

FIRST NATIONS EDUCATION & STUDENT SUCCESS STRATEGY

2024 - 2028



OFFICE OF
INDIGENOUS
ENGAGEMENT

CONTENTS

FOREWORD	3
INTRODUCTION	5
OVERVIEW	5
IMPLEMENTATION	5
CQU AS A LEARNING ORGANISATION: APPLYING MULTI-LAYERED GEARING	6
CQU INSTITUTIONAL ENVIRONMENT	6
Figure 1: The Learning Institution: Applying Action Learning and Action Research	6
SCHOOL OF ACCESS EDUCATION	7
STUDENT SUCCESS DIVISION	7
PATHWAYS PROGRAMS	7
INDIGENOUS STUDENT ENGAGEMENT	7
SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL WELLBEING	8
OFFICE OF INDIGENOUS ENGAGEMENT	8
EMBEDDING WITHIN DIVISIONAL PLANS AND CQUNIVERSITY STRATEGIC PLAN 2024-2028	8
GOVERNANCE	8
FIRST NATIONS SUCCESS STRATEGIES COMMITTEE	8
LEARNING AND TEACHING SUB-COMMITTEE	8
Table 1: Learning and Teaching Sub-Committee	9
CONTEXT BEHIND THE FIRST NATIONS EDUCATION & STUDENT SUCCESS STRATEGY 2024-2028	11
OUR PERFORMANCE 2013-2023	12
Table 2: CQU Indigenous enrolments and completions (all HE courses)	12
Table 3: CQU Indigenous enrolments and completions (all VET courses)	12
PERFORMANCE: HE AND VET (ALL COURSES)	12-13
HE (ALL COURSES)	13
VET (ALL COURSES)	13
DEFINING VET COMPLETIONS	13
ANALYSIS	13
OUR COMMITMENT TO IMPROVING FIRST NATIONS STUDENT SUCCESS AT CQUNIVERSITY	14
STRENGTHENING THE PARADIGM	14
Table 4: Universities Australia six strategic responses	14
PURSUING A STRENGTHENED FRAMEWORK	14-15
Table 5: Summary of key elements	15
IMPROVEMENT THROUGH ACTION LEARNING AND ACTION RESEARCH	15
Figure 2: Framework for Strengthening First Nations Student Performance across CQU	15
1. STRENGTHENED DATA CAPTURE AND APPLICATION	16
2. STRENGTHENED PATHWAYS AND STUDENT SUPPORT	17
3. STRENGTHENED COURSE AND UNIT DESIGN	18
4. STRENGTHENED TEACHING AND SCHOLARSHIP	19-20
SCHOLARSHIP OF TEACHING AND LEARNING	19
PEDAGOGY	19
5. STRENGTHENED PERFORMANCE TARGETS	20-21
ENROLMENTS AND COMPLETIONS (ALL HE COURSES)	21
Table 6: Indigenous completions by course level, 2023 (all schools)	21
Table 7: Indigenous completions by school level, 2023 and target completions 2028	21
ENROLMENTS AND COMPLETIONS (ALL VET COURSES)	22
Table 8: Indigenous completions by school level, 2023 and target completions 2028	22
Table 9: Indigenous completions by school level, 2023 and target completions 2028	22
Table 10: Indigenous completions by school level, 2023 and target completions 2028	23
Table 11: Indigenous completions by school level, 2023 and target completions 2028	23
Table 12: Indigenous completions by school level, 2023 and target completions 2028	23
Table 13: Indigenous completions by school level, 2023 and target completions 2028	25
Table 14: Indigenous completions by school level, 2023 and target completions 2028	25
LIST OF TERMS AND ACRONYMS	26
RELATED LEGISLATION AND DOCUMENTS	26
REFERENCES	27
CONSULTATIONS	28
APPENDIX 1 - OUR CQUNIVERSITY PERFORMANCE	29
APPENDIX 2 - UNIVERSITIES AUSTRALIA FOCUS AREAS AND ACTIONS	33
APPROVAL AND REVIEW DETAILS	35



Billabong Camp

COVER ARTWORK

Billabong Camp depicts time-worn tracks that lead to a shady place of water, where clans gather under paperbark trees after a long, hot journey. The design places people at its centre, referencing students, researchers, people and community. Tracks to a place by water and paperbark trees symbolises the energising, holistic values of the learning journey.

The motifs depict people, tracks and meeting places; a story that relates to each individual, on a journey that holds limitless pathways of learning, growth and connection.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF COUNTRY

We respectfully acknowledge the Traditional Custodians of the lands on which we work and learn. We pay respect to the First Nations Peoples and their Elders, past, present and emerging for they hold the memories, the traditions, the culture and hopes of Indigenous Australians. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and communities are also respectfully referred to within this Strategy as Indigenous Australians, First Australians and First Nations Peoples. Further, we acknowledge the unceded land, sea, and waterways of First Nations people; the sovereignty of First Nation peoples; the detrimental impacts invasion/colonisation have had and is having on First Nations peoples; and we acknowledge First Nations Self-Determination. This land is and will always be Aboriginal land.



FOREWORD FROM THE DEPUTY VICE-PRESIDENT OF INDIGENOUS ENGAGEMENT

I am pleased to endorse the First Nations Education and Student Success Strategy 2024-2028. This strategy has been developed in response to CQUniversity's long-term pattern of low completion rates for First Nations students across higher education and vocational education and training courses. Since 2013 there has been a strong increase in First Nations student enrolments across CQUniversity courses, signalling that more than ever our Indigenous communities are wanting to engage with the tertiary education and training sector. Unfortunately, as the performance data sadly shows, the overwhelming majority do not complete their chosen course. This has a profound and negative impact on our students, their families and communities because with every drop in retention the wounds of failure run deep and adds to a perception that tertiary education is unattainable. It is an outcome that also reflects poorly upon CQUniversity, as it does more broadly across the sector.

The Australian Universities Accord final report 2024 makes clear that in order to overcome this entrenched pattern, new paradigms are needed that shift our understanding in respect to how this is problematised in ways that can levitate students from this condition. The First Nations Education and Student Success Strategy 2024-2028 responds to this call.

“First Nations students experience structural inequality at the intersections of wealth and racial identity, producing multiple barriers to engaging with the tertiary sector. While many of these barriers are external to CQUniversity, this strategy provides guidance to strengthening the internal systems design elements.”



INTRODUCTION

The First Nations Education and Student Success Strategy 2024-2028 has emerged as a result of the long-term and continuing pattern of First Nations student underperformance across Central Queensland University's (CQU) Higher Education (HE) and Vocational Education and Training (VET). While CQU has layers of strategic plans, policies and frameworks that serve to respond to this pattern, these have had limited impact.

“More needs to be done in increasing the number of students from the equity groups, including First Nations student performance in enrolments, retention and completions to a minimum 13.3% parity by 2035.”

Against this patterned sector problem, the Australian Universities Accord (Final report 2024) makes clear that more needs to be done in increasing the number of students from the equity groups, including First Nations student performance in enrolments, retention and completions to a minimum 13.3% parity or above by 2035.¹ At the core of this is improving the strategic actions designed to achieve these outcomes. This means building new ways of understanding the nature of the problem behind the entrenched, persistent and stubborn pattern of First Nations underperformance at the national level and more specifically at CQU. First Nations students experience structural inequality at the intersections of wealth inequality and racial identity, producing multiple barriers to engaging with the tertiary sector. While many of these barriers are external to CQU, this strategy provides guidance to strengthening the internal systems design response elements.

OVERVIEW

The pattern for CQU since 2013 has been one where the vast majority of First Nations students do not complete their chosen VET or HE course, on average being close to 80% non-completions. While there are external variables to this pattern, the severity of this under-performance implicates that more needs to be done in respect to internal institutional responses. To do this means a move away from the existing paradigm and it's underlying organisational consciousness from which this dynamic has been complicit. What currently exists reflects a tertiary sector that has oriented to industry demands through increased regulatory forces to the delivery of generic course offerings, delivered against escalating tensions that include substantial teaching loads and the associated work demands. Simply put, the present sector trajectory will likely continue to place

downward pressure on CQU and its capacity to respond to the needs of First Nations students and those from identified equity groups.

Against these pressures an altered paradigm needs to avoid an increased tiering and service cost across the university, and it needs to be designed in ways that strengthen the balance between the systemic levers that enable teaching staff to be better supported at the interface of service delivery. For this strategy an altered paradigm is one that is based on the teaching and learning exchange and its location within the strategic layers of Equity and Retention. This strategy pursues a paradigm shift in the way the teaching/learning exchange is problematised, locating it as the pivotal exchange within CQU's service delivery. This design tension is reflected in the Australian Universities Accord-final report (2024) focus on establishing an Australian Tertiary Education Commission, which includes amongst its future charter a focus on increasing the quality of the tertiary education workforce. The First Nations Education and Student Success Strategy 2024-2028 responds to this call through offering a roadmap to this goal, which commences with an outline of how it is implemented.

IMPLEMENTATION

A core determinant to successfully implementing the First Nations Education and Student Success Strategy 2024-2028 concerns the processes by which it is embedded across the university, particularly in ways that enables progressive and sustained improvements to First Nations student performance. It is important to note from the onset that this strategy does not centrally problematise other actions within the CQU's Reconciliation Action Plan (RAP). This approach is taken on the basis this strategy is focused on the systems design elements concerning the intersections of Teaching and Learning, where student success and related attrition are increased or decreased.

This approach reflects the Australian primary and secondary education sectors, which focus extensively on the quality of the teacher-learner exchange and the layers of organisational leadership, staff professional development and resource distribution that strategically builds this capacity. This national policy trajectory has accelerated since 2008, based on a variety of research evidence, in particular international meta-data analysis by researchers including Hattie (2003), who highlighted this pivotal exchange as the main variable to improving student learning success and engagement with education. It is notable that unlike the primary and secondary sectors, the tertiary sector does not have national standards for teaching and in this absence attention to a defining metric by which to evaluate this exchange is a significant tension to this Strategy's implementation.

¹ Refer to 5.4 performance targets.

Strengthening the teacher-learner exchange is further achieved through this strategy's embodiment within the university's strategic leadership, which builds capacity through operationalising this Strategy across all levels. Central to this is to ensure it is located within existing strategic actions, and as reflected in ongoing professional conversations, staff and school/college performance reviews and forward planning.

At the core of this are five key actions including:

- (i) Strengthened data collection and application
- (ii) Strengthened pathways and student support
- (iii) Strengthened course and unit design
- (iv) Strengthened teaching and scholarship, and
- (v) Strengthened performance targets.

These elements require a seating within an institution-wide reflective practice model and are highlighted in Figure 2: A Framework for Strengthening First Nations Student Performance across CQU: Improvement through action learning and action research.

CQU AS A LEARNING ORGANISATION: APPLYING MULTI-LAYERED GEARING

A key narrative of the First Nations Education and Student Success Strategy 2024-2028 is that the patterned performance of First Nations students (reflected in the data) in part reflects the patterned performance of internal responses. This is particularly around key design elements of the teaching/learning exchange and how these are synchronised within an action learning and research model. The Learning Organisation recognises the organisation has systems and procedures in place which assists it in learning about its problems and mistakes, and importantly these are linked and operationalised within existing communication structures (Lawler & Sillitoe, 2013). One implication for

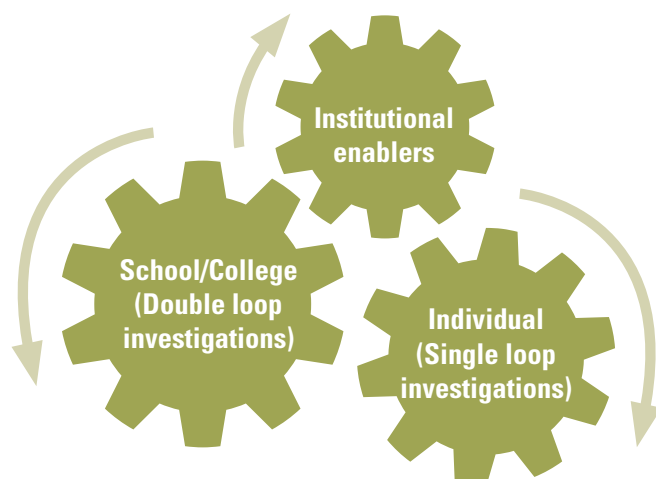
CQU is that this strategy is not a one-off, but embedded within a cycle of continuous assessment, evaluation and future actions. A second implication is that all staff are involved in the process. At the individual learning level, reflective practice involves 'single-loop' learning where incremental changes are made, extending to 'double-loop' learning which involves the broader group of staff, for example at the school, college and institutional levels.

Of significance, double-loop learning asks questions of the systems processes themselves (Lawler & Sillitoe, 2013). Figure 1 highlights the synchronised gearing required across the three layers that are essential to examining the internal design properties of CQU that the First Nations Education and Student Success Strategy 2024-2028 draws attention.

CQU INSTITUTIONAL ENVIRONMENT

A geared institutional environment provides a legitimising and geared foundation to the First Nations Education and Student Success Strategy 2024-2028. In this regard CQU's RAP paradigm location within Belonging Education commits to institutional development, which provides increased structural legitimacy and systems coherency to the day to day practice of Inclusive Education. Inclusion is a choice (individuals decide whether to include someone or not) but belonging is a feeling that can be enforced by a culture that can be purposefully created (Sands, 2019). The need to belong has long and arguably been identified as a fundamental human motivation, taking priority in human need over self-esteem and self actualisation (Baumeister & Leary, 1995; Sands, 2019). For First Nations students whose families have been excluded and othered for generations, a sense of belonging at school and within the broader education system arguably becomes an even more significant issue in the context of deepened educational stratification (Daniels-Mayes, Fry & Sinclair, 2022).

FIGURE 1: THE LEARNING INSTITUTION: APPLYING ACTION LEARNING AND ACTION RESEARCH



The CQU RAP key performance indicators (KPIs) which are overlaid across the institution, particularly the Tertiary Education Division (TED) in respect to teaching, learning and curriculum change, strengthens implementation of this strategy through the systemic levers and enculturation practices under development across all levels of the university. These include the two key teaching and learning guides: First Nations Curriculum Framework (September 2023) and First Nations Cultural Competency Framework 2023-2028.

Alongside CQU's RAP, key service supports include the School of Access Education, Student Success Division and the Office of Indigenous Engagement.

SCHOOL OF ACCESS EDUCATION

The School of Access Education has a strong commitment to social justice and the provision of opportunities that foster greater social inclusion in Higher Education. The school provides pathway courses for prospective students to access award courses and provides academic learning support services to VET, undergraduate and postgraduate coursework students seeking assistance. A key pathways program is the Skills for Tertiary Education Preparatory Studies (STEPS), an Enabling course that provides a pathway for students to enter university HE studies. Students enrolled in STEPS are provided ongoing support through and after completion, which extends to when transitioning into their respective chosen undergraduate courses. This support includes access to a large selection of micro-credential courses, follow up sessions and multiple other areas covered by the Academic Learning Centre.

STUDENT SUCCESS DIVISION

A design feature of the First Nations Education and Student Success Strategy 2024-2028 is also its alignment with the Student Success Division, in particular CQU's developing Retention Equity Program and Student Engagement, including the Equity and Success Framework. These initiatives, once finalised and implemented, will provide a heightened capacity for the embedding of this Strategy. In addition, three service supports that target First Nations students include Pathways Programs, Indigenous Student Engagement and Social and Emotional Wellbeing.

PATHWAYS PROGRAMS

Through the Student Success Division CQU offers two main pathways programs that target all students, while still in school. These include Start TAFE Now (STN) and Start Uni Now (SUN). The STN program caters for Years 10, 11 and 12 high school students and provides the opportunity to commence their studies across a diverse selection of VET courses

that contribute towards their Queensland Certificate of Education (QCE). This program offers students the opportunity to gain real trade skills and qualifications while still completing high school. Students completing this program may be eligible to study a fee-free course funded by the Queensland Government under the VET in Schools (VETiS) program. Qualifications that are not funded under the VETiS program are available to study as a full-free paying course.

The SUN program also targets students in Years 10-12, and offers the opportunity to combine their senior school study with university-level study. Students are able to select from a range of units from CQU bachelor degrees, gain an authentic insight into university life, and start university early. Students may be eligible for direct entry into their chosen course and credit towards their degree after completing selected SUN units. Students enrolled in the SUN program do not receive direct funding support but can complete the first unit for free with subsequent units offered at significant discounted costs.

The Student Success Division further offers targeted support for First Nations students enrolled at CQU through the Indigenous Student Engagement team and the Social Emotional Wellbeing team.

INDIGENOUS STUDENT ENGAGEMENT

The Indigenous Student Engagement team provides support to Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander students at CQU. The Indigenous student engagement team provides advice about services on offer to Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander students, including free tutoring support, financial guidance, cultural advocacy, safe learning support, basic course information, and more. Indigenous student engagement staff are located at the Cairns, Townsville, Mackay, Rockhampton and Bundaberg campuses. The Indigenous student engagement team draws attention to the need for strengthened tracking of First Nations students and is pivotal to early intervention responses for those struggling with their studies.

The Indigenous Student Engagement also delivers the 'Dare to be Deadly' (D2BD) Student Journey, being a culturally safe case management program that engages with First Nations students online and on campuses. This program focuses on connecting with students prior to enrolment and ongoing engagements from enrolment to graduation, ensuring students are prepared for studies and to build awareness of the student services and supports available.

The Indigenous Student Engagement team is a vital link to teaching staff in First Nations student support and intervention.

SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL WELLBEING

The Social and Emotional Wellbeing (SEWB) service provides culturally safe, culturally sensitive and culturally informed counselling and wrap around supports and services for First Nations Students.

Underpinning the SEWB approach is the understanding of the relationships an Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander person has between individuals, family, kin, and community, with a focus on connection to mind and emotions, body and behaviours and to land, culture, spirituality, and ancestry (Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet [PM&C], 2017).

Service offerings, based on the SEWB Framework (PM&C 2017; Gee et al. 2014), which is foundational to First Nations Students success, include weekly Virtual Cuppa and Yarn, Wellbeing packs and Check Ins, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Mental Health First Aid Training, Deadly Thinking Training, Cultural Safe Spaces and Cultural Excursions.

The Social and Emotional Wellbeing team responds to the significantly increased stress and anxiety levels of students undertaking tertiary studies, of which Baik et al (2019) highlights how educators and teaching practices influence student wellbeing. Approximately one third (31%) of First Nations students aged 18 years and over experience high or very high levels of psychological stress (ABS, 2018).

The SEWB team is also a vital link to teaching staff in First Nations student support and intervention.

OFFICE OF INDIGENOUS ENGAGEMENT

The RAP 2024-2028 commits CQU to working alongside, with, and through the First Nations community to respond to the inequality that is experienced by First Nations students and staff at the intersections of racial identity and wealth inequality. The Office of Indigenous Engagement (OIE) is part of the University's Research Division, and provides CQU staff, students and stakeholders nation-wide with strategic direction and practical information, providing active tools to initiate and sustain mutually beneficial relationships with First Nations peoples. The OIE team approaches engagement, research and policy-making in an innovative way, balancing support, education and economic opportunities for First Nations peoples and their communities. The OIE walks alongside CQU staff in building knowledge and skills capacities in First Nations Ways of Being, Knowing and Doing, and the translation of these foundations to increased First Nations course completions.

EMBEDDING WITHIN DIVISIONAL PLANS AND CQUNIVERSITY STRATEGIC PLAN 2024-2028

GOVERNANCE

The First Nations Education and Student Success Strategy 2024-2028 aligns with the CQU Strategic Plan 2024-2028, Strategic Partnerships - First Nations Commitment: 3.1 First Nations Voice and 3.2 First Nations Success. Accordingly, this strategy needs to be seated across CQU's Divisions, particularly the Tertiary Education Division. A strategic enabler to this is the formation of a governance component that is factored into existing operations. This governance includes the First Nations Success Strategies Committee and a Learning and Teaching Sub-Committee.

FIRST NATIONS SUCCESS STRATEGIES COMMITTEE

The First Nations Success Strategies Committee (FNSSC) was established in 2020 to provide oversight of CQU's programs and strategies relating to Indigenous student support, education and employment. A key function and responsibility includes the monitoring and reviewing of the progress on the First Nations Workforce Strategy and First Nations Education and Student Success Strategy (2024-2028) actions and outcomes. The FNSSC is an important conduit to CQU's senior level governance through the Deputy Vice-President Indigenous Engagement. Based on this the FNSSC will maintain a presence in the governance committee, as reflected in Table 1: Learning and Teaching Sub-Committee.

LEARNING AND TEACHING SUB-COMMITTEE

A key governance challenge in locating this strategy within a broader university Teaching and Learning strategy is that one does not currently exist. There is a Learning and Teaching Framework (2010) that has undergone various editorial updates to the present, however, is limited in the articulation of how the Teaching and Learning exchange is strategically applied. Given this absence of a whole of university strategy and policy, the First Nations Education and Student Success Strategy 2024-2028 will necessarily be located within a broadened whole of university strategic approach. This will ensure a net relevance to a broadened non-Indigenous student cohort.

To ensure the First Nations Education and Student



Success Strategy 2024-2028 is operationalised as part of core business, it needs to be embedded within the Tertiary Education Division (TED) governance and reporting structure. This means inclusion within TED divisional plans and school operational plans, with reporting via the Tertiary Education Advisory Committee (TEAC) and six-monthly progress reports to the First Nations Student Success Committee (FNSSC).

A Learning and Teaching sub-committee is required at the TED level to ensure ownership and governance is established and shared across each of the six schools, associated colleges and VET. A key function of this sub-committee will be to bring greater nuanced attention to First Nations student performance across HE and VET.

This sub-committee will be guided by the key elements highlighted in Figure 1: Strengthening First Nation student performance through an action learning and

research model. It will be the responsibility of the Learning and Teaching sub-committee to:

- Meet on a monthly basis to discuss and ensure that this strategy is operationalised (inclusion within existing and regular monthly meetings are recommended); and
- Provide regular progress reports to Deans and TED executive via TEAC.

As highlighted in Table 1, the Learning and Teaching sub-committee needs to reflect VET and each of the HE schools and associated colleges. Levels recommended are at the deputy dean or equivalence. The role of chair is located at the level of Deputy Vice-President Education and Quality, on the basis of this role's direct alignment with the governance of this Strategy. A key outcome of the governance committee is to lead an operationalised voice and response actions to the First Nations Education and Student Success Strategy 2024-2028.

TABLE 1: LEARNING AND TEACHING SUB-COMMITTEE

TERTIARY EDUCATION DIVISION	DEPUTY VICE-PRESIDENT EDUCATION AND QUALITY (CHAIR)
School of Trades	Deputy Dean VET
Student Services	Director Student Engagement
Marketing	Director Global Brand and Marketing
School of Access Education	Deputy Associate Dean Learning & Teaching
School of Business and Law	Deputy Dean Learning & Teaching, Deputy Dean VET
School of Education and the Arts	Deputy Dean Learning & Teaching, Deputy Dean VET
School of Health, Medical and Applied Sciences	Deputy Dean Learning & Teaching, Deputy Dean VET
School of Nursing, Midwifery and Social Sciences	Deputy Dean Learning & Teaching, Deputy Dean VET
School of Engineering and Technology	Deputy Dean Learning & Teaching, Deputy Dean VET
Student Success Division	Senior Coordinator Indigenous Engagement
Office of Indigenous Engagement / FNSSC	Associate Professor of First Nations Studies

*While gains in First Nations student enrolments on a national level are evident, this performance is tempered by issues of parity. While for example completion rates have improved in recent years, the gap is far larger than it is for enrolments. For example, in 2019, nine-year completion rates for Indigenous students were **47 percent**, which is significantly below non-Indigenous students at **74 percent**. In this regard, increases in access are not translating to equivalent growth in course completions.*

(Universities Australia Indigenous Strategy 2022-2025)



CONTEXT BEHIND THE FIRST NATIONS EDUCATION AND STUDENT SUCCESS STRATEGY 2024-2028

The First Nations Education and Student Success Strategy 2024-2028 has emerged as a whole of university response to the continued pattern of First Nations student underperformance across CQUniversity courses. Over the period 2013-2023, increased enrolments show that more than ever Indigenous students are wanting to achieve a VET or HE qualification, of which the vast majority do not complete. While there are a variety of external factors behind this entrenched outcome, such performance patterns are well disproportionate to non-Indigenous performance and point also to internal institutional factors that contribute to this outcome.

It is this anchored dynamic that this strategy draws attention, offering strategic guidance that avoids merely repeating what already exists within existing strategic plans, policies and frameworks, but importantly in problematising what is missing and what current approaches can be done better.

This Strategy takes its place alongside the roadmap for attaining CQU's vision of becoming Australia's most accessible, supportive and engaged university.

To reiterate, this call for increased scrutiny of CQU's strategic approaches to increasing the parity level of First Nations student completion rates is reflected within the Australian Universities Accord (Interim report 2023), which makes clear the national urgency:

To meet our higher education attainment needs, the system will need to rapidly and substantially seek out and include students from historically underrepresented backgrounds. To reach parity, growth in students from underrepresented backgrounds will need to be significantly higher than for other students. The Department of Education's initial analysis of potential enrolment growth to meet a potential attainment target of 55% by 2050, suggests that by 2035, Commonwealth supported enrolments need to increase by 33% compared to 2021. Given the already high levels of participation in some communities, this additional growth in enrolments will need to come from communities that are traditionally underrepresented in higher education. Reaching parity would require around 60% of the additional students in the system to be from low SES backgrounds. Similarly, around 53% would need to be from regional and remote areas, and around 11% would need to be First Nations students. (p. 30-31)

Against this challenge, the Universities Australia Indigenous Strategy Annual Report (June 2023) executive summary highlighted seven key performance findings regarding First Nations students within the sector. These include:

SEVEN KEY PERFORMANCE FINDINGS

- 1 Indigenous student enrolments more than doubled between 2008 and 2021, increasing by 152.6% from 9,490 to 23,967 students, with an annual average growth rate of 7.4%.
- 2 Indigenous student enrolments remain well below Indigenous population parity, representing 2.08% of all domestic enrolments in 2021. Indigenous student enrolment growth has surpassed the rate of growth in non-Indigenous enrolments, particularly in undergraduate enrolments.
- 3 Indigenous students more frequently enrol in courses in society and culture, health, and education, than they do in management and commerce, natural and physical sciences, and engineering.
- 4 Indigenous enrolments in Bachelor degree courses grew by an average of 7.3% per year, while enrolments in postgraduate coursework degrees increased by 9.7% per annum on average over the period.
- 5 Award course completions by Indigenous students have continued to grow, with Bachelor award course completions growing by 127%, postgraduate research course completions by 139% and postgraduate coursework completions by 203% since 2008.
- 6 Bachelor degree completion rates for Indigenous students remain low compared to non-Indigenous students, but nine-year completion rates for Indigenous students have increased over time from 46.5% to 50% for the 2013 cohort.
- 7 Indigenous higher education attainment is growing, in line with increases in participation. In particular, Indigenous Bachelor award course completions grew by 106.4% between 2008 and 2019, postgraduate research course completions rose 121.2% and postgraduate coursework completions rose 146.7%.



OUR PERFORMANCE 2013-2023

Against these sector wide performance findings, CQU's performance is captured in the data sets outlined in Appendix 1.

Tables 2-3 provide First Nations student enrolments and completions for all HE courses and vocational education and training (VET) courses, captured across the period 2013-2023.

TABLE 2: CQU INDIGENOUS ENROLMENTS AND COMPLETIONS (ALL HE COURSES)

Enrolments (#)	425	503	533	642	714	784	875	959	994	978	962
Completions (#)*	20	37	29	54	92	108	131	156	156	152	127
Period	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023

Note*: Completions in any given year reflect the previous 3-4 years of study, being typical of an undergraduate degree.

TABLE 3: CQU INDIGENOUS ENROLMENTS AND COMPLETIONS (ALL VET COURSES)

Enrolments (#)	n.p	192	202	284	480	536	642	742	967	868	1,045
Completions (#)	n.p	47	62	50	101	170	145	168	240	210	176
Period	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023

(CQUniversity Data Smart Report 2023)

PERFORMANCE: HE AND VET (ALL COURSES)

HE (ALL COURSES)

- First Nations student enrolments for all HE courses over the period 2013 to 2023 reveals a more than doubling of enrolments from 425 to 962. This is reflected also in increased growth against all student enrolments from 2.9% in 2013 to 5.7% in 2023.
- Against this enrolment profile, First Nations student completions for all HE courses over the period 2013 to 2023 reveals an increase from 20 completions in

2013 to 127 completions in 2023. Against enrolments this however reflects a lowered completion rate of 1.2% in 2013 to 4.0% in 2023.

While this pattern points to strengthening performance, it does so from the lowest points and reflects a continuing and unacceptably high rate of non-completions across HE courses. For example, the completion rate of 54 students in 2016 reflects enrolments from the previous four years in 2013 when 425 students enrolled (based a four-year degree), suggesting a completion rate of 12.7%. Similarly, 2023 completions of 127 against an original enrolment of 959 students in 2020 suggest a completion rate of 13.2%. Both examples on average indicate an approximate **87%** of First Nations students do not complete their chosen HE course.



VET (ALL COURSES)

- First Nations student enrolments for all VET courses over the period 2014 to 2023 reveals a significant increase from 192 enrolments in 2014 to 1,045 in 2023. This is reflected in a significant increase from 1.7% (rounded) in 2014 to 9.0% in 2023.
- Against this profile, First Nations student completions of 47 in 2014 have increased to 176 completions in 2023. This is reflected in a parity increase from 2.2% in 2014 to 11.3% in 2023.

While this performance points to strengthening performance, it also reflects a continuing and unacceptably high rate of VET course non-completions. With VET enrolments and completions, each can be evaluated within each year. In 2014 (being the year that records commenced) enrolments of 192 and completions of 47 suggest a completion rate of 24.5%. In 2023, enrolments of 1,045 and completions of 176 suggest a completion rate of 16.8%, highlighting that completions have reduced. Both time period examples on average indicate an approximate **79.4%** of First Nations students do not complete their chosen VET course.

DEFINING VET COMPLETIONS

An important filter to this profile is that VET students are predominantly studying part-time, as opposed to HE students who are predominantly full time. This is likely to have a dampening effect on completions. For example, students either don't seek to complete their chosen qualification, even from the start, or they instead are interested in only doing a few Units, not the full award course. In this way the nature and reasons for studying part-time can mitigate against completions.

It is therefore important to define 'completions' when it comes to VET students. The reason for this is also based on the practice that VET completions at CQU are often

discussed and measured with respect to Unit (subject) completions, not full Course completions. This is due to the funding/subsidy mechanism for VET students in Queensland being based on Unit completions, not Course completions. That is, CQU is paid by the government following each Unit completion.

ANALYSIS

The data profile across HE highlights CQU needs to significantly improve First Nations student retention and completion rates. The long-term evidence shows that more and more First Nations students are wanting to engage with CQU, but the overwhelming majority drop out/do not complete their studies within minimum timelines. This is despite the fact all will have met the eligibility criteria to be accepted into their chosen HE course, and by definition possessed the foundational knowledge and skills that enables learning success.

Based on the data sets provided, the pattern for First Nations VET course completions follows the same trajectory as those enrolled in HE. While outlined that there are notable reporting differences to government, this strategy considers VET course completions as this provides a consistent measuring metric alongside HE completions. This includes capacity to evaluating impact; for example, reviewing VET pathways as a 'stepping stone' in recognised prior learning/credit transfer for First Nations students into HE.

In responding to this patterned challenge the following section outlines CQU's commitments against the challenging and multi-faceted barriers behind this lowered performance pattern. The next section outlines the strategic actions that are likely to significantly improve the ongoing patterned performance reflected across the recent decade.

OUR COMMITMENT TO IMPROVING FIRST NATIONS STUDENT SUCCESS AT CQU

STRENGTHENING THE PARADIGM

The impact on First Nations students cannot be understated: when students drop out of their studies, it has a profound impact on their future educational choices and more broadly across First Nations communities. It is a debilitating dynamic and to overcome this deeply embedded outcome the nature of the problem needs to be reviewed. First Nations communities situate at the intersections of racialised inequality and wealth inequality, leading to multiple internal and external barriers to participating in tertiary education. Many of these inequalities are well known and have been for at least the past two decades, for example the Productivity Commission's Overcoming Indigenous Disadvantage Report 2020 identified five key factors, being: (1) previous academic achievement; (2) accessibility issues, including remoteness; (3) racism and cultural insensitivity; (4) lack of culturally appropriate services; and (5) caring and other community responsibilities.

The Universities Australia Indigenous Strategy (2022-2025) highlights six key strategic actions in meeting these challenges, outlined in Table 4.

TABLE 4:

UNIVERSITIES AUSTRALIA SIX STRATEGIC RESPONSES	
1	Recruitment strategies
2	Pursuing improved pathways into university study
3	Student services
4	Establish Institutional working group to enable targeted improvement of completion rates
5	Shared responsibility
6	Performance targets.

While instructive, this guide offered by Universities Australia is vague in its architecture and offers little if any clues to the layers of strategy and how these are operationalised and geared in creating sustainable growth curvatures in First Nations student performance. The task of how to respond to these challenges is complex because responses are tempered by the institutional performance enhancement systems in place, fluctuating funding and resource levels, and ongoing and competing workplace and institutional tensions. In this regard problematising a set of key strategic actions that will likely result in improved First Nations student performance in VET and HE needs to factor in a set of areas for attention that are based on evidence, will not significantly increase resource demands or fuel organisational tiering, and importantly avoid adding to the layered complexity existing across the university.

This means a modelling that is focused on industry best practice that enhances existing approaches and identifies areas of weakness that can be improved upon in ways sustainable.

PURSuing A STRENGTHENED FRAMEWORK

In responding to this need, consultations in late 2023 involving academic staff across the schools confirmed key themes where significant 'gaps' currently exist. From these consultations, which were deepened during consultations in early 2024, the First Nations Education and Student Success Strategy 2024-2028 problematises five key elements:

5 KEY ELEMENTS

1. Strengthened data capture and application;
2. Strengthened pathways and student support;
3. Strengthened course and unit design;
4. Strengthened teaching and scholarship; and
5. Strengthened performance targets.

These elements are summarised in Table 5 and reflected in Figure 2 framework. While the focus is on First Nations students, this model framework is one that all students will benefit from. A key design feature includes an action learning and research design that offers a defined feedback loop through synchronising of the five key elements.



TABLE 5: SUMMARY OF KEY ELEMENTS

1 Strengthened data capture and application
This element is a cornerstone to all system responses. The relevance, accuracy and currency of data provides understanding of the nature of First Nations student performance and the nature of responses required.
2 Strengthened pathways and student support
This element is a cornerstone given pathways need to strengthen, due to a deeply tiered Australian economy and the need for systemic intervention for First Nations students.
3 Strengthened course and unit design
This element is a cornerstone at the core of the university's service product. Embedding First Nations curriculum is a tertiary bedrock to National Reconciliation and Closing The Gap targets.
4 Strengthened teaching and scholarship
This element is a cornerstone to quality assurance measures and at the core of First Nations' student learning success.
5 Strengthened performance targets
This element is a cornerstone to strengthening CQU's accountability and strategic schematic around improved First Nations' student completion rates.

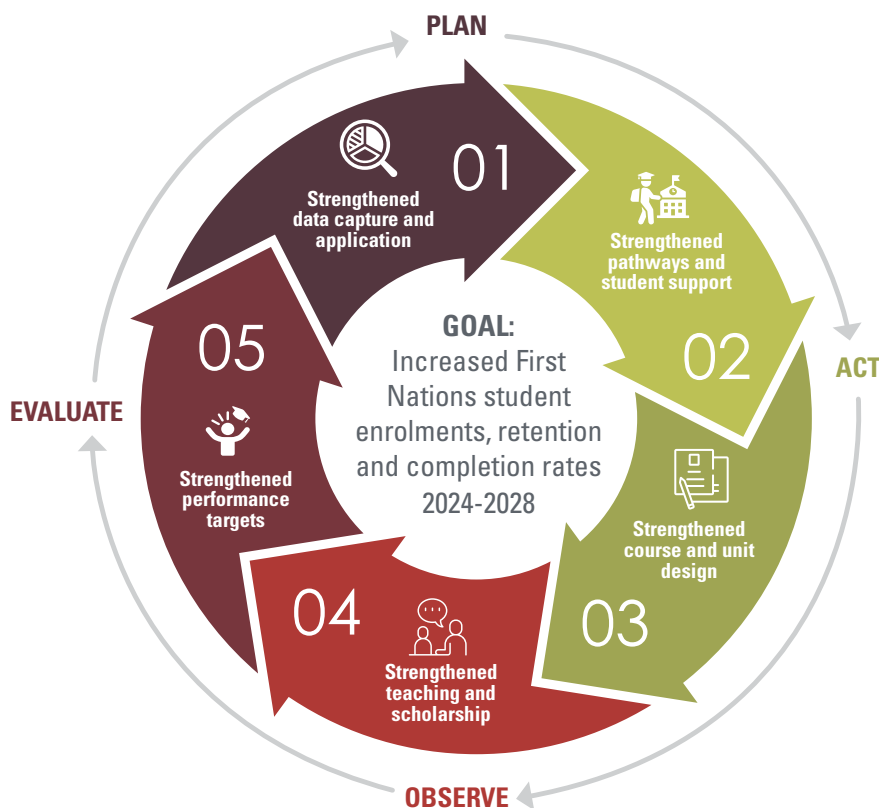
IMPROVEMENT THROUGH ACTION LEARNING AND ACTION RESEARCH

Figure 2 provides guidance to strengthening First Nations student performance across CQU, however and by itself this framework is limited if it is situated in a siloed format. While earlier discussion located this framework within the context of the CQU RAP and the broader environmental and service actions, its location within an action learning and action research modelling is a key to operationalising the framework.

In this regard the five elements of the framework serve to guide the broader geared paradigm that binds each element. Consistent with the Learning Organisation (Lawler & Sillitoe, 2013) and its central tenets around single and double loop investigation, this model approach is proposed on the basis that the internal systems require assessment and evaluation on collective and synchronised inputs, and policy and program outcomes.

FIGURE 2: FRAMEWORK FOR STRENGTHENING FIRST NATIONS STUDENT PERFORMANCE ACROSS CQU

Improvement through action learning and action research.





1. STRENGTHENED DATA CAPTURE AND APPLICATION

1.1 OVERVIEW

Data collection on student performance is integral to understanding the relationship between inputs and outcomes. This relationship is problematised with consideration of numerous variables that situate within the internal properties of the university and those that situate externally. Strong data collection systems by design need to consider the intersectionality of these domains to update and ensure accurate and nuanced data is being sourced to improve First Nations enrolments, retention and completion rates.

1.2 KEY ISSUES

- 1.2.1 First Nations student data capture and its application to performance growth is limited across the schools. First Nations students as a defined cohort are largely 'invisible', despite being an at-risk group. Data collection systems need to be strengthened across all schools and assessed and evaluated to inform effective response actions.
- 1.2.2 First Nations student performance data are not captured in the Unit Assessment (grades) Review process. This is a key operational cycle that can include student performance.
- 1.2.3 A system of flagging First Nations students to teaching staff is not automated and left to staff accessing CQU Success or the Academic Information Management System (AIMS) to carry out searches. Consultations indicate this is not consistently used by all teaching staff and no evaluation of how it is used is possible.

- 1.2.4 Student exit surveys are available, but staff feedback indicate these are voluntary and for international students only. There appears to be no systemised feedback processes around domestic students, including First Nations students.

1.3 KEY ACTIONS

- 1.3.1 Improved and systemised processes are developed and installed across the Tertiary Education Division (TED) to capture First Nations student performance. This will be a key focus of the governance committee.
- 1.3.2 First Nations student performance be included in the college Unit Assessment Review Process. Data performance capture includes a red flag design to ensure appropriate intervention responses are enacted and reported to course and unit coordinators.
- 1.3.3 Performance capture needs to be appropriately stored, retrieved, and applied in building school and college responses to improving the retention and course completion rates of First Nations students.
- 1.3.4 Student exit surveys to be automated for domestic and First Nations students. These surveys will need to factor internal and external key variables that can be used as part of the single and double loop action learning and action research approach embedded within the Learning Organisation.





2. STRENGTHENED PATHWAYS AND STUDENT SUPPORT

2.1 OVERVIEW

Student pathways and support is a key strategic service response to scaffolding students into VET and HE studies. This will need to strengthen as CQU looks to increasing the enrolments, retention and course completions of First Nations students, as highlighted in this strategy. A key way this can occur is through strengthened collaboration and service alignment between the Student Success Division, Access Education and the Schools and Colleges. As earlier described, the Student Success Division delivers student pathways through entry programs including Start TAFE Now (STN) and Start Uni Now (SUN) with both specifically tailored to school-aged students in Years 10,11 and 12. Alongside this offering, the STEPS program delivered through Access Education provides further pathways into HE courses. First Nations students sourcing these entry and enabling programs require their locations to be strengthened, particularly within pathways to VET and HE.

2.2 KEY ISSUES

2.2.1 Collaboration between the Student Success Division, Access Education and the schools and colleges has long been limited to a needs-only basis. No systemised connection exists, and this service gap significantly reduces communication between these allied service partners, particularly regarding First Nations student performance and support.

2.2.2 The STN is funded through VETiS, and while there are no funds allocated to the SUN program, the first unit is free, with remaining unit costs reduced. Both are not covered by IISP, HEPPP or other specific funding, which

might otherwise assist First Nations students with associated costs, for example ICT access. While STEPS receives IISP funding, this support ceases when First Nations students move to their chosen course.

2.2.3 The high level of First Nations student non-completions across VET and HE points to a need for additional resource supports. This includes incentivisation approaches that offer student learning support across the three key knowledge and skill domains of academic writing, academic referencing, and learning how to learn in tertiary education.

2.2.4 Where First Nations students do not complete a chosen course, consideration is required around exit pathways. Complex lifestyle impacts continue to influence the study trajectory of all students, particularly First Nations students, and flexible stepped exit points that allow graduation needs to be considered alongside the steadily increased course flexibility trend.

2.3 KEY ACTIONS

2.3.1 Collaboration between the Student Success Division, Access Education and the schools and colleges requires systemised connection. This can be operationalised through inclusion in school/college staff meetings as ongoing standing items, and within this strategy's governance committee. Priority is given to the Indigenous Engagement team and the Social and Emotional Wellbeing team, as early intervention service layers.

2.3.2 A review of the delivery and funding models is undertaken to strengthen the pathways programs, particularly the STN, SUN and STEPS. Potential expansions of IISP and HEPPP funding to be considered.



2.3.3 A suite of additional interventions are required. This includes micro-credentials from the Be Different platform are sourced to provide an additional layer that are incentivised to First Nations students. Content areas include: (i) academic writing; (ii) academic referencing; and (iii) learning how to learn at tertiary level. Each micro-credential is designed/redesigned to a recognition of 2 credit points each and collectively offered to students as an equivalent 6 credit point unit.

2.3.4 Course exit pathways are developed alongside hyper-flexible study options (including assessment extensions) that enables First Nations students to achieve study completions and recognition. This recommendation responds to the complex impediments encountered by students and the need to strengthen student self-esteem through graduated outcomes.

3. STRENGTHENED COURSE AND UNIT DESIGN

3.1 OVERVIEW

The development and delivery of quality courses are a core university and sector requirement, as well as consumer expectations that drives innovation and market competition, where 'today's excellence is tomorrow's expectation'. While much attention is paid to the design of courses and their associated units, a key maintenance of this goal is achieved through the review process. In the intervening period between the five-year cycle of accreditation/re-accreditation, the Annual Course Enhancement Review (ACER) and Annual Unit Enhancement Review (AUER) are audit measures designed to ensure rigour and integrity are maintained during the intervening years. Poor course and unit design and/or maintenance leads to poor quality offerings that negative impact teaching and student learning.

These annual audits are a key opportunity in the embedding of First Nations cultural content in learning outcomes (where appropriate), including the assess-

ment instruments. These changes will necessarily respect the parameters of accredited content, with more significant changes reflected only during the accreditation/re-accreditation process.

3.2 KEY ISSUES

3.2.1 The ACER audit takes the course level review and is actioned annually at the beginning of each year. This cycle provides opportunity to embed First Nations cultural content and perspectives, without significant changes to content and assessment.

3.2.2 The AUER audit takes the unit level view and is actioned annually, after the primary term in which it is delivered. This cycle provides opportunity to embed First Nations cultural content and perspectives, without significant changes to content and assessment.

3.2.3 The ACER and AUER audit process appears to be encumbered with a significant backlog of courses and units waiting for review. This points to capacity issues as much as management processes that need to be addressed as a matter of priority.

3.2.4 Minor embedding of First Nations content through the AUER and ACER, and as more substantially reflected through the accreditation/re-accreditation processes, can drift over time (i.e. watered down). Quality controls are needed to prevent this potential.

3.3 KEY ACTIONS

3.3.1 Course coordinators work with allied staff to embed First Nations cultural content and perspectives across the ACER process. The First Nations Curriculum Framework (Feb 2023) provides guidance to this embedding across curriculum content, learning outcomes and assessment.

3.3.2 Unit coordinators work with allied staff to embed First Nations cultural content and perspectives

across the AUER process. The First Nations Curriculum Framework (Feb 2023) provides guidance to this embedding across curriculum content, learning outcomes and assessment.

- 3.3.3 The ACER and AUER audit process issues are addressed, particularly given the significant implication this presents for the RAP prioritised embedding of First Nations cultural content and perspectives across the CQU curriculum.
- 3.3.4 Quality controls are strengthened to avoid course and unit content drift. These can include and not be restricted to 'locking' content, including assessment instruments, to ensure course and unit integrity over time and the multiple reshaping that can occur externally to the required approval process.

4. STRENGTHENED TEACHING AND SCHOLARSHIP

4.1 OVERVIEW

This strategy focuses on the close-up and interfacing relationship within the teaching and learning exchange since this is at the core of university engagement; one that makes or breaks Indigenous student success. As earlier detailed, education research based on the analysis of metadata involving teachers and students across multiple countries confirms the key variable in student success is the quality of the teacher and their pedagogical practice (Hattie, 2003). Quality teachers know their curriculum content, ensure the appropriate learning resources and strategies are in place, apply differentiated teaching methods and employ multiple learning and assessment tasks to support optimised student learning. At the core of this is a commitment to motivate each student to achieve at their best through building success to generate learning engagement. The Australian schooling sector has long pivoted to teacher excellence as the primary instrument in national education reforms.

SCHOLARSHIP OF TEACHING AND LEARNING

Defining what is a quality teacher within the tertiary sector is at the core of workforce development. The term scholarship of teaching and learning which is also known as the 'teaching scholar' arguably emerged in the early 1990s through the work of Ernest Boyer, when responding to criticism aimed at teaching academics that their work that was self-referential and disconnected from the needs of community. Boyer identified four forms of academic scholarship: (i) the scholarship of discovery; (ii) the scholarship of integration; (iii) the scholarship of application; and (iv) the scholarship of teaching (Renwick et al, 2020).

This framework focused on what academics do as scholars and is advanced by the Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Authority (TEQSA) as a way of capturing, assessing and evaluating academic performance against scholarship. At the core of this is what is understood as effective pedagogical practice, recognising the need to articulate what this means within an online delivery mode, and against the deepened sector challenges highlighted in the Australian Universities Accord-final report 2024.

PEDAGOGY

A requirement for teaching academics is to firstly have a strong background in their respective discipline and secondly to have a strong grasp of how to teach successfully. With the exception of those with an equivalence and those in the teacher education discipline, this suggests that most academics will vary considerably in their abilities to teach, and this requires an increased strategic response. This is especially critical given the need to work across equity groups, in particular First Nations students.

4.2 KEY ISSUES

- 4.2.1 Unlike the primary and secondary education sectors, national professional standards for the tertiary sector do not exist. Alongside this a framework based on TEQSA's framework of the Scholarship of Teaching also does not exist and negatively impacts the university's continuous performance enhancement, as guided by a trajectory towards improvements via sector specialisation.
- 4.2.2 The Graduate Certificate in Tertiary and Adult Education is a mandatory qualification for teaching staff and is provided free of charge, however staff are only required to complete one of the four units. This is a limited response to strengthening teaching scholarship.
- 4.2.3 The content of this qualification needs to reflect current understandings of teaching scholarship, particularly as relates to working with First Nations students.
- 4.2.4 Completion of the full Graduate Certificate will be challenging for staff under significant workplace loads and in this regard can be factored through a rewards-based approach linked to the Performance Excellence Program (PEP).
- 4.2.5 The OIE is committed to developing and delivering staff training resources and these resources are available for teaching and professional staff. The uptake of these training resources are weakened where not factored into the PEP and workplace promotion.



“Performance targets provide attainment goals, but importantly create spaces within competing priorities to operationalise continuous professional discussions around the relationships between key input actions in this strategy and associated First Nations student performance outcomes.”



4.3 KEY ACTIONS

- 4.3.1 Where absent, a framework to guide the teaching scholarship is developed and implemented across all schools and colleges, guided by the publication: Compliance guide: Scholarship (TEQSA, 2021). This needs to factor the First Nations Cultural Competency Framework 2023-2028 and First Nations Curriculum Framework (Feb 2023).
- 4.3.2 The Graduate Certificate in Tertiary and Adult Education is reviewed and, where appropriate, upgraded to reflect current advances as guided by TEQSA and best practice exemplars.
- 4.3.3 Where there is no equivalent held, teaching staff to complete the full Graduate Certificate in Tertiary and Adult Education qualification.
- 4.3.4 An incentivisation approach to gaining a full Graduate Certificate in Tertiary and Adult Education is implemented and embedded within the PEP and broader workforce development actions.
- 4.3.5 All teaching staff are supported in accessing training relating to the embedding of First Nations content and perspectives and as factored into the PEP and workplace promotion.

5. STRENGTHENED PERFORMANCE TARGETS

5.1 OVERVIEW

Performance targets for First Nations students are required, particularly given the extremely low course

completion rates across CQUniversity’s HE and VET. Performance targets provide attainment goals, but importantly create spaces within competing priorities to operationalise continuous professional discussions around the relationships between key input elements in this strategy (see Figure 2) and associated First Nations student performance outcomes. This strategy outlines a set of performance targets at the school level and are set for the period 2024-2028 to capture a range of course completions and associated timelines to a minimum four-year undergraduate degree.

5.2 KEY ISSUES

- 5.2.1 Data performance can be misleading where appropriate filters and evaluative criteria are absent. The performance data story is the most significant outcome in performance assessment (student oriented) and evaluation (systems oriented). The data story emerges where reflective tools are applied as part of an action learning and action research cycle, and factor internal institutional policy and resource gearing against the fluid external variables that shape and impact performance.
- 5.2.2 On this basis the action learning and research model highlighted in Figure 2 provides a framework of the five key elements in which to assess and evaluate performance. This framework is only successful where all of the key elements are enacted.

5.3 KEY ACTIONS

- 5.3.1 The following performance targets provide a visual for the schools to problematise First Nations student improvements. The targets are based on 11% completions by 2028, noting this

reflects a parity figure against non-Indigenous student completions, and clouds the fact that First Nations enrolments and completions should be much higher, particularly in respect to the ratio between enrolments and completions.

performing under parity enrolments and completions for both HE and VET, as reflected in Tables 6-7.

ENROLMENTS AND COMPLETIONS (ALL HE COURSES)

5.4 PERFORMANCE TARGETS

Establishing a CQUniversity First Nations student parity target

The Australian Universities Accord – Final report 2024 defines parity as “achieved where representation of the target cohort in the student population is equal to that of their share of the Australian population aged 15 to 64 years” (p. 357). Based on a national scale this review recommended that participation targets for First Nations students will need to grow from 12.1% to 13.3%² in order to reach population parity by 2035. An important distinction made in the review is that ‘participation’ is focused on course completions as the defining metric of success.

Applied to CQU, this metric reveals the university is

Enrolments and Completions for all HE courses are below parity.

- Enrolments and completions for all HE courses are below parity. The 2035 target means moving from **5.7%** of all student HE enrolments in 2023 toward **11.00%** in 2028. This figure is based on the annual First Nations student growth rate stepped at an increased average enrolment growth rate of 1.06% per annum across 2024-2028.
- Targets for completions need to be more ambitious, given the high dropout rates outlined in this strategy. This means moving completions from **4%** for all HE courses in 2023 to **11.0%** in 2028. This target is based on a First Nations student growth stepped at an increased average completion rate of 1.6% per annum 2024-2028.

TABLE 6: CQU INDIGENOUS ENROLMENTS AND COMPLETIONS (ALL HE COURSES) BY PERCENTAGE

Indigenous enrolments (#)	425	503	533	642	714	784	875	959	994	978	962
Share of all enrolments (%)	2.9%	3.3%	3.4%	3.8%	4.2%	4.4%	4.7%	4.8%	5.1%	5.5%	5.7%
Indigenous completions (#)	20	37	29	54	92	108	131	156	156	152	127
Share of all completions (%)	1.2%	1.9%	1.4%	2.2%	2.8%	3.5%	3.9%	4.3%	4.0%	4.0%	4.0%
Period	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023

TABLE 7: CQU INDIGENOUS ENROLMENTS AND COMPLETIONS (ALL VET) BY PERCENTAGE

Indigenous Enrolments (#)	192	202	284	480	536	642	742	967	868	1,045	
Share of all enrolments (%)	1.67%	2.06%	3.00%	5.77%	6.33%	6.85%	7.70%	9.76%	10.03%	9.00%	
Indigenous completions (#)	47	62	50	101	170	145	168	240	210	176	
Share of all completions (%)	2.2%	2.0%	1.9%	5.1%	8.9%	7.3%	9.7%	10.1%	9.2%	11.3%	
Period	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023

For the purposes of establishing a university growth target over the period of this strategy, a 11% parity for completions is advanced for both HE and VET by 2028. This figure is derived from a four-year stepped performance from 2024 to 2028, being the timeline set for this strategy. Based on this trajectory the following analysis sets the following targets.

² The Accord (2024) shows 2.1% to 3.3% and is considered an error, given it is far too low a target. It is interpreted for this report that these should have read 12.1% - 13.3%, as all other equity groups are reflected in the double digits and the Accord (2023) interim report identified a First Nations minimum target of 11% by 2035.

ENROLMENTS AND COMPLETIONS (ALL VET COURSES)

- The target for enrolments means moving from **9.0%** of all VET enrolments in 2023 to an above parity target of **12.25%**, based on an average annual increment of 0.62% per annum across 2014-2023.
- VET course completions appear to have excelled, where **9.0%** of all VET enrolments has resulted in **11.3%** of all completions in 2023. A target from this baseline would suggest a target completion rate moving from **11.3%** of all student completions to a rate of **12.25%** in 2028. This figure is based on an average increment of 0.19% per annum across 2024-2028.
- These target goals for Indigenous enrolments and completions across HE and VET are reflected in Tables 8-11 (CQUniversity Data Smart Report 2023).

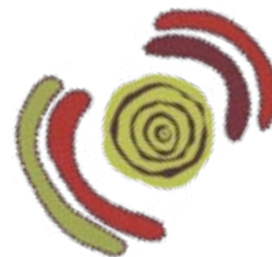


TABLE 8: INDIGENOUS COMPLETIONS BY COURSE LEVEL, 2023 (ALL SCHOOLS)

Course level	Completions in 2023	Target completions in 2028 (based off 2023 non-Indigenous completion rates)
Postgraduate coursework	23 (575)	63 (minimum)
Bachelor	49 (1,225)	135 (minimum)
Sub-Bachelor	4 (100)	11 (minimum)
Enabling	51 (1,275)	140 (minimum)
Non-Award	0	TBA
All courses	127 (3,175) 4% of all students	349 (TBA) 11% of all students

TABLE 9: INDIGENOUS COMPLETIONS BY SCHOOL LEVEL, 2023 AND TARGET COMPLETIONS 2028

	Course level	Completions in 2023	Target completions in 2028
Education and the Arts	Postgraduate coursework	6	Targets based off 2023 non-Indigenous completion rates.
	Bachelor	11	
	Sub-Bachelor	3	
	Non-Award		
	VET		
	All courses	20	
		4% of all students	11% of all students

TABLE 10: INDIGENOUS COMPLETIONS BY SCHOOL LEVEL, 2023 AND TARGET COMPLETIONS 2028

	Course level	Completions in 2023	Target completions in 2028
Business and Law	Postgraduate coursework		Targets based off 2023 non-Indigenous completion rates.
	Bachelor	7	
	Sub-Bachelor		
	Non-Award		
	VET		
	All courses	7	
		4% of all students	11% of all students

TABLE 11: INDIGENOUS COMPLETIONS BY SCHOOL LEVEL, 2023 AND TARGET COMPLETIONS 2028

	Course level	Completions in 2023	Target completions in 2028
Health, Medical and Applied Sciences	Postgraduate coursework	4	Targets based off 2023 non-Indigenous completion rates.
	Bachelor	18	
	Sub-Bachelor		
	Non-Award		
	VET		
	All courses	22	
		4% of all students	11% of all students

TABLE 12: INDIGENOUS COMPLETIONS BY SCHOOL LEVEL, 2023 AND TARGET COMPLETIONS 2028

	Course level	Completions in 2023	Target completions in 2028
Nursing Midwifery and Social Sciences	Postgraduate coursework	10	Targets based off 2023 non-Indigenous completion rates.
	Bachelor	13	
	Sub-Bachelor		
	Non-Award		
	VET		
	All courses	23	
		4% of all students	11% of all students



TABLE 13: INDIGENOUS COMPLETIONS BY SCHOOL LEVEL, 2023 AND TARGET COMPLETIONS 2028

	Course level	Completions in 2023	Target completions in 2028
Engineering and Technology	Postgraduate coursework	2	Targets based off 2023 non-Indigenous completion rates.
	Bachelor		
	Sub-Bachelor	1	
	Non-Award		
	VET		
	All courses	3 4% of all students	11% of all students

TABLE 14: INDIGENOUS COMPLETIONS BY SCHOOL LEVEL, 2023 AND TARGET COMPLETIONS 2028

	Course level	Completions in 2023	Target completions in 2028 (based off 2023 non-Indigenous completion rates)
Access Education	Enabling	51	Targets based off 2023 non-Indigenous completion rates.
	Non-Award		
	All courses	51 4% of all students	



LIST OF TERMS AND ACRONYMS

ENABLING PROGRAMS – provide students with a pathway to HE. Skills for Tertiary Education Preparatory Studies (STEPS).

HE – is the acronym for the term Higher Education (tertiary education) that encompasses VET, Undergraduate, Postgraduate, and Higher Degree by Research programs.

NIAA – is the acronym for the National Indigenous Australians Agency

OUTREACH – is a term that describes various programs that prepare people to enter university education through various pathways: SUN and STN Start TAFE Now tertiary preparation programs; CQUni Connect and AIME mentoring programs, and a conceptual program that provides an informal and harmonious way of communicating and engaging Indigenous students regarding academic issues.

PATHWAY PROGRAMS – provide students with a pathway to HE, including Start Uni Now (SUN) and Start TAFE Now (STN).

STEPS – is the acronym for Skills for Tertiary Education Preparatory Studies, an Enabling course that provides a pathway for students to enter university.

VET – is the acronym for Vocational Education and Training, a broad scope of programs that provide education and training at certificate and diploma levels, focused on providing skills for specific employment.

RELATED LEGISLATION AND DOCUMENTS

- [Reconciliation Action Plan 2022-2024](#)
- [CQUniversity Learning and Teaching Framework](#)
- First Nations Cultural Competency Framework 2023-2028
- Draft First Nations Curriculum Framework (Feb 2023)
- Draft First Nations Curriculum Policy and Procedure (Nov 2023)
- Draft First Nations Curriculum Review Committee Terms of Reference (Nov 2023)
- First Nations Research Strategy 2023-2028
- First Nations Community Engagement: Industry guide phase 1
- [Universities Australia Indigenous Strategy 2022-2025](#)
- [Universities Australia Indigenous Strategy Annual Report 2023](#)
- [CQUniversity Strategic Plan 2024-2028](#)
- [TEQSA \(2021\) Compliance Guide: Scholarship](#)



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CONSULTATIONS

The First Nations Education and Student Success Strategy 2024-2028 has been developed through a Working group in consultation with key invited staff from across CQUniversity. Staff consultations were conducted over three drafts on the basis of either having a strong background understanding and experience

of strategic policy development, leadership or have a detailed understanding and experience in the teaching of courses, and at minimum mid-career academics. A broader group of staff were consulted during the third and final stages of the strategy.

WORKING GROUP

Professor Adrian Miller	Deputy Vice-President Indigenous Engagement	Office of Indigenous Engagement
Associate Professor Gary Fry	Associate Professor First Nations Studies	Office of Indigenous Engagement
Ms Emma Cerff	Executive Officer, Leadership and Operations	Office of Indigenous Engagement
Ms Karen Seary	Associate Dean	School of Access Education
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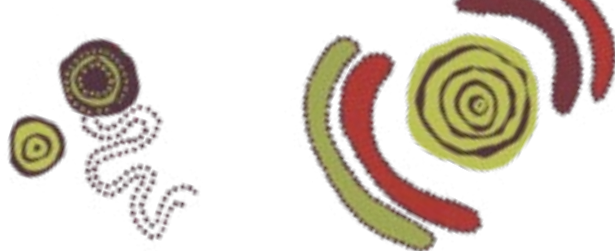
CONSULTATIONS

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Mr Peter Heilbuth	Deputy Vice-President VET and Business Development	Tertiary Education Division
Professor Jonathan Powles	Deputy Vice-President Student Success	Student Success Division
Dr Henry Boer	Senior Post-doctoral Research Fellow	Jawun Research Centre
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AUTHOR

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APPENDIX 1 - OUR CQUNIVERSITY PERFORMANCE



Data sets supplied by CQU Business Intelligence Nov 21, 2023. Notes around this data:

1. CQU does not have data prior to July 2014 for VET and the quality of data for 2014 is not high, so care needs to be used.
2. Enrolments and completions by course level does not include VET courses (they didn't appear under types).
3. The indigenous enrolments by individual course levels in "CQU Indigenous enrolments by course level, 2013 and 2023" table will not add up to "all courses" line due to students being enrolled in multiple course types in a year.
4. Completions for Enabling prior to 2016 was not recorded consistently, so Indigenous Enabling completions in 2013 may be understated.

CQU INDIGENOUS ENROLMENTS (ALL HE COURSES)

Indigenous enrolments (#)	425	503	533	642	714	784	875	959	994	978	962
Share of all enrolments (%)	2.9%	3.3%	3.4%	3.8%	4.2%	4.4%	4.7%	4.8%	5.1%	5.5%	5.7%
Period	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023

CQU INDIGENOUS COURSE COMPLETIONS (ALL HE COURSES)

Indigenous enrolments (#)	20	37	29	54	92	108	131	156	156	152	127
Share of all enrolments (%)	1.2%	1.9%	1.4%	2.2%	2.8%	3.5%	3.9%	4.3%	4.0%	4.0%	4.0%
Period	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023

CQU INDIGENOUS ENROLMENTS (ALL VET)

Indigenous enrolments (#)	n.p	192	202	284	480	536	642	742	967	868	1,045
Share of all enrolments (%)	n.p	1.67%	2.06%	3.00%	5.77%	6.33%	6.85%	7.70%	9.76%	10.03%	9.00%
Period	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023

CQU INDIGENOUS COURSE COMPLETIONS (ALL VET)

Indigenous enrolments (#)	n.p	47	62	50	101	170	145	168	240	210	176
Share of all enrolments (%)	n.p	2.2%	2.0%	1.9%	5.1%	8.9%	7.3%	9.7%	10.1%	9.2%	11.3%
Period	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023



CQU INDIGENOUS ENROLMENTS BY COURSE LEVEL, 2013 AND 2023

Course level	Enrolments			
	2013	2023	Growth rate since 2013	Annual average growth rate since 2023
Postgraduate research	5	17	240%	24.0%
Postgraduate coursework	24	87	263%	26.3%
Bachelor	272	672	147%	14.7%
Sub-Bachelor	11	22	100%	10.0%
Enabling	116	169	46%	4.6%
Non-Award	1	17	1600%	160.0%
All courses	425	962	126%	12.6%

INDIGENOUS COMPLETIONS BY COURSE LEVEL, 2013 AND 2023 (ALL SCHOOLS)

Course level	2013	2023	Growth since 2013	Annual average growth since 2023
Postgraduate research	0	0		
Postgraduate coursework	3	23	667%	67%
Bachelor	16	49	206%	21%
Sub-Bachelor	1	4	300%	30%
Enabling	0	51		
Non-Award	0	0		
All courses	20	127	535%	54%

INDIGENOUS COMPLETIONS BY SCHOOL LEVEL, 2013 AND 2023 (EDUCATION AND THE ARTS)

Education and the Arts	Course level	2013	2023	Growth since 2013 (%)	Annual average growth since 2023 (%)
		Postgraduate research			
	Postgraduate coursework		6		
	Bachelor	4	11	175%	17.5%
	Sub-Bachelor	1	3	200%	20%
	Enabling				
	Non-Award				
	All courses	5	20	300%	30%



INDIGENOUS COMPLETIONS BY SCHOOL LEVEL, 2013 AND 2023 (BUSINESS AND LAW)

	Course level	2013	2023	Growth since 2013 (%)	Annual average growth since 2023 (%)
Business and Law	Postgraduate research				
	Postgraduate coursework	2			
	Bachelor		7		
	Sub-Bachelor				
	Enabling				
	Non-Award				
	All courses	2	7	250%	25.5%

INDIGENOUS COMPLETIONS BY SCHOOL LEVEL, 2013 AND 2023 (HEALTH, MEDICAL AND APPLIED SCIENCES)

	Course level	2013	2023	Growth since 2013 (%)	Annual average growth since 2023 (%)
Health, Medical and Applied Sciences	Postgraduate research				
	Postgraduate coursework	1	4	300%	30%
	Bachelor	5	18	260%	26%
	Sub-Bachelor				
	Enabling				
	Non-Award				
	All courses	6	22	267%	26.7%

INDIGENOUS COMPLETIONS BY SCHOOL LEVEL, 2013 AND 2023 (NURSING, MIDWIFERY AND SOCIAL SCIENCES)

	Course level	2013	2023	Growth since 2013 (%)	Annual average growth since 2023 (%)
Nursing, Midwifery and Social Sciences	Postgraduate research				
	Postgraduate coursework		10		
	Bachelor	4	13	225%	22.5%
	Sub-Bachelor				
	Enabling				
	Non-Award				
	All courses	4	23	475%	47.5%



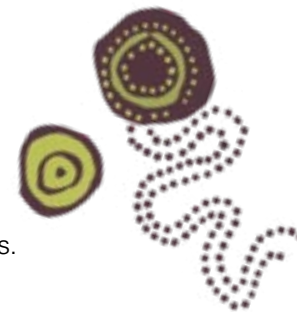
INDIGENOUS COMPLETIONS BY SCHOOL LEVEL, 2013 AND 2023 (ENGINEERING AND TECHNOLOGY)

	Course level	2013	2023	Growth since 2013 (%)	Annual average growth since 2023 (%)
Engineering and Technology	Postgraduate research				
	Postgraduate coursework		2		
	Bachelor	3			
	Sub-Bachelor		3		
	Enabling				
	Non-Award				
	All courses		3	3	0%

INDIGENOUS COMPLETIONS BY SCHOOL LEVEL, 2013 AND 2023 (ACCESS EDUCATION)

	Course level	2013	2023	Growth since 2013 (%)	Annual average growth since 2023 (%)
Access Education	Postgraduate research				
	Postgraduate coursework				
	Bachelor				
	Sub-Bachelor				
	Enabling	0	51	-	-
	Non-Award				
	All courses		0	51	-

APPENDIX 2 - UNIVERSITIES AUSTRALIA FOCUS AREAS AND ACTIONS



Universities Australia *Indigenous Strategy, 2022-25* identified the following requirements. The use of italics indicates those areas specifically relevant to learning and teaching.

Student Success

- Universities have recruitment strategies for Indigenous students.
- Universities acknowledge the significant role Indigenous student support services play in success and resource these services appropriately.
- Whilst Indigenous Centres play a central role, there is a need to share responsibility across the institution and universities should have in place resourced mechanisms for student support across their institution.
- Universities target the improvement of completion rates of Indigenous students through the development of an institutional working group to determine the nature of the issues at the institutional level and to implement strategies to improve Indigenous student completion rates at their university.
- These strategies should include undergraduate, postgraduate, mature age, and remote area students.
- Universities support through specific initiatives pathways for Indigenous students into university, and similar support programs for students to transition into higher degrees by research (HDRs), academic employment, and other employment opportunities.

Staff Success

- Universities have workforce strategies that include initiatives for attracting and retaining Indigenous staff.
- Universities have Indigenous staff targets that consider factors such as the number of Indigenous students at the university and the ratio of the university's local Indigenous population to the broader population.
- Universities have an Indigenous senior leadership position (PVC or higher) that is appropriately placed within the university's structure and is appropriately resourced (support staff and position funding).
- Workloads of Indigenous staff are recognised and commensurately supported.
- Universities have documented promotion pathways that recognise the uniquely broad experience and expertise Indigenous staff possess.
- Universities have professional development activities for Indigenous staff.

University Responsibility for Indigenous Advancement

- Vice Chancellors actively champion the Strategy.
- The DVC/PVC Indigenous (or equivalent) has a direct line of engagement to the Vice-Chancellor.
- Universities ensure Indigenous views are represented either directly or through a governance mechanism to the Council or Senate and to the senior executive.
- Initiatives aimed at advancing Indigenous people are appropriately resourced.
- Universities have a demonstrated connection to Indigenous communities that supports Indigenous advancement.
- Universities have an Indigenous procurement policy.
- Universities consider Indigenous cultural representation in the built environment, for example names of buildings or other aspects of the physical environment.
- Universities implement KPIs for staff – especially staff in leadership positions both academic and professional - that require them to demonstrate action toward Indigenous advancement.



Racism and Cultural Safety

- Universities develop and implement an Indigenous-specific anti-racism strategy.
- *Cultural safety training provided to all staff, which includes addressing impacts of dominant culture on Indigenous people and addresses more subtle forms of racism.*
- Universities formally recognise the cultural load of Indigenous staff and students and make appropriate adjustments, including in relevant HR policies and practices.

Recognising the value Indigenous people and knowledges bring to the university and embedding Indigenous value systems and knowledges into University structures commitments

- *Universities have Indigenous content in curricula that is meaningful, appropriately developed and appropriately resourced.*
- *Universities ensure students graduate with an awareness of Indigenous values and knowledges.*
- That the benefits of Indigenous-led research be recognised and promoted by universities.
- That there be robust ethics processes in Indigenous research, with the AIATSIS guidelines taken as a minimum.
- That the value of Indigenous leadership be recognised by being appropriately structured and supported (staff and resources).
- That the role of Elders be appropriately recognised and valued.



APPROVAL AND REVIEW DETAILS

APPROVAL AND REVIEW	DETAILS
Approval Authority Delegated Approval Authority Advisory Committee Administrator Next Review Date	Vice-Chancellor and President N/A University Management Committee Deputy Vice-President Indigenous Engagement <01/07/2028> [Policy Officer to update]
APPROVAL AND AMENDMENT HISTORY	DETAILS
Original Approval Authority and Date Amendment Authority and Date Notes	Vice-Chancellor and President

Feedback about this document can be emailed to:

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