



Indigenous Student Plan 2023–2027



THE UNIVERSITY OF
MELBOURNE

Acknowledgement

The University of Melbourne acknowledges the Traditional Owners of the unceded land on which we work, learn and live: the Wurundjeri Woi Wurrung and Bunurong peoples (Burnley, Fishermans Bend, Parkville, Southbank and Werribee campuses); the Yorta Yorta Nation (Dookie and Shepparton campuses); and the Dja Dja Wurrung people (Creswick campus).

The University also acknowledges and is grateful to the Traditional Owners, Elders and Knowledge Holders of all Indigenous nations and clans who have been instrumental in our reconciliation journey. We recognise the unique place held by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples as the

original owners and custodians of the lands and waterways across the Australian continent, with histories of continuous connection dating back more than 60,000 years. We also acknowledge their enduring cultural practices of caring for Country.

We pay respect to Elders past, present and future, and acknowledge the importance of Indigenous knowledge in the academy. As a community of researchers, teachers, professional staff and students, we are privileged to work with and learn from Indigenous colleagues and partners every day.

About this plan

The University of Melbourne's Indigenous Student Plan 2023–2027 (ISP) is the key mechanism for delivering on our commitment to fulfilling Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples' educational goals and aspirations. Enhancing the recruitment, retention, success and completions of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students is central to our work.

This Plan will progress the following projects and initiatives in support of our key priorities around Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander student participation:

- number of Indigenous students to reach 1000 by 2029
- undergraduate to graduate student ratio to be equal for Indigenous and non-Indigenous students by 2025
- undergraduate success ratio of 1 between Indigenous and non-Indigenous students by 2025
- graduate coursework success ratio of 1 between Indigenous and non-Indigenous students by 2025.

These headline targets were developed in recognition of the changing student demographic brought about by the implementation of the Melbourne curriculum, such that our domestic graduate student numbers are roughly equivalent to our domestic undergraduate numbers (50.4% and 49.6% respectively).

Achieving our commitment to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander educational aspirations by meeting these headline targets demands a whole-of-University approach. While our Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander student centres,

such as Murrup Barak and the Wilin Centre, will continue to play a central role in this, responsibility for student outcomes must be shared across the University, backed by senior leadership and accompanied by appropriate staffing and resources.

The *Indigenous Student Plan 2023–2027* will be adopted and implemented across all faculties and divisions and clearly articulated in Divisional Indigenous Development Plans. It outlines key priorities, focus areas and actions that will enable the University to create and sustain a culture of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander academic participation, fulfilment and excellence.

The Plan reaffirms the University's commitment to academic excellence and respect for all, and is supported by a range of internal and external documents, including:

- Advancing Melbourne
- Murmuk Djerring, Indigenous Strategy 2023–2027
- Indigenous Internationalisation Plan 2020–2024
- Indigenous Research Framework 2023–2027
- Advancing Students and Education Strategy 2023–2030
- Diversity and Inclusion Strategy 2030
- Universities Australia's Indigenous Strategy 2022–2025

Purpose

Our purpose is to empower Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students to succeed in a safe, welcoming and respectful environment. We position students at the heart of everything we do, offering them a transformational educational experience. We aim to provide pathways to study, responsive and appropriate academic and enrichment programs, and enhanced financial and wellbeing support.

Additionally, we will increase student engagement with global opportunities via the [Indigenous Internationalisation Plan 2020–2024](#), and its successor, and advance research opportunities and pathways into academic work via the [Indigenous Research Framework 2023–2027](#).

All of these activities will provide Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students with access to enrichment opportunities, global mobility, pathways into higher degrees, academic employment and industry engagement. This rich, supportive student experience will equip them to flourish both in their academic pursuits, and in their personal and professional lives.

Governance and implementation

The Indigenous Student Plan is jointly overseen by the Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Indigenous) and the Executive Director of Student and Scholarly Services. They will:

- develop and oversee a staged and coordinated implementation plan in conjunction with initiatives and programs linked to [Murmuk Djerring, Advancing Students and Education Strategy](#), the new [Narrm Scholarship Program](#) and faculty Divisional Indigenous Development Plans.
- collaborate with other areas of the University, including existing student recruitment, scholarship and support programs, to further the goals of the Plan.
- work with key teaching and learning leadership forums across the University to build visibility, momentum and support through the convening function of (among others): the Committee of Associate Deans (Teaching and Learning), the Committee of Associate Deans (Research), and the Committee of Associate Deans and Delegates (Indigenous).
- review progress and implementation of the Plan annually and jointly report to the Indigenous Strategy Reference Group, University Executive, and University Council.

Focus areas and initiatives

There are three key focus areas – each described in more detail over the following pages – that are essential to achieving our purpose and the goals of this Plan.

1. Student wellbeing

We will commit to identifying and dismantling the structural inequalities embedded in all aspects of our current and future practice to provide services that give Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students a sense of belonging, recognising that our practice can exacerbate the colonial load placed on these students. The Indigenous Cultural Education program and [Anti-Racism Action Plan](#) will be central to enhancing student wellbeing and ensuring a sense of belonging.

2. Student experience

We will intensify our commitment to an exceptional student experience that begins with future students and continues beyond graduation.

3. Graduate pathways

We will strengthen the articulation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students into graduate coursework and graduate research programs and enhance the scope of PhD familiarisation programs.

Focus Area 1: Student wellbeing

A safe space for cultural expression is essential for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and critical to wellbeing. [Murrup Barak](#) on the Parkville campus is the central place for students to engage with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff who have expertise in providing safe spaces, along with the [Wilin Centre](#) at the Southbank campus. Students engage with cultural workshops, connect with peers and seek advocacy from staff who understand the colonial load often placed upon them.

While spaces like [Murrup Barak](#) and the [Wilin Centre](#) are vital to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander student support, the responsibility for culturally safe spaces must be shared more equitably across the University. Enhancing the capability of staff to engage fully with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander programs will be integral to creating spaces that are free of racism and nurture a sense of belonging.

We have been explicit in our response to addressing racism as a major barrier to students' success and are committed to the University's anti-racism action plan. There is a need

to acknowledge the emotional labour toll of those with lived experience of racism, which the University has previously struggled to deal with effectively.

Systemic issues that disproportionately impact Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students will be identified in consultation with those communities, and addressed through our anti-racism work so we can fulfil our ambitious aspirations for Indigenous student participation.

PRIORITY 1

Provide a culturally safe and supportive environment where our Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students can thrive

Support the University-wide roll-out of the Indigenous Cultural Education/Anti-Racism Training programs for all staff and students. This includes applying a holistic anti-racism approach in all our language and practices.

Ensure staff in leadership positions are equipped with the knowledge, skills and capacity to drive systemic change, along with Key Performance Indicators to guarantee accountability.

Recruit and retain more Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander mental health and wellbeing practitioners for students and invest in bespoke student counselling and support programs.

Foster a greater sense of belonging among Indigenous students by:

- accelerating plans for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander student spaces in the student precinct, including a permanent home for [Murrup Barak](#)
- investing in cultural programs that foster a sense of belonging and reinforce the value of expressing Indigenous culture and identity (e.g. on Country experiences, language programs, Indigenous creative arts, etc.)
- strengthening Indigenous student leadership and participation in University decision making.

Focus Area 2: Student experience

We are committed to improving Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander access to the University so that we attract talented people, nurture ambition and support great performance. We will do this via tailored student support, assistance with accommodation, expanded scholarship offerings, and opportunities to participate in enrichment experiences that cultivate an environment in which Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students can thrive.

The strong commitments we have made to anti-racism and cultural education at the University will increase the ability of staff to engage confidently with those Indigenous programs working towards an exceptional Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander student experience. In this endeavour, we consider the entire student experience, as illustrated in Figure 1.

2.1 Outreach and access

We will consult First Peoples to understand where our outreach and access efforts have fallen short in the past and use this knowledge to inform our future efforts. We will focus our outreach efforts, including creating strong links to a range of supports, both locally and interstate so that all students have the best support network they need to succeed, and are well prepared for student life at the University of Melbourne.

By deepening our existing partnerships with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities we can continue to provide a solid foundation for future students. This includes preparation through camps, orientation activities and open days, an understanding of the support programs available, introducing accommodation options, and including family members in the process.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students relocating from interstate, regional and remote areas can be adversely affected by additional barriers to success. We will provide these students with a strong support network both on campus and with the wider Narmm community, and encourage engagement with family, thereby positioning students for success at the University. We will also promote options for relocation and accommodation and specific financial support available through the new [Narmm Scholarship Program](#) and other channels. Ensuring access to a supportive environment is key to a thriving student experience.

[Murrup Barak](#) and the [Wilin Centre](#) continue to play an important role in engaging future Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students nationally. We will coordinate deeper collaboration with all access points across the University.

PRIORITY 2.1

Increase the number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students succeeding across all faculties and levels

Build on existing outreach programs to strengthen our engagement with both the school sector and the community sector to best prepare future students for tertiary study.

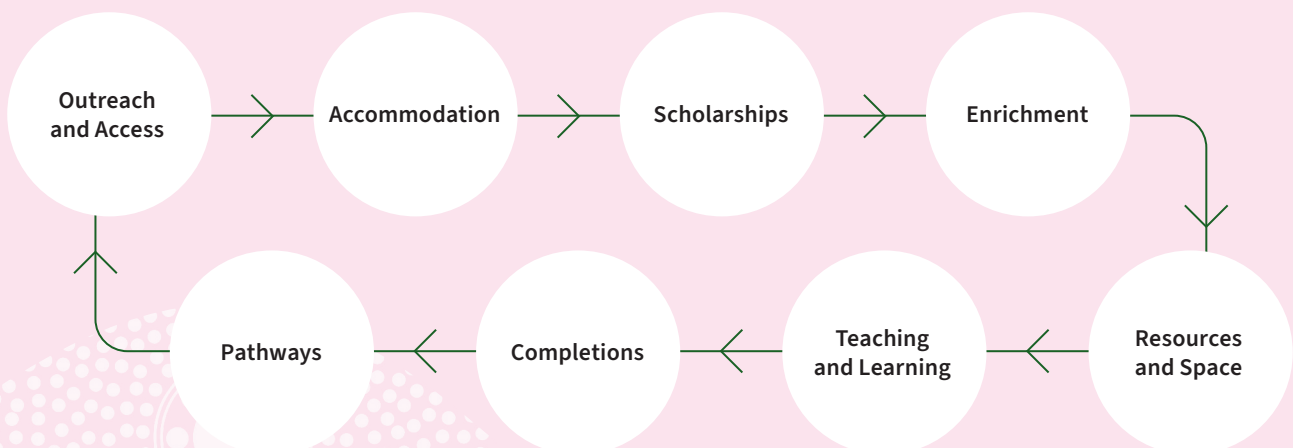
Develop scalable approaches to undergraduate recruitment and selection, moving beyond relying solely on ATAR scores, in collaboration with the Widening Participation team.

Collaborate with the Widening Participation team and Student and Scholarly Services to refine and articulate the [Narmm Scholarship](#) offer clearly and consistently across all faculties and to future students.

2.2 Pathways

We recognise that an ATAR score alone does not reflect the academic potential of prospective students. We will adopt an approach that is conducive for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander applicants based on our consultation with them, acknowledging that existing practices do not always take into account an individual's educational experience or likelihood of success.

Figure 1: Interconnected elements of the student experience



We will develop strong external relationships to build the pipeline of undergraduate students aspiring to study at the University of Melbourne.

Our outreach and engagement with future students will aim to attract a diverse range of students, including non-school leavers whose education and experience will demonstrate a likelihood to succeed in a University of Melbourne degree.

PRIORITY 2.2

Develop and promote alternative entry pathways

Develop strong external partnerships to build trustful relationships, and a pipeline of talented students.

Through the implementation of the [Advancing Students and Education Strategy](#), develop scalable approaches to the selection of undergraduate students that move beyond relying solely on ATAR.

Implement processes that attract non-ATAR applicants to the University through Registered Training Organisations, including a review of [Access Melbourne](#) funding for pathway applicants.

2.3 Accommodation and scholarships

The practical and financial implications of leaving home and moving to Melbourne are significant barriers for many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students. And as the housing crisis continues to play out, there is an increased need to offer all students suitable accommodation and scholarship options.

Many students seek to reside at residential colleges and University accommodation, but as not all of them have the financial resources for this they are often heavily dependent on government support and scholarships. Eligibility for ABSTUDY is not guaranteed for all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students and the need to secure accommodation well before receiving any income guarantee can create uncertainty and stress for students and their families.

We will collaborate with the new [Narrm Scholarship Program](#) and other existing scholarship programs to ensure our outreach and engagement activities empower future Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students in their decision-making at the time that course offers are released.

We will create and promote accommodation and scholarship offers that are clear, attractive and competitive, and that coincide with a strong Melbourne offer for both undergraduate and graduate students.

We will work with colleges and affiliated residential advisors to formalise accommodation and scholarship guarantees alongside course offers regardless of students' socio-economic status, age or educational background.

PRIORITY 2.3

Address financial and accommodation barriers to higher education facing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students

Establish suitable and competitive accommodation offers that coincide with course offers and are attached to a [Narrm Scholarship](#) or other scholarship offer for students from interstate, regional and remote areas.

Expand scholarship support and incentives to encourage future graduate and research students, in alignment with the Widening Participation graduate access pathways and packages and Chancellery Research and Enterprise initiatives.

Collaborate across all access points of the University to ensure unified communications to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students seeking accommodation and scholarship support.

2.4 Enrichment

We will consult with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities so that we can better understand how to provide an enriching student experience through access to a range of opportunities across the University. As well as academic support, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students will have a richer experience by engaging in cultural activities, leadership programs, international opportunities, and work experience.

Access to enrichment opportunities will be culturally accessible, have purpose with coordination across the University, and be developed in collaboration with the new [Narrm Scholarship Program's](#) enrichment activities.

PRIORITY 2.4

Provide Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students with a broad range of enrichment opportunities

Create a formalised mechanism for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students to participate in decision making.

Invest in a broader offering of cohort experiences for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students to expand their professional development and leadership opportunities.

Increase the number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students engaging in Study Abroad and other international experiences.

Ensure that all staff administering and delivering enrichment opportunities for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students participate in the University anti-racism training.

2.5 Resources and space

We will commit dedicated operational funding to ensure the stability of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander student support teams and their on-campus space to reduce reliance on external funding such as the Commonwealth Indigenous Student Support Program (ISSP).

By securing dedicated operational funding, sources like ISSP can be used as intended – as top-up funding – and be directed toward expanding academic support, health and wellbeing initiatives, cultural engagement, and other enrichment programs.

We will prioritise the location of Murrup Barak on the Parkville campus to ensure Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students remain at the heart of the student precinct. Access to safe spaces and a sense of belonging are crucial for an exceptional Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander student experience. This is demonstrated not only through Murrup Barak but also at the Wilin Centre, Poche, and the Atlantic Fellows for Social Equity program. Responsibility for creating safe spaces extends beyond Murrup Barak and the Wilin Centre to the entire institution. We will engage with faculties to ensure that creating safe and welcome spaces for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students is an institutional priority.

PRIORITY 2.5

Ensure our campuses are safe and welcoming places for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students

Ensure Murrup Barak and the Wilin Centre are adequately resourced to provide outstanding academic support, health and wellbeing initiatives, cultural engagement and enrichment activities.

Expedite the presence of Murrup Barak in the student precinct, both in the short term and in the establishment of a permanent home.

Provide more opportunities for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students to participate in the design of built and natural environments on campus.

Provide opportunities for students to participate in work around the naming/re-naming of buildings and matters related to culturally appropriate signage on campus.

2.6 Retention, success and completions

Recognising the need to increase parity in undergraduate and graduate success rates, we will invest in mechanisms that better support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander student retention, success and completions. In 2020 we celebrated a milestone of 1000 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander graduates, a number that grew to more than 1400 by 2023.

To provide an exceptional student experience and strengthen completions we will increase investment in our academic supports across the University. The Indigenous Tutorial Assistance Scheme (ITAS), for example, engages with around a quarter of our Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, and is a key support strategy to increasing their success and completion rates. A greater investment in ITAS will ensure a strengthening of this support and engagement with more students.

Retention relies on academic engagement in spaces that are free from racism. The University's anti-racism training for staff will contribute to building and maintaining safe learning spaces across our campuses and throughout all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander support services.

PRIORITY 2.6

Improve Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander student retention, success and completions

Audit the current targeted academic supports for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students to ensure strong and consistent investment in academic support across faculties and schools, and through the ITAS program.

Incorporate anti-racism training into the suite of programs that all staff must complete as employees to reduce the onus for this work falling on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff and to share the load more equitably across the University.

Establish an alumni project to raise awareness of our Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander graduates among current students, connect them with alumni in related disciplines, and support a flourishing alumni community.

Focus Area 3: Graduate pathways

Building future generations of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander scholars, researchers and leading professionals is a key priority. We are committed to strengthening our already excellent graduate student outcomes and remaining a key destination for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Higher Degree by Research (HDR) and Coursework (HDCW) students.

We will further the collaborations that our faculties and schools have with student support services to ensure that the recruitment and nurturing of Indigenous graduate students across all disciplines is properly resourced. Frontline, specialist Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff are key to providing information about HDR/HDCW pathways and recruitment, including through [Murrup Barak](#), [Wilin Centre](#) and [Poche](#).

We will build on the success of specialised PhD familiarisation programs and other strategies to raise HDR/HDCW aspirations and grow the number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander researchers across all faculties. We will provide students with ample opportunities to engage with a diversity of professional workplaces to open doors for further research and employment.

PRIORITY 3.1

Increase the numbers and success outcomes of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students in graduate programs

Work with faculties to develop an Indigenous graduate student recruitment and support strategy and ensure HDR/HDCW recruitment targets are incorporated in faculty Divisional Indigenous Development Plans.

With Chancellery Research and Enterprise, review PhD financial support and the feasibility of a PhD package that includes pathways to academic employment at the University and expands PhD familiarisation programs across a range of discipline areas.

Ensure all staff in supervisory and mentoring roles participate in cultural education and anti-racism education programs.

Provide a range of graduate entry pathways and lifelong learning opportunities, for example, the Professional Certificate in Indigenous Research and the Graduate Certificate in Indigenous Research and Leadership programs and the pathways opportunities they provide.

PRIORITY 3.2

Prepare students for a range of post-study employment pathways

Provide excellent, contextualised and relevant career advice to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students.

Expand access to internship experiences and work-integrated learning opportunities.

Draw on the University's convening power and alumni network to connect students to a range of post-study employment pathways.



About the Artist and the Artwork

Samantha Richards is a proud Indigenous woman from the Wurundjeri and Dja Dja Wurrung Tribes. The artwork featured here, *Murmuk Djerring – Working Together*, depicts the layers of the land, and the generations of peoples who have lived on this land, and the rich cultures and history that lie under their feet. It is where all the pieces of the puzzle connect, and by working together how we can strive for a future of positive change.