Nations university leaders. The key themes of this discussion are outlined below.

### Impact of the Voice to Parliament Referendum

The Voice to Parliament referendum, along with the campaign leading up to the vote and the ensuing public discourse about constitutional reform, had a profound and often detrimental impact on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities both within and outside universities, regardless of their stance on the proposal. Within academic institutions, intense and challenging discussions were held regarding the public positions universities would adopt on the Voice issue. While some universities chose to remain neutral, 25 institutions formally supported the Yes campaign. The burden of these discussions fell disproportionately on Indigenous leaders, who had to navigate internal politics, community expectations and immense racism, misinformation and lies, expending significant emotional energy and effort in the process. Following the “No” outcome, there is a strong sense of sadness and anger that remains in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.

*Most people were anticipating the worst and when it actually happened, we all cried and I'm still crying. After you get the tears out the anger kicks in and you ask "Who are these white people?". Then focus kicks in because we can't be in misery for too long because as educators, we have a responsibility to change this country.*

– **Professor Martin Nakata**

*Going out into community and seeing how much our old people are hurting and are angry after the referendum, it was really confronting. As universities we have to respond to this in the way we approach this work in the future.*

– **Chanelle van den Berg**

The need for healing and addressing the impact of the referendum is crucial for ongoing work in the higher education sector. This context underlies the task ahead. While universities have the potential to be positively transformative, simply moving forward without addressing the underlying issues will not resolve the persistent discontent. Many are experiencing fatigue and burnout, exacerbated by the lack of awareness and understanding from others. The prevailing sense amongst many Indigenous leaders is that the catalyst for change will not come from non-Indigenous allyship but will centre on a renewed self-determined agenda supported by the Universities Accord (Australian Government Department of Education, 2023).



## Indigenous Self-Determination in Higher Education

The Australian Universities Accord emphasises “First Nations” over 340 times and “self-determination” 19 times in its Final Report (Australian Government Department of Education, 2023), bringing a sharp focus on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander leadership and agency asserting that:

- Indigenous matters should be at the heart of the higher education system.
- Indigenous self-determination must be a primary component of the sector going forward.

Indigenous self-determination is a concept that remains largely misunderstood by many Australians and university leaders. Unlike the decolonisation processes seen in other contexts, where colonised peoples gain independence from their colonisers, Indigenous self-determination in Australia involves transforming the ongoing relationship between Indigenous peoples and non-Indigenous people. This transformation aims to compel or persuade the settler colonial state to transfer some decision-making powers to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

From the 1970s to the early 21st century, Indigenous self-determination focused on “the transformation of an ongoing Indigenous-settler relationship, in which the settler state might be compelled or persuaded to transfer some decision-making powers to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples” (Nakata, 2020). However, since the 2000s, there has been a noticeable shift from self-determination politics towards constitutional recognition and structural reform. However, the Voice to Parliament proposal represented somewhat of a middle ground between these two political standpoints.

Within the context of higher education, the panellists reflected on Indigenous self-determination and asked audience participants to consider the current state of their institutions:

*Indigenous self-determination is about how we will contribute the volume and the capacity for communities to drive their own agendas. Our role is to get the graduates back to their communities so they can start determining their own futures.*  
**- Professor Martin Nakata**

*Think about your university. Think about the centres, institutes and areas that lead on the Indigenous agenda. How close or far are they from being able to make decisions, to have power to set their own agenda, budget, workloads etc. Consider how close they are to that power and agency. Who’s setting the teaching or research agenda? Are those priorities responsive to Indigenous communities inside and out of the academy?*  
**- Professor Braden Hill**

As Indigenous leaders Page and Trudgett (2024) argue,

*A key element of self-determination is ensuring that Indigenous people can make decisions about our futures. Self-determination and autonomy require that Indigenous people have genuine participation and authority in the tertiary education sector and in institutional decision-making processes. This decision making cannot be limited to decisions about apparently Indigenous matters. Almost all decisions made in universities will in some way effect Indigenous people, whether it be appointment of senior staff or allocation of finances.*

## Panel Conversation Highlights

In a sector where there has never been an Indigenous Vice-Chancellor and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander leaders, at times, remain excluded from the Executive table, the ambition of self-determination has a way to go to meet the Accord's call for Indigenous matters to be at the heart of a sector, especially when these matters are often not prioritised within our individual universities.

### Role of Reconciliation and Reconciliation Actions Plans

In the pursuit of self-determination, there is growing concern about the concept of Reconciliation and the higher education sector's reliance on Reconciliation Action Plans as primary catalysts for change. Following the Voice referendum, many Indigenous people feel disappointed by the actions, inactions and/or tokenistic approaches of non-Indigenous people towards reconciliation. This has led to increased scepticism towards reconciliation as an effective means to improve outcomes for Indigenous students, staff, and communities.

*RAPs were latched onto by many organisations, including universities, in the early 2000s when (particularly in academia), you had so few Indigenous leaders driving an agenda at the executive table. At the beginning Indigenous folk saw this as something in the absence of not a lot. Times have changed now... Conceptually, reconciliation pre-referendum was about hand-in-hand walking together side-by-side and it's a symbolism everyone understands. But that has to shift now, it's now, we lead and our 6 million friends follow.*

**- Professor Braden Hill**

*I've never been a believer in Reconciliation agendas. I was around when it was adopted, I walked the bridge. But every year when I read the reports and what we are achieving is a very slow journey and it struck me over the years that it was about doing things to us. Where as for me, this is about non-Indigenous people reconciling your history, your continued presence on our lands, the ongoing everyday that subjugates our very existence as Indigenous people. But I take heart of the work that has been done over the last 30 years, that there are 6 millions good white folks out there. We need your skills and knowledge, but we don't need your opinions...Reconciliation yes has some value, but what is the thing that will make a substantive difference?*

**- Professor Martin Nakata**

*With RAPs you are constantly negotiating with non-Indigenous folk about what Indigenous priorities should be. The result has been some really pretty gardens and impressive art collections. But the dollar value spent on that would fund Indigenous learning support for decades. So, there are differences in priority settings within a reconciliation framework.*

**- Professor Braden Hill**

As of July 2024, 11 universities have current RAPs (Reconciliation Australia, 2024). While some institutions still find them as important strategic drivers with elevated importance within their universities, others have found them limited in terms of relevance to the higher education sector. Some drive reconciliation agendas alongside an Indigenous-led agenda, while others have moved away from reconciliation as an organising framework for work in the Indigenous space.

Reconsidering its approach to reconciliation, Murdoch University has decided to manage reconciliation and the RAP under the Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion portfolio following consultations with First Nations stakeholders. This decision reflects the view that non-Indigenous individuals should carry a significant proportion of responsibility in reconciliation efforts.

In early 2024, a Reconciliation Project Coordinator was appointed. After extensive consultations, a new RAP was preferred over a separate strategy for its consistent framework and government reporting.

The RAP, led by EDI, will align with and support the First Nations sub-strategy, addressing gaps and ensuring alignment. The EDI office is committed to self-determination through ongoing consultation and oversight from First Nations stakeholders to inform their work.

*Following extensive consultations with First Nations stakeholders, Murdoch University has decided to manage reconciliation and the RAP under the EDI portfolio. This reflects the view that non-Indigenous individuals should lead reconciliation. In early 2024, a Reconciliation Project Coordinator was appointed. After thorough consultations, it was decided that a new RAP would be preferred over a separate strategy for its consistent framework and government reporting. Murdoch is also developing its First Nations sub-strategy. We look forward to seeing how this sub-strategy and the RAP will work together to enhance our reconciliation efforts and outcomes.*

**- Channele van den Berg**

## Increasing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Enrolments and Driving Success

The Accord has set ambitious targets to double Indigenous student enrolments to 48,000 by 2035 (Australian Government Department of Education, 2023). Achieving this growth will require a committed effort across the entire educational landscape. Barriers to higher education, particularly academic preparedness, emerge as early as primary schooling, let alone achievement gaps that become apparent in secondary schooling. Therefore, it is essential to work closely with schools. At the university level, the current enrolment rates are insufficient, and addressing the pipeline issue is critical.

However, focusing on enrolment alone is not enough; success and completion rates must also be addressed. With low completion rates at around 30% after four years and 50% after nine years, many students are left with significant debt without obtaining their degrees, which raises questions of ethics and morality. The sector must also recognise the significantly changing nature of students' lives and the specific hardships faced by Indigenous students.

The proposed Needs-Based funding will support the Accord's ambition to increase Indigenous enrolments, specifically through uncapped places within its proposed Managed Growth approach (Australian Government Department of Education, 2023). However, Indigenous Student Success Program funding needs to be significantly increased to support this anticipated growth.

*We need to double our numbers to get to 48,000 Indigenous enrolments by 2035. For us to do this, we must work with schools. The volume is not coming through from the schools. We have to be vigilant about what can support that vital part of the pipeline. If we don't open up that bottleneck, we won't reach our targets. We must also focus on success. Our low completion rates at four-year levels are around 30%. We are sending home a lot of debt for our students, it's cruel and it's immoral.*  
- **Professor Martin Nakata**

*It's difficult to double our enrolments when our students are not financially stable. The cost of living has a major impact on people choosing whether or not to come and stay in university.*  
- **Chanelle van den Berg**



Self-determination for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities depends on the leadership, education, ambitions, and skills of the graduates that universities produce. Our purpose must be to get Indigenous graduates back to their communities so they can determine their own futures. Universities must focus on the barriers to access, participation, retention, and success. This consideration must be included in university Strategic Plans and resourced appropriately alongside programs like the Commonwealth's Indigenous Student Success Program.

## Curriculum, Teaching and Learning

Not until the 1920s was there mention of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, cultures, or histories in an Australian university curriculum (Holt, 2016). It was by the 1960s that the inclusion of Indigenous perspectives became more commonplace (Ma Rhea & Russell, 2012). Nevertheless, efforts to embed Indigenous knowledges in teaching and learning were curated by non-Indigenous scholars who often viewed Indigenous people as a threatened culture needing preservation (Holt, 2016). By the 1970s, Indigenous support, teaching, and research centres, once called 'enclaves', began emerging in Australian universities, supporting the growth of Indigenous-led teaching and learning and scholarship (Holt, 2016). Nevertheless, much work remains to be done. In 2021, less than half of Australia's universities reported systematically considering Indigenous perspectives in the development of curriculum and pedagogy. Of those, only 15% reported having processes and policies in place to ensure that Indigenous content was present in both Indigenous and non-Indigenous course offerings (Universities Australia, 2021).

## Panel Conversation Highlights

A key theme of the panel reflected on the work that remains, but importantly, asked for a re-framing of the way we conceptualise Indigenising of curricula. There are curricula about Indigenous folk and curricula for Indigenous folk. Sometimes, the question “How do we Indigenise a discipline?” is unhelpful; the question should be ‘how do we have Indigenous students embrace disciplinary and Western knowledge without losing their sense of self, agency, and purpose?’.

*Indigenous Australia didn't start at colonialism. But a lot of our courses do. We've allowed ourselves to be soaked into this milieu of colonialism where we can't see our own histories anymore. Our reference point should be 60,000+ years. We were on our way to our modernity. When colonialism came along recently, yes, it disrupted our lives, but how can it constitute a primary position in our teaching? It's an episode in a long history. Our reference point and loyalties shouldn't be to colonialism, it should hark back to our humanity that evolved in relationships to our planet that taught us about our responsibilities for country, place and care. Too many of us allowed ourselves to think that only Western folks and their colonial agendas were the only road to modernity. We were told we're uncivilised, too many of us believed it. For our Indigenous colleagues we must take a good look at what we are doing in our teaching. Something must be substantively different.*

**- Professor Martin Nakata**

*Academics and curriculum designers must consider what are the kinds of skills and competencies that they will need to drive their own agendas forward. That should be under what we'll do for Indigenous people. The other side is about Indigenous people. This is where we have done a lot of work, teaching about Indigenous histories, perspectives etc. Over the decades the balance has shifted toward educating whitefullas, not the needs of our communities, that needs adjustment as we go forward. We need to do more than histories, cultures and languages, it needs to be about oppression. What does it look like in the lives of Indigenous people? Where do we teach this in our curriculum? Where are we training our professionals to deal with this? We can't keep doing a tourist venture. We need to train professional to work more effectively with Indigenous communities.*

**- Professor Martin Nakata**



A key challenge for universities is the need to upskill non-Indigenous academics to infuse Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander knowledges, perspective, histories and realities into their curriculum, teaching and learning – and to be enabled to do so with confidence. A key risk to this work is the re-inscribing of racism, tokenism, and deficit discourses that perpetuate the marginalisation of Indigenous people in academia. Challenges and opportunities presented by Artificial Intelligence will need to be carefully considered in this work. As universities reimagine and reshape curricula, a major opportunity presents itself in resetting what is taught, how it is taught, and by whom. While not an exhaustive list, there are two sector-wide opportunities for non-Indigenous folk to engage in this work via UTS which has a [Developing an Indigenised Curriculum micro-credential](#) offering and QUT offering an [Indigenous Perspectives and Knowledges in L&T](#) Workshop and an associated [Associate Fellow \(Indigenous Knowledges\) of the HEA](#) program.

### **Increasing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Presence in the Academy**

The panel discussion reflected on the challenges of shifting the dial within universities and the sector when Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff remain under-represented across many Australian institutions. Since 2005, Indigenous staff numbers across the university sector have more than doubled (63% professional staff and 37% academic). In 2021, Indigenous staff represented 1.4% of the higher education workforce (Universities Australia, 2022).

The panel was forthright as to how universities can increase their Indigenous workforce:

*I often get asked, "How do we get more Aboriginal academics in university?" I always say, "Employ them!"*

**- Professor Braden Hill**

A range of programs and initiatives can significantly impact Indigenous staffing levels. While acknowledging that academic employment can be a more challenging task, there are proven strategies available, but they require intentional efforts and adequate resourcing:

- Scholarships for Higher Degree Research (HDR) students that go beyond Research Training Program levels are vital enablers to HDR's success. A key enabler is the ability for candidates to focus on their studies fully without having to rely on part-time or casual work.
- Flexible academic positions that allow Indigenous academics to develop their academic career and HDR studies simultaneously – pre-doctoral fellowships, etc.
- Specialist funds that proactively seek to develop Indigenous academic positions within the institution that support and enable Indigenous success.
- Committed strategic research funding to Indigenous research priorities to develop and grow Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander research within universities.
- Attend to cultural safety and racism concerns in proactive and courageous ways at all institution levels.
- Ensure HR/People and Culture teams have committed resources to advancing Indigenous employment across the institution.
- Utilise talent pools to proactively identify potential candidates for roles within the institution.
- Appropriately utilise identified positions to drive employment, but ensure these roles are well supported and connected to Indigenous colleagues and organisational units.

## Thinking about the future and final words

*I am hopeful for the future. I believe in basic humanity and there's a lot of good left in us. We have to get the right agenda and stick to it. Not have it pulled in different directions. We can't give over sovereignty for reconciliation, land rights for native title. We must stand firm. We'd really love you to come on board with that. We are going to need a whole lot of good people on board.*

**- Professor Martin Nakata**

*In setting the agenda and leading in the ways we think is right and purposeful for ourselves, our families and communities is going to challenge colleagues because our history recently, and not so recently, tells us that it comes up against a nervousness, an ignorance, a fragility, and we don't have time for fragility anymore in these conversations. So, when you see us pushing our agenda, we're thinking about the lives our grandparents didn't get to have, we're thinking about our young people and hoping their experiences will be better than the ones we had. When we push these things it comes from the heart, when we work hard at it, and sometimes you get frustrated and sometimes you don't understand, your relationships with us should tell you that our heart is in the right place and our heart is with our families and communities. It means so much to us and it's too important for us to get wrong. But be okay with us really powerfully striding forward in that space and don't be scared, we're all in this together.*

**- Professor Braden Hill**

*I was down after the referendum; everyone was really angry. But what I am going to do now is focus on what I can control. I am a leader in a university that's enabled our work in the First Nations space. That is where my focus will be. I feel really excited about the future. Our mob are resilient, we'll keep moving forward.*

**- Channele van den Berg**

*One graduate back in a family changes the economic trajectory of that family. That should make us get out of bed*

**- Professor Martin Nakata**

To revisit the discussion, the full recording of the panel conversation is available here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wQpGMYMoFJA>



# Reflective Activity Insights and Key Priorities

## Overview

The insights provided throughout this report were drawn from the views of our panellists and the 350+ participants. Following the panel discussion, both online and in-person attendees participated in discussions and reflective activities. These activities encouraged them to consider the role of higher education in advancing reconciliation and to think about specific actions they could take or recommend to colleagues within the tertiary sector. The intent was that these ideas could generate discussion throughout Australian universities to empower future discussions.

## Methodology

The data informing the key themes were collected through in-person written reflections. Of those in-person reflections, 26 submissions were received from groups in the room. There were 27 submissions received from online participants who were also given the opportunity to participate via an online form with the same questions to answer individually. This dual approach ensured a broad collection of insights from diverse participants. These questions were informed by Reconciliation WA Respect Rising's sessions (Reconciliation WA, 2024).

The questions/prompts posed to all participants (in-person and online) were as follows:

- To advance reconciliation in universities, what are the key priorities that need to be addressed?
- Identify three priorities within your area.
- For each priority, find one thing you could start doing, do differently, or do better. Share and discuss with others at your table.

The survey was anonymous, but participants had the opportunity to share their specific university, organisation, or sector, as well as the area of work within the institution. This information was optional.

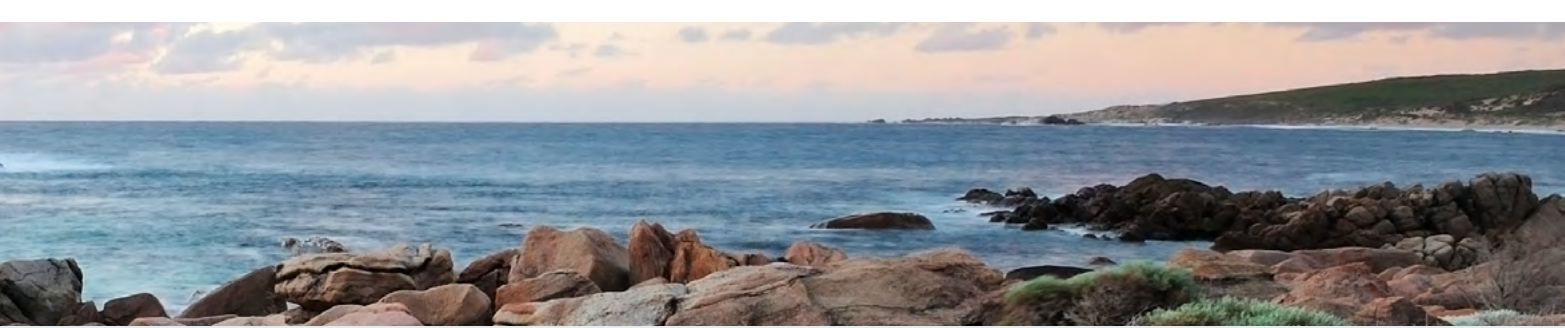
The submission from participants online and in-person represented a wide range of universities and organisations, as well as various roles and departments (as provided by participants), including:

- **Universities/Organisations:** University of Queensland, Edith Cowan University, Murdoch University, University of Newcastle, Macquarie University, James Cook University, University of New South Wales, University of Western Australia, Notre Dame University, Higher Education sector, the Guild, not specified.
- **Roles/Departments:** Learning Designer, Education, Graduate Employability and Disability Advocacy, Library, Academic, Reception/Office of the Deputy VC, Graduate Research Office, Alumni Engagement, Nursing and Midwifery, University Secretary's Office, DVC Education, Teaching and Learning unit, Workplace Diversity & Inclusion, Indigenous Education and Research Centre, HR, Student Equity, Environmental and Conservation Sciences, Work Integrated Learning, Research Collaborations, Finance, PCO, HASS, Environmental Biosecurity & Food Security, EDI, Student Engagement, Business Support, Students Assist, Kulbari Aboriginal Centre, not specified.

## Key priorities and actionable steps required to promote reconciliation

Following data collection, all submissions across in-person and online activities were thematically analysed to understand the key ideas, issues, priorities and actions to guide future work in the sector. These key themes are articulated below in order of significance.

1. **Education and Training**
2. **Senior Leadership, Strategy and Governance**
3. **Self-Determination**
4. **Student and Staff Success**
5. **Engagement and Collaboration**



# 1. Education and Training

The most prominent theme among all participants was the importance of enhancing education and training for both staff and students. For staff, the focus was primarily on organisational development, particularly for non-Indigenous staff, with an emphasis on cultural safety, allyship, and anti-racism. It was also recognised that decolonising and Indigenising curricula are vital components of truth-telling. For students, actionable steps related to supporting First Nations students across the entirety of the educational landscape (not just at university). Financial support was also viewed as being a critical enabler for student success.

*“Support of Indigenous students: advocate and provide training for safe spaces of teaching and learning, advocate and provide training for strategies to provide inclusive classrooms and manage problematic conversations that occur in classrooms. Partner with Indigenous staff and students to improve the training of teaching staff.”*

*“Build people’s capacity and capabilities – a massive problem across the country. Review of the curricula, resources, reading materials in recognition of the Indigenous Knowledges and History. Also, there needs to be Inclusive Learning modules for academic staff to ensure they include Indigenous perspectives with inclusion and respect. Lastly, there needs to be Cultural Safety Awareness Training for staff and students, as well as anyone working on campuses, to ensure there is common ground in ensuring broader cultural inclusion and respect.”*

*“Education on reconciliation for staff – Engage in independent professional development. Culturally reflexive practices – Self-reflection on what I bring into the classroom/workplace regarding unconscious/conscious bias. Developing relationships with Aboriginal communities – Making connections through staff and community networks.”*

## Key Priorities:

- Decolonising. Indigenous perspectives and truth-telling in curricula.
- Cultural safety, allyship and awareness development for non-Indigenous staff, including truth-telling.

## Actionable Steps:

- **Mandatory Indigenous Training:** Implement mandatory Indigenous cultural awareness and training for all staff, including new hires, as part of their probation.
- **Truth-Telling and Historical Education:** Teach the history of colonisation and oppression, intergenerational trauma, and the shared history of white and Indigenous Australians to undergraduate students.
- **Professional Development:** Provide ongoing professional development for staff to increase cultural competence and understanding of Indigenous issues.
- **Intersectional Education:** Include education on intersectionality in Indigenous communities in training programs.
- **Resource Development:** Develop and maintain an up-to-date repository of resources for continuous knowledge sharing and learning about Indigenous cultures and histories.

# Reflective Activity Insights and Key Priorities

## 2. Senior Leadership, Strategy and Governance

Participants identified the importance of senior leadership, strategy, and governance in advancing reconciliation efforts as a key theme. They emphasised the need for visible commitment from senior leaders, both in words and actions, to foster professional and learning environments that enable Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff and students to succeed. Ensuring that First Nations priorities are embedded in key institutional strategies, policies, and decision-making structures was also highlighted as crucial.

*“Senior Leadership needs to be seen to do things, not just sprout the University Strategy. Our Heads of School / Directors need also to be visible and develop the environment by leading the way.”*

*“Uni leadership needs to take a stronger position on reconciliation action. Actively be anti-racist, and look for opportunities. Drive a more inclusive view of what an academic and learning environment looks like. More resources to employ and support First Nations academics and support staff.”*

*“Ensure First Nation leaders are front & centre in these initiatives (This is happening, but it is enough).”*

*“Upskill leadership on Indigenous knowledge when acting on boards. Improve psychological safety of Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander staff by increasing accountability of non-Indigenous people/staff. Focus both on our role as educators of our own staff & students, but also look at how we can contribute to raising awareness & understanding in the wider communities.”*

### Key Priorities:

- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander leadership on Council/Governing Boards, the Executive team.
- The need for senior leadership to be visibly committed to reconciliation, not just in words but through actions to lead by example to create professional and learning environments that enable Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff and students to succeed.
- Ensuring First Nations priorities are embedded in key institutional strategies, policies and decision-making structures.

### Actionable Steps

- Visible Leadership: Ensure senior leaders and Heads of Schools/Directors are visibly leading and developing an inclusive environment.
- Strategic Commitment: Embed Indigenous priorities in strategic documents and ensure ongoing financial investment and resources to support these priorities.
- Accountability: Hold universities accountable for implementing and maintaining a focus on Indigenous matters across all areas of their work.
- Aboriginal-Led Decision Making: Empower Aboriginal leadership in strategy development and decision-making processes.
- Engagement with Community: Engage with local Aboriginal communities and elders in developing and implementing strategies.

### 3. Self-Determination

A prominent theme was empowering Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities to lead and set agendas within and external to the university context. Participants highlighted the necessity for non-Indigenous people to understand and support self-determination for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples at both strategic and operational levels. This involves incorporating self-determination approaches into university strategies and ensuring that policies are flexible and inclusive.

*“Reconciliation requires a constant, ongoing commitment to thinking about the biases & the privilege that is in the way of reconciliation. Ask First Nations people what they need from allyship – and don’t be afraid to check in to confirm whether how ‘good intentions’ are being received.”*

*“Design and deliver Cultural Capabilities training that is driven by a Self-Determination agenda.”*

#### Key Priorities:

- Empowering Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities to lead and set agendas within and external to the university context at all levels of the organisation.
- Non-Indigenous people understanding and supporting self-determination for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples at strategic and operational levels.
- Incorporating self-determination approaches into university strategies and policies.

#### Actionable Steps

- Self-Determination Support: Empower First Nations people to lead initiatives and decision-making processes, ensuring their voices are prioritised.
- Cultural Safety: Improve psychological safety for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff by increasing accountability of non-Indigenous staff.
- Indigenous Data Sovereignty: Recognise and respect Indigenous Data Sovereignty in research and data management practices.
- Decolonising Practices: Commit to decolonising education by valuing Aboriginal ways of knowing, doing, and being.



# Reflective Activity Insights and Key Priorities

## 4. Student and Staff Success

Promoting the success of Indigenous students and staff was a key theme highlighted by participants. This includes proactive recruitment, addressing financial barriers, and providing necessary support to ensure equitable access to university education. Developing anti-racism strategies and educational opportunities is also crucial in creating an inclusive environment that fosters success for all.

*“Outreach & support to regional Indigenous students to support them in starting a university journey.”*

*“Regional recruitment of students needs to be a priority – mentors to guide them and walk with them through the enrolment processes & welfare support systems. Open days for regional centres and schools to increase awareness of opportunities at universities. You can be only what you see and know.”*

*“Getting First Nations kids to university; solving financial problems in community in a wider context because First Nations families will be particularly affected and this affects whether First Nations people go to university; teaching non-Indigenous people about oppression (including this in curriculum) & preparing professionals to be able to work with Indigenous communities; acknowledge our limitations, acknowledge (as non-First Nations people) we don't know enough and don't know the best ways to engage with First Nations people & we should let and empower First Nations people to lead.”*

*“Employ Indigenous staff. Engage with the local Aboriginal community, bring elders to campus, and invite all students and staff. Have Indigenous staff on all campuses. Don't be lazy. It's not genuine or acceptable to just put a few stickers around and email signatures but not do the above, that's gammon. Talk to elders instead of getting a voice that better represents the local communities.”*

*“Scholarships and housing assistance to make university study possible BUT not just for Low SES students as students between Low SES and Gifted & Talented are the ones missing out as financially study is still too far out of reach.”*

### Key Priorities:

- Proactively recruiting Indigenous staff and students to increase visible representation at all levels.
- Addressing financial barriers for Indigenous students and ensuring equitable access to university education.
- Providing scholarships, housing assistance, and other financial support not just for Low SES students but also for those in the middle-income range.
- Develop anti-racism strategies, policies, and educational opportunities for students and staff. Support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students across the entire educational landscape (schools and tertiary education).
- Financial hardship support for students.

### Actionable Steps

- Support Services: Provide robust support services for Indigenous students, including safe spaces for teaching and learning, scholarships, housing assistance, and pathways to university not dependent on ATAR scores.
- Employment Opportunities: Increase the recruitment and ongoing support of Indigenous staff and students, ensuring representation at all levels of the university.
- Professional Development: Develop professional development opportunities for Indigenous staff, including pathways for promotion and leadership roles.
- Inclusive Practices: Implement inclusive teaching practices that respect and incorporate Indigenous perspectives and manage problematic conversations in classrooms.
- Educational Support: Implement comprehensive support for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students across the entire educational landscape, including schools and tertiary education.
- Financial Hardship Support: Establish and expand financial hardship support programs for Indigenous students to ensure they can continue their education without financial barriers.

## 5. Engagement and Collaboration

Participants highlighted that engagement and collaboration with Indigenous communities and stakeholders are crucial for advancing reconciliation and fostering a supportive environment for Indigenous staff and students. The data emphasised transitioning from consultative approaches to community-led agendas, engaging with external community and industry experts, and strengthening partnerships as essential for mutual benefit and best practices.

*“Encourage other staff and First Nation allies to get things happening and join action groups. Keep abreast with events and initiatives, and share resources widely. Develop relationships with Aboriginal communities - making connections through staff and community networks.”*

*“Community-led initiatives to replace consultative approaches to Indigenous strategy development - this will address each of the priorities because community knows what community needs.”*

*“Engage and provide more events and activities relating to Indigenous culture and history throughout the year and not just during National Reconciliation Week. The frequency and how many times these events are held are extremely vital to continuously strengthen and signify the connection (bond) with our Indigenous brothers and sisters.”*

*“Using social media platforms (Instagram/TikTok/Twitter) to promote these activities to create a broader audience of students.”*

### Key Priorities:

- Proactively transition from consultative approaches towards community-led agendas.
- Engage with external community and industry with expertise to share best practices and leverage relationships of mutual benefit.

### Actionable Steps

- Community Outreach: Engage with local Aboriginal communities and elders, bringing them to campus for events and dialogues.
- Regional Recruitment: Prioritise recruitment of Indigenous students from regional and remote areas, providing mentorship and support through the enrolment process.
- Cross-Institution Collaboration: Work collaboratively with other universities, schools, and community organisations to support Indigenous strategies and initiatives.
- Social Media Promotion: Use social media platforms to promote Indigenous events, stories, and cultural knowledge to a broader audience.
- Student Involvement: Increase student awareness and engagement with Indigenous issues through events, discussions, and collaborations with Indigenous leaders and communities.



## Attendee Questions and Responses

### Disclaimer

This chapter contains responses from the panellists to questions submitted by attendees during the event registration process. Due to the high volume of questions received—numbering in the hundreds—the panellists have grouped similar questions by theme and provided answers to as many as possible within their capacity. While every effort has been made to comprehensively address the questions, some may not have been answered due to time constraints, capacity limitations, or other factors.

### Questions per themes:

#### Theme: What is the Future of Reconciliation and RAPs?

1. **Given the failure of many RAP organisations, including some universities, to support a First Nations Voice to Parliament at last year’s Referendum, what is the relevance and value of RAPs in the post-referendum environment? Should reconciliation be the focus moving forward?**

Reconciliation Action Plans still have relevance within organisations. However, they should not be the primary driver of the Indigenous agenda where you have Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander leadership that should be resourced and enabled to lead. RAPs too often have to be negotiated with non-Indigenous folk, and often, there is a misalignment of purpose and priorities.

2. **Following the 60% no vote, some people feel that reconciliation has now had its time and has not worked. What are your reflections on this sentiment and what does reconciliation look like in a post-referendum world?**

It cannot be the leading framework for how we consider Indigenous advancement. We have had 20 years or more of this underpinning the way we think about Indigenous and non-Indigenous relations, it has not yielded the results we would have hoped. It might be time to try something different. The Voice was something different, but it was still in the spirit of compromise and togetherness driven by an ask by Indigenous Australians to be included and reform the way we shape the Australian political landscape. It was, in the eyes of many, too much of an ask.

3. **I feel disillusioned with reconciliation because even the small request to be listened to via the Voice to Parliament was so soundly rejected. But I appreciate all our non-Indigenous allies. What does the panel think about continued investment in “reconciliation” activities and using the term ‘reconciliation’?**

This is important work for non-Indigenous allies to consider now. Reconciliation is an agenda that should be reflected and acted upon by non-Indigenous people. This is the work ahead for them to consider and understand how their intentions may align with an Indigenous-led agenda and self-determination.



## Theme: Taking Action on Reconciliation

1. **Have you heard of examples of individual staff or teams within universities doing practical, meaningful things to support reconciliation? What immediate steps can we take as individuals to be more mindful and influence the wider population to embrace true reconciliation?**

Actions that people can take can vary significantly from person to person, team to team or even organisation to organisation. What is helpful is when people undertake learning and reflection, consider what is in their control to effect change and work with others, collectively and respectfully, to effect change. The non-Indigenous organisers of this event are good examples of this. There is a lot of great work going on, and to single out particular initiatives would be difficult.

2. **After the referendum, what is the number one way that universities could support elders in residence and university Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander leaders to move students and staff towards reconciliation?**

It is important to bring Elders in Residence into culturally safe spaces where they can engage meaningfully in the work of our educational institutions. Resourcing and supporting Elders in this work is key. For students, there has to be a curriculum/learning and teaching response. whereas for staff, this has to be prioritised and resourced appropriately.

3. **How can non-Indigenous people best support First Nations Australians at this time and move from tokenism to proactive positive steps forward?**

Talk to other non-Indigenous folk and give Indigenous communities some space to heal and re-group. Ensure Indigenous colleagues and friends know that when they are ready, you are here to support and mobilise.

4. **What strategic initiatives can universities undertake to actively support the aspirations of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, while championing inclusivity and diversity across their campuses and curriculum?**

The aspirations of Indigenous folk vary from community to community. Understanding these needs and aspirations is key.

5. **What are non-negotiables for universities serious about supporting First Nations equality and increased access to tertiary education? What opportunities are there for inter-university collaboration to improve outcomes?**

Indigenous matters must be included in the institution's overarching strategy, KPIs must hold leadership accountable, and funding and resources must flow to support these ambitions. Universities generally do a good job of collaborating, but there is a major opportunity for them to work better together in their engagement with the schooling sector.

6. **The referendum results seem to have stymied any chance of progress on an Indigenous voice for at least a decade, likely more. How can universities combat this and make tangible steps towards a more hopeful future and impact broader social views and governmental policy?**

It is important to keep reflecting on the principles of the Voice. It is also important to teach about it and the outcome and consider what opportunities have been lost. It is also important to consider what future opportunities that might emerge in the wake of the referendum outcome. It would also be important for universities to consider how they can embed Voice-like entities into their own governance and leadership structures.

# Attendee Questions and Responses

## Theme: Impact on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Communities

- 1. What has been the impact on the Indigenous staff and students within your respective institutions, and how can we ensure their voices are heard and respected in the political decision-making process moving forward?**

Regardless of Indigenous staff and students' views on the referendum proposal, there remains a great need for healing. The Voice campaign and outcome were damaging in all sorts of ways, and I think there is probably a distrust that the political system can deliver for Indigenous people in Australia. Closing the Gap targets remain off-track in many domains, and an ask to be heard via a Voice has been rebuffed. Many communities are likely to look inward and rely on community leadership and community-led initiatives to make positive change.

- 2. How can we work collaboratively as a mental health service to best support the needs of Indigenous students moving forward?**

Proactive support is vital. Mental health and stress for university students is the number reason they consider withdrawing. Initiatives like the one at Kulbaradi (Murdoch University) or the Living Room (ECU, UWA) are good models to explore. There is also a real need to consider the inadequacies of Western knowledges pertaining to psychology and counselling that inhibit relational approaches to the support of Indigenous young people. Professional boundaries often lead to being real boundaries for Indigenous students. Trust and relationships are critical to many Indigenous people in therapeutic and wellbeing settings. I would also consider unlimited sessions for Indigenous students as a key equity initiative.

## Theme: Indigenous Priorities in Higher Education Post-Referendum

- 1. Has there been a broader shift in discussions about Indigenous matters because of the No outcome?**

Yes, among Indigenous leadership, yes. There remains a bit of silence more broadly. Many people remain uncomfortable discussing the outcome and where priorities must be going forward. What we are seeing, though, is a more direct approach taken by Indigenous leaders in universities to progressing initiatives and programs within their institutions. There is a growing understanding that relying on non-Indigenous folks to 'come to the party' takes a bit too long.

- 2. Why was it important for universities to take a position and support staff in this conversation? What are the implications for universities that remained mostly silent throughout the Referendum and afterwards?**

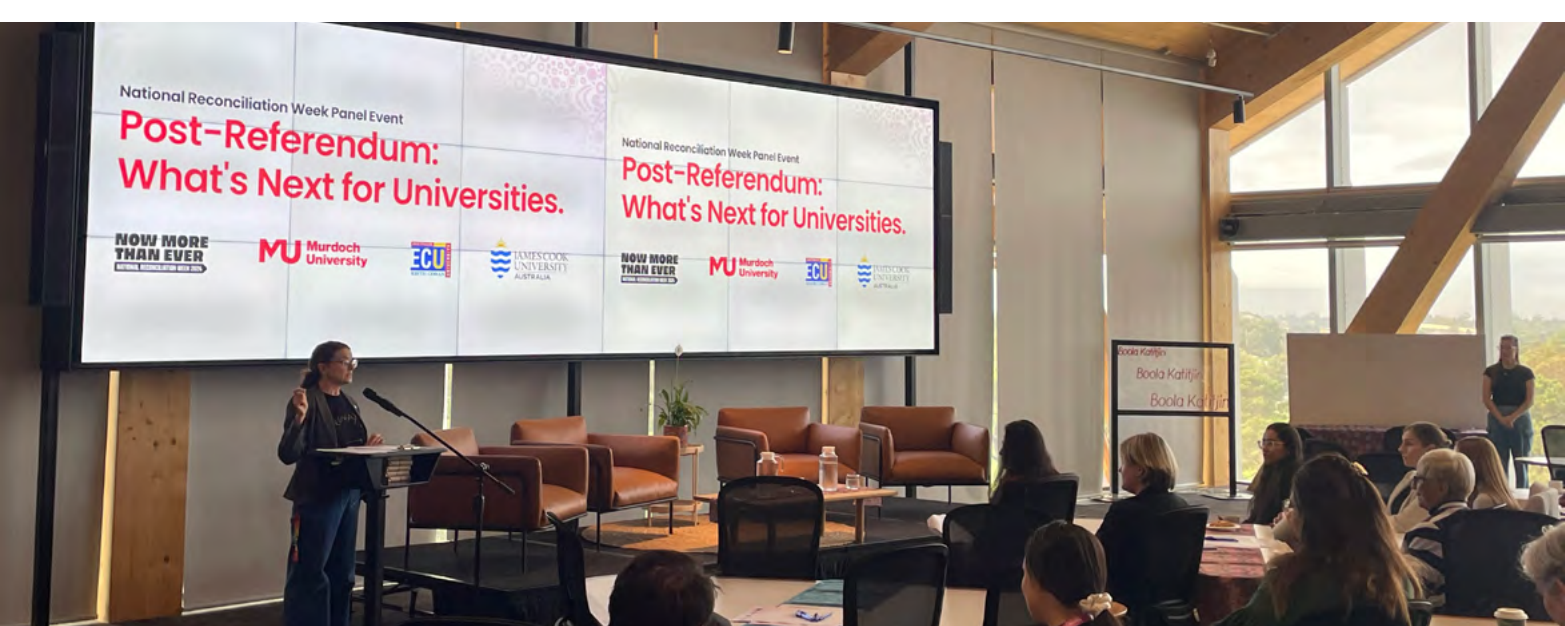
Universities are spaces for rational inquiry, critical thinking and fostering social change. Under applied scrutiny, there were very few material concerns about the concept of a Voice to Parliament. All academic interrogation of the idea led most reasonably minded people to conclude that the reform was one much needed with important impact. Those who did not take a position will need to reflect on that. Their silence will not be forgotten by the Indigenous students and staff in their academic communities.

- 3. How do we get more Indigenous representation on university governing councils/senates?**

Make them attractive and impactful prospects for Indigenous people to engage with them. Many suitably qualified and passionate people would take up these opportunities if they were remunerated and well supported with a strong sense of agency to move things in the right direction, i.e. not tokenistic.

- 4. Murdoch University was the first in Australia to formally institute remuneration for cultural load – recognising the unpaid labour of Indigenous staff in educating their colleagues on Indigenous matters. Can you tell us about this initiative and how it will work at Murdoch?**

See here: <https://www.murdoch.edu.au/news/articles/new-policy-recognises-cultural-load-of-first-nations-community>



5. Since the failed referendum, are there signs of increased attempts to have greater local community input into resolving local community issues, or is it still business as usual in this space?

Some areas of society have adopted the spirit of the Voice proposal and incorporated the principles behind the idea into their organisations. Some state governments are actively exploring this or pursuing a treaty agenda. But largely, this remains 'business as usual'.

### Theme: Reflecting on the Vote Outcome

1. In your view, why did the referendum fail, and how is it that Australians ended up voting overwhelmingly in opposition to the Voice to Parliament idea? What were the key reasons why so many Australians, including First Nations people, voted No?

The lack of bi-partisanship, media reporting that defaulted to uncritical "both-siderism" and social media that enabled the spread of lies, misinformation and disinformation. The other factors came down to ignorance about Indigenous people and communities and racism. Analysis by ANU surmised that "Australians voted no because they did not want division and remain sceptical of rights for some Australians that are not held by others. The data suggests that Australians think that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians continue to suffer levels of disadvantage that is both caused by past government policies and that justified extra government assistance. They did not see the Voice model put to them as the right approach to remedy that disadvantage." See: [https://csrcm.cass.anu.edu.au/sites/default/files/docs/2023/11/Detailed\\_analysis\\_of\\_the\\_2023\\_Voice\\_to\\_Parliament\\_Referendum\\_and\\_related\\_social\\_and\\_political\\_attitudes.pdf](https://csrcm.cass.anu.edu.au/sites/default/files/docs/2023/11/Detailed_analysis_of_the_2023_Voice_to_Parliament_Referendum_and_related_social_and_political_attitudes.pdf)

2. The media displayed First Nations people as being opposed to the referendum. What is the truth in this matter?

Booth-by-booth analysis shows that electorates/ areas with high Indigenous populations tended to vote in support of the proposal. See here: <https://www.smh.com.au/politics/federal/booth-by-booth-indigenous-australians-backed-the-voice-20231015-p5ecc7.html>

3. Is there an opportunity in the future to do another referendum?

This is almost an impossibility.

### Theme: Taking Heart and Hope

1. What warms your heart, and what can we aspire to? What are the hope-generating activities you see happening in this post-referendum space that can re-energise and redirect momentum?

A graduate going across the stage to receive their testamurs in our colours.

2. What motivates you most about your work in this area?

Being able to see a graduate go back home to their family with a degree.

# Attendee Questions and Responses

## Theme: The Accord and Sector

- 1. The Commonwealth government has committed to an inquiry into racism in the universities sector to examine the prevalence and impact of racism on students and staff. What are the panel's reflections on this initiative, and will it lead to a more culturally safe space for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in Australian universities?**

It is important that we also put effort into and refresh our thinking on ways the universities can do this.

- 2. Can you discuss how the accord fits with our future and how universities need to be thinking about self-determination, which is heavily featured in the outcome?**

Yes, we should be driving all the universities to be focused on delivering the volume and capacities of graduates so they can return to their communities to help drive their self-determination plans.

- 3. What are the roles of university groupings (such as IRU, UA, Go8) in supporting what is next for universities and Indigenous self-determination?**

It is important for members of these groups to drive the policy and resourcing infrastructure in the sector to ensure the right settings for university staff so they can help drive the capacity-building agenda for determining our own futures.

- 4. What strategies are universities adopting to improve access and opportunities for underrepresented groups, as per the Australian Universities Accord report? How can academics, researchers, and staff at universities better serve these student populations?**

The Federal Minister has expressed the need for doubling our Indigenous student numbers by 2035. This is crucial if we are to meet the workforce targets by 2050. It is also beneficial to us to have twice the number of graduates returning to their communities with degrees to help with plans for our future.

## Theme: Thinking About Education, Curriculum, Broader Learning, and Professional Development

- 1. Is there an opportunity for universities to undertake community education around Indigenous issues? What are your thoughts on teaching First Nations languages in schools similar to Indonesian, Italian, Japanese, etc.? Could this be an achievable step towards greater reconciliation? First language priorities should be focused in the communities.**

Our priorities for language restoration/reinvigoration are a commitment to ourselves and our connections to Country. Remember our traditional wisdom about recalling who we are, our being as humans on this planet: Speak your language, Country will speak to you.

- 2. How do you think the failed referendum and the arising issues should be taught to high school students?**

As a bad lesson, taught by bad people and who are not grateful for being on our land...

- 3. Apart from Indigenising the Curriculum and knowledge sharing with students studying at university, what role can universities take to share knowledge within society?**

We need to reflect on what we are teaching in these programs and ask ourselves how much of this is about colonisation and how much of this is not about our long trajectory, building towards our own modernity based on our values and relationship with Country.

- 4. In the context of reconciliation, how can individuals strike a balance between self-education and seeking information from trusted sources? What are some recommended practices for ensuring the accuracy and respectfulness of self-learned knowledge?**

We should critically look at how much we have done in this area that leads to patronage agendas of liberals and turn more towards asking ourselves, "How/why have we come to be reliant on/preoccupied with agendas that seek the help of others to fix things for us?"

**5. Would universities consider mandatory in-person cultural awareness training by Aboriginal facilitators for all staff as a good step?**

They already do this. But we need to ask: Is “awareness” the right thing for them to focus on, and how will this drive their contributions towards our independence?

**6. What role do you see K-12 education, educators, and preservice teachers having post-referendum?**

The schools should focus on the knowledge and skills our students need to go to university and for work, and less so on the patronage of our inclusion in the curriculum to satisfy a political imperative. Our kids’ future depends on them obtaining the level of capacities and skills set to have options in the future.

**7. What skills do graduates currently lack that they need to make positive contributions to reconciliation in their professional endeavours?**

Self-reflection, mindfulness, and learning how to not interfere with Indigenous matters.

**8. How can the leitmotifs of reconciliation be added to the curriculum of different universities and utilised as a means of social equity? Specifically, what actions can they take to foster a greater understanding and respect for First Nation cultures, histories, and contributions?**

Leitmotifs of reconciliation and equity agendas over the past 30 years have not been helpful, indeed, have led to the mess/systems we find ourselves today (Think Referendum). Try this. We do not seek to be liked by white people nor do we want to be on a par with them. Be more brave. Turn to reparation agendas. Maybe there, you will find unison with the forms of justice we are seeking.

## **Theme: Indigenous Rights in a Global Context**

**1. How do the speakers view what is happening in Gaza right now?**

Taking over someone’s country is not something that sits well with Indigenous people. The issues in Gaza rightfully need to be called out by all, not just Indigenous people, in solidarity. It saddens me to think that in the 21st Century, we have not yet found a more civilised approach to growing communities or leaders who know what that means.

## **Theme: Intersections and Solidarity**

**1. What is next for universities from a CALD perspective post-referendum?**

CALD folk need to step up and walk alongside Indigenous folk in highlighting the impact of racism on minoritised communities. There needs to be greater conversations and solidarity amongst communities that are commonly impacted by white supremacy, whiteness and settler-colonialism.

**2. How can we bring Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander initiatives together with other cohort initiatives (e.g., disability, LGBTIQ+) to promote intersectionality and advocate for common goals?**

Intentional collective leadership in this space is key. Talking across and in solidarity is important, but these spaces are not always safe for Indigenous people.

**3. How do we increase understanding of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander experiences for international cohorts?**

I think the library profession has been a strong ally for us. Where they have not been so great is separating in their heads this: We are not part of the equity groups. We are the first peoples. We have a unique tenure to this country that others do not have. We are not seeking a share of the patronage afforded to equity groups. We have a responsibility to our Country. Learn about what that means, and perhaps that might help with your forward contributions.

# Attendee Questions and Responses

## Theme: Allyship and Support

- 1. How can we support our First Nations people going forward and engage with our First Nations colleagues without burdening them with all the work?**

It is really important to avoid possessive framing here; others do not own First Nations peoples, i.e. “Our” First Nations, etc. First Nations leaders articulate visions within organisations for what needs to happen. Read these strategies, familiarise yourself with what needs to happen and get cracking. Ask questions in forums where Indigenous folk are not present, and advocate where you can. But make sure you know what you are talking about and not taking up space of Indigenous folk in these actions/conversations.

- 2. As university staff, how can we teach our non-Indigenous students to be allies to the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and empower them to speak up to their peers?**

Model it yourselves. Use whiteness/non-Indigeneity to talk them through your own racism and bias and show them how one moves through that discomfort to be better. It requires authenticity in teaching and vulnerability; otherwise, it is meaningless.

- 3. How do non-Indigenous people step up for their Aboriginal peers while also knowing when to get out of the way?**

This is something that can often only be learned through relationships with Indigenous folk and a sort of trial and error. Sometimes, Indigenous people themselves struggle to define what an ally is, but we know it when we see it. It will also differ across different communities and contexts. Unfortunately, there is no easy answer.

- 4. How can allyship be effectively integrated into the university curriculum (outside of Aboriginal Centres and certain identified units) to ensure all students graduate with a comprehensive understanding of First Nations cultures and histories? What role do educators play in modelling allyship within their teaching practices?**

See response to Q2. But also understand the “why” and articulate that from an authentic standpoint. Be sure that academic governance processes surface these conversations in accreditation and reviews.

- 5. How can non-Indigenous staff best support our Indigenous colleagues post-referendum?**

Our 6 million allies give us confidence in the good in people. We would like to see that converted to new energy that goes towards building the capacities for Indigenous people to determine their own futures. Each of us in the sector has to find ways to make those contributions from our different locations. Through incremental movements/change, we will find ourselves building agendas for a common outcome.

## Other Questions

- 1. How important is it for First Nations students to have opportunities to be published (e.g., is the Stanner Award important to keep)?**

Awards like this are vital as they recognise and celebrate Indigenous scholarship, providing visibility and encouragement to aspiring scholars and students.

- 2. What is the most important area in health for First Nations people in Australia?**

Addressing the systemic issues that lead to the ongoing health issues we suffer, and not just treating the ongoing symptoms. Address racism as a major factor for poor health amongst our communities. See here for more: <https://mkstudy.com.au/>

- 3. Professor Nakata, how are you thinking about your previous scholarship on the cultural interface now, post-referendum? Curious to hear if, and how, your thinking has changed.**

It has indeed deepened by scholarship in this field of intersecting knowledge traditions, and particularly how/why we have allowed ourselves/come to believe that Western constitutional traditions could solve our issues. This is a system devised by others to safeguard their interests not ours. What convinced us that that system was ever going to resolve a position that would benefit us?

- 4. What role can the NTEU play in this realm?**

NTEU members and Union organisations all need to resolve an outstanding issue: Where do Western industrial rights sit with Indigenous people’s rights to determine their own futures? The important thing for NTEU to keep in mind is: None of you should speak for Indigenous Australians.

5. **The term “spiritual sovereignty” was left out of much of the Referendum debate. Arguably, this phrase relates to self-determination and the right to culture (rather than, say, “Closing the Gap”). What are your thoughts on bolstering understandings of ‘spiritual sovereignty’ in wider Australian society?**

Yes, I agree. However, it requires wider Australians to mature their understandings outside of Western conceptions of spirituality.

6. **Universities play a critical role in the consciousness of our broader society. How can the Performing Arts, particularly WAAPA, engage in this important process?**

Institutions like WAAPA already do a great job showcasing Indigenous customs, traditions, knowledge, voices, and stories, supporting Indigenous artists, developing collaborations with Indigenous communities, and creating platforms to educate and inspire everyone, not just Indigenous people. It would be good to see more of their important work on our campuses across Australia.

7. **How do you see university research services and systems for First Nations HDRs becoming more culturally safe and responsive**

Everything in research these days should be in concert with the Indigenous self-determination plans of Indigenous Australians, and every effort needs to be about building capacities that can further scholarship and development of our plans.



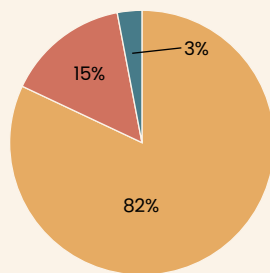


# Attendees feedback overview

A feedback survey was distributed to all participants after the event. Of those who responded to this questionnaire, 22 attended online, and 11 engaged in person. The figures below capture their collective responses and sentiments regarding the event. All respondents expressed an interest in future events of this nature and theme.

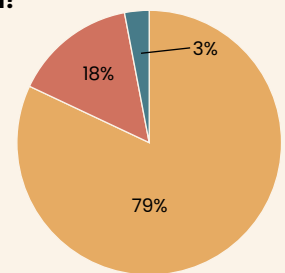
## How satisfied were you with the event overall?

- Very satisfied
- Satisfied
- Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied
- Somewhat dissatisfied
- Very dissatisfied



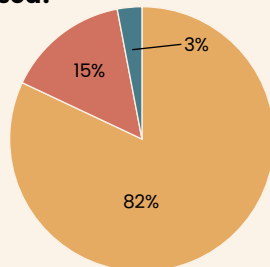
## How relevant and informative did you find the panel discussion?

- Very relevant and informative
- Relevant and informative
- Neutral
- Irrelevant and not very informative
- Very irrelevant and not very informative



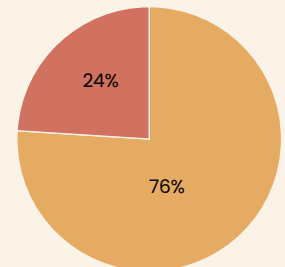
## How impactful did you find the panel discussion and key points raised?

- Very impactful
- Impactful
- A little impactful
- Not very impactful
- No impact at all



## How engaging was the event?

- Very engaging
- Engaging
- Neutral
- Not engaging
- Very disengaging



## What Attendees Enjoyed Most

### 1. Learning from First Nations People:

Many participants appreciated the opportunity to hear directly from Indigenous Australians, finding it a rare and valuable learning experience.

*"Learning from First Nations people."*

*"Hearing the stories and perspectives of Indigenous Australians on the result of the Voice was distressing and added to my sadness and disappointment at the result. I felt honoured that these stories and personal experiences were shared freely with the attendees."*

*"Most enjoyable was the opportunity to listen and learn from the perspectives of the amazing panel members. It provided precious insights into a lived experience different from my own and allowed me to explore what actions I can take in my personal and work life to be/do better."*

### 2. Panel Discussion:

The panel discussion format was highly praised for its ability to present diverse perspectives in an engaging and authentic manner.

*"The panel discussion because it gave an insight that I would not have got had each participant presented individually. This made it all the more authentic."*

*"The quality of the contributions from panel members, it was great to hear from such eminent speakers with so much knowledge and insight that they shared."*

*"The insightful knowledge and experience of the speakers and panellists."*

### 3. Organisation and Impact:

Attendees found the event to be well-organised and impactful, appreciating the passion and honesty of the speakers.

*"It was inspiring and powerful. All speakers were so gracious with their time and energy. It was such a well-organised event. I felt really honoured to be part of the conversation."*

*"The details that Yohann put into the event were not missed. You can see he put his heart into this event and every little thing he did make the event great."*

*"The video was an excellent way to frame the discussion, & thanks to colleagues like Sharna & colleagues for sharing what the actual impact of the No vote had on them. This was painful but important to hear. Jenna was an excellent MC."*

## Least Enjoyed Aspects

### 1. Limited Q&A Opportunities:

Several attendees felt that the event would have benefited from a live audience Q&A session to engage more directly with the panellists.

*"That we could not have had live audience Q&A sessions."*

*"A short portion of time dedicated to a Q&A with the audience would have been fantastic."*

### 2. Time Constraints on Activities:

Some participants expressed a desire for more time to complete interactive activities, feeling that the limited time detracted from their effectiveness.

*"We could have had more time to complete the activities as we were talking and sharing ideas together and did not complete the activities."*

## Attendees feedback overview

### Additional Comments and Feedback

Attendees expressed deep gratitude and admiration for the panellists' courage and vulnerability in sharing their personal experiences and perspectives. Many highlighted the need for universities to engage more robustly with their communities on Indigenous futures and the way forward. Suggestions included organising more events like this, integrating reconciliation and truth-telling processes, and learning from international examples of reconciliation.

*"Thank you for sharing so much of your personal experience, so raw and so vulnerable, and so honest - there is a strength that I can only aspire to."*

*"Amazing, one of the best events I have been to."*

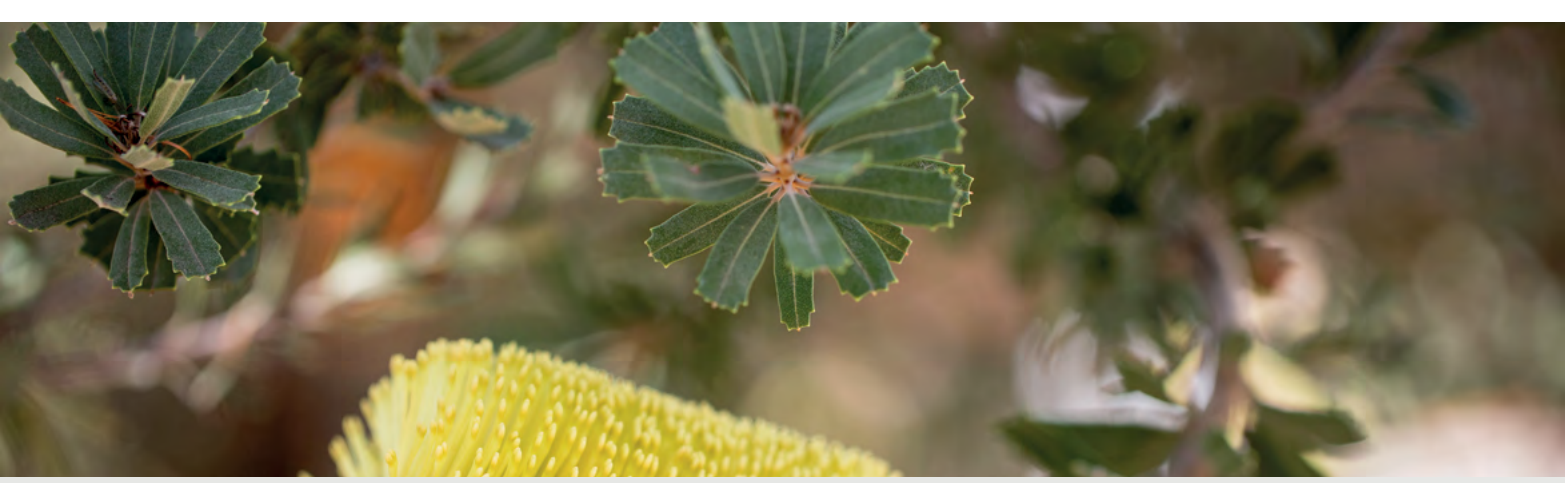
*"Everything was 100%. My greatest respect, admiration and thanks to Jenna Woods, Chanelle van den Berg, Braden Hill, and Martin Nakata."*

### Preferred EDI Topics for Future Events

- Disability and reconciliation
- Embedding Indigenous Knowledges
- Universal learning design
- Equity for Indigenous Australians and students from low socioeconomic backgrounds
- First Nations empowerment
- Allyship in action and anti-racism work
- Neurodiversity and awareness
- LGBTQIA+ issues
- Indigenous worldviews and activation
- Understanding First Nations history post-colonisation

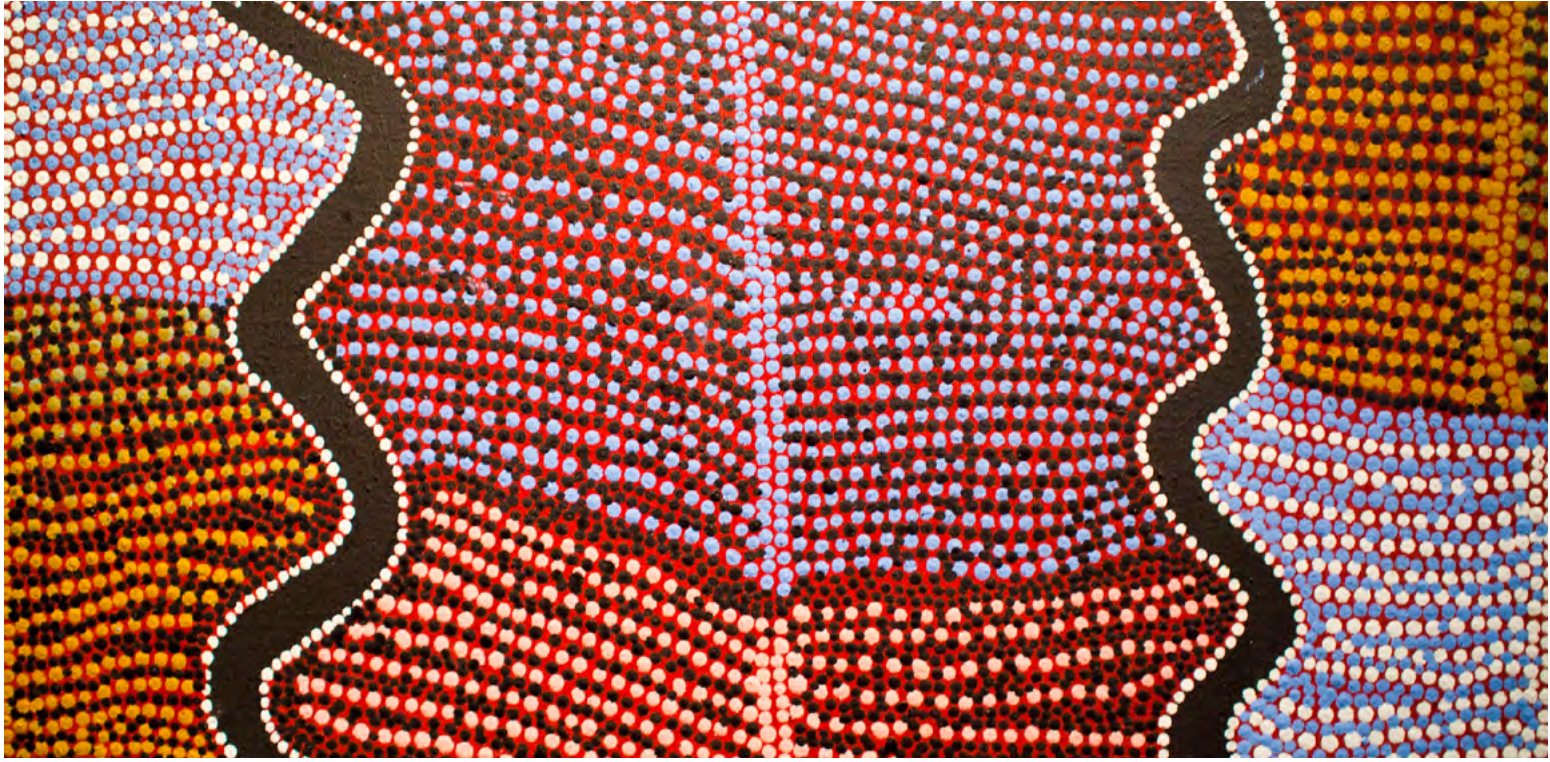
This feedback highlights the significance of authentic dialogue and the need for continued engagement with Indigenous perspectives and experiences within the university community.





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