

Embedding Indigenous knowledge in the curriculum: Principles and strategies across the Australian higher education sector

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In this paper we document the various strategies universities have undertaken or are currently undertaking in their Indigenising practices across the Australian higher education sector by screening university websites for their strategies, principles and initiatives. It serves as a vital stocktake, audited in November 2023, for institutions aiming to forge a path towards an inclusive and culturally diverse academic environment. While such benchmarks should be tempered with caution due to the diversity of First Nations communities in which universities operate, it offers a spectrum of current practices for further development and growth. At the same time, it reinforces the current transition, from the perspective of Western science, of the value of Indigenous knowledges, epistemologies and approaches within the curriculum.

Keywords: Indigenisation benchmark, Indigenous studies, Indigenising the curriculum, First Nations perspectives

Acknowledgment of Country: We acknowledge and pay respect to the Larrakia peoples who are the traditional custodians of the lands upon which our Casuarina, Waterfront and Palmerston campuses are located, and where this research was conducted. We pay respect to Larrakia elders, past, present and emerging, and extend respect to all First Nations peoples and countries where this paper may be read in the future. “We talk to country, our country talks to us. This is Larrakia Country, we are Larrakia people, and we will always be here.” — Bundilla Barbara Mills-Raymond

Introduction

All Australian universities to some degree, have an Indigenous strategy. However, only around a third have a specific strategy whereby Indigenous knowledges are embedded within the curriculum. While resources exist (e.g., *Great Guide to Indigenisation of the Curriculum* by Central Queensland University), the practical implementation models employed by universities to achieve “Indigenisation” remain diverse, their availability to the public is limited and contextual factors heavily influence them (Al-Natour & Fredericks, 2016). As a result, only a few institutions have provided explicit guidelines or a step-by-step process for how they have “Indigenised” their curriculum. This leaves little substance for other universities to learn, understand and adopt other strategic practices. Our analysis is based solely on publicly available information from university websites. We recognise that relying on such data presents

limitations: websites may be outdated, selectively positive or incomplete. Therefore, our findings serve as a starting point, rather than a definitive assessment, and must be interpreted with caution. It is important here to highlight that the process to Indigenisation is one that is in constant flux.

Audit and assessment method

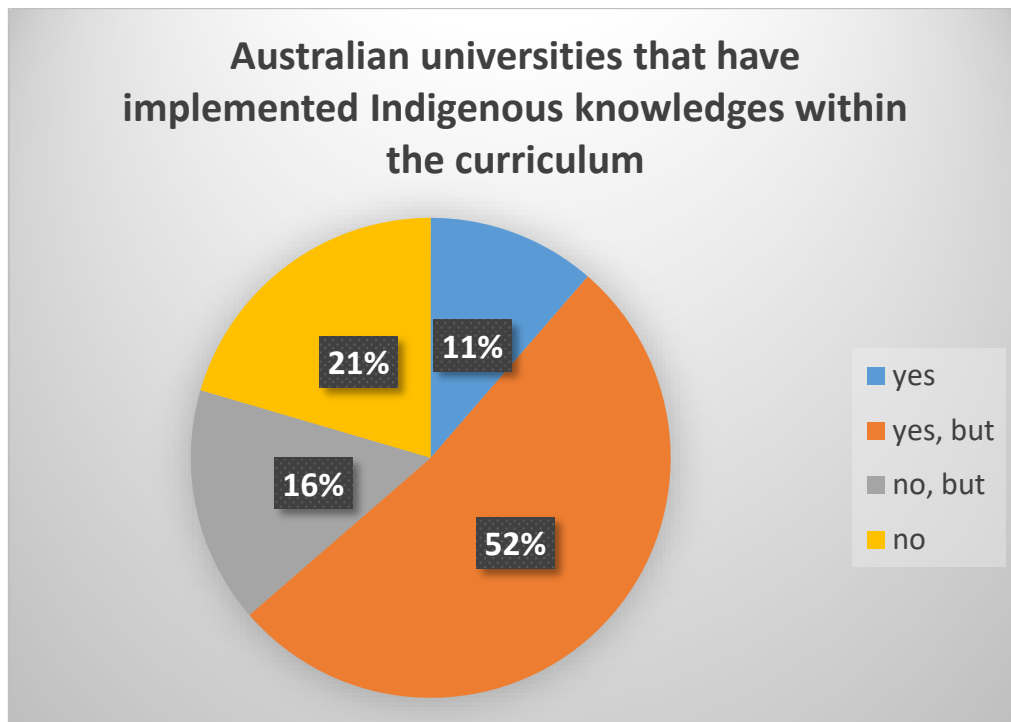
Our approach to this audit and assessment involved the interpretation of documents readily available on university websites. It is worth noting that our approach did not influence the development of the information present on the websites, making for a genuine method to examine the structures and processes (as published on their websites) used by each university. Our approach also aimed to mitigate the three concerns of content analysis where there might be (a) not enough data, (b) inappropriate data, or (c) ambiguous data (Love, 2013).

We employed the technology enhanced learning framework created by Sankey and Padró (2016), adapted from the Australasian Council on Open, Distance and e-Learning (ACODE) benchmarks as a quality assurance framework and aligned it to the three main areas of focus: (1) institution-wide policy and governance, (2) resource allocation, and (3) outcomes assessment. The ACODE benchmarks are based on a four-point scale (yes, yes-but, no-but, and no). This scale has currency and relevance, having recently been adapted and embedded in the Technology Enhanced Learning Accreditation Standard (TELAS).

Thirty-nine Australian universities were selected for benchmarking, including two private providers (Torrens University and Bond University). A search strategy was employed to examine the extent to which Australian universities have embraced the concept of Indigenising the curriculum. The initial phase involved identifying relevant keywords such as “Indigenisation”, “Indigenising”, “Indigenous”, “Indigenised”, “First Nations”, “Indigenous curriculum”, OR “Indigenous strategy”, along with the name of the university. To give an example of how Boolean operators were used, a typical search included “Indigenous strategy” OR “Indigenising” OR “Indigenisation” AND Charles Darwin University. The selected universities were scrutinised using these keywords to uncover their commitment to incorporating Indigenous perspectives and knowledges into their curricula, as documented on their websites. As a result, a benchmark was conducted across 39 institutions.

Where an Indigenous strategy focused on employment, retention, support and student success only, this was excluded from the data and noted as having no Indigenisation initiatives mentioned at the time of inquiry. This immediately excluded eight universities from further investigation (see “no” in Figure 1). In other cases, where no overarching strategy or initiative was mentioned, but other pockets of the universities had particular initiatives (whether they be workshops, seminars, conferences or resources dedicated to Indigenising the curriculum), this was noted as a “no, but”; consequently, six universities were assigned this category. While some attention was given to the content of these institutions in the benchmarking effort, greater attention was placed on universities in the “yes” and “yes, but” categories.

Figure 1: Percentages of Australian universities benchmarked that have implemented Indigenous knowledges within the curriculum



Discussion

Indigenising the curriculum efforts in Australian higher education is a relatively recent phenomenon that attempts to rectify, integrate and remedy some of the past wrongs that have been imposed on Indigenous peoples. In this context, race relations have continued to inform perspectives of the divide between Indigenous knowledge and Western knowledge. Yet, clearly, there has been an intention to draw from Indigenous knowledge in a respectful way so that non-Indigenous people are better informed of the value and contribution that Indigenous knowledge can make to the education of university students. It is important to note that the current stance on embedding Indigenous knowledge practices has a history of tensions.

As Nakata's (2007) concept of the "cultural interface" highlights, the historical interaction between Indigenous and Western knowledge systems is characterised by tensions. This interface, shaped by colonial legacies, continues to influence how Indigenous knowledges are perceived and integrated (or not) within the academy. His later work homed in on the cultural interface offering a more complex and holistic understanding of such tensions and their intersections of various cultural dimensions, traditions and structures (Nakata, 2014). Other scholars such as McGloin (2009) leveraged Nakata's work focusing on its influence on power and privilege, especially from non-Indigenous standpoints. The cultural interface has now help shape many Aboriginal studies curricula as a method of realising the multi-layered, multi-faceted and multi-dimensional levels of cultural interfaces (Hill et al., 2020; MacDonald et al., 2016). Over time, these concepts have ultimately become embedded in policies and legislature, citizen attitudes and behaviours, and within our institutions. Accordingly, Indigenous epistemologies, ontologies and pedagogies have been, and continue to be, marginalised, appropriated and/or dehumanised within university curricula and graduate attributes. This is due to the hegemonic nature of Western colonial forms of knowledge (Williams et al., 2022). It has set the tone and relationship between

Indigenous knowledge and Western knowledge. Indigenous knowledges may not always be taken seriously, which can stem from historical bias. However, this may also be influenced by non-Indigenous staff feeling uncertain or underprepared to meaningfully include Indigenous content. Building staff confidence through professional development and culturally responsive training is thus essential. There has, however, been positive progress as universities develop their Indigenous initiatives to improve Indigenous outcomes across a number of priority areas, including student support, curriculum design, Indigenous employment, and Indigenous success rates, attraction, retention and completion. And while there is some good work that is deep and meaningful, the embedding of Indigenous knowledges and/or perspectives is complex, yet critically important for the Indigenous agenda.

Since Linda Tuhiwai Smith published her seminal work on decolonising methodologies in 1993, Indigenous scholars and their supporters have been infatuated with its applicability across disciplines and international borders. In more recent times, *decolonial* discourse has found its way into public servant speak, as well as state structures, in a bid to improve the future of Indigenous peoples. While decolonial discourse has been influential for some time now, it seems to have lost its mojo more recently and has been described as reductionist and reduced to simplified forms of decolonising curriculum practices that do not recognise nor appreciate the complexity of Indigenous epistemologies (Nakata et al., 2012).

Approximately one-third of Australian universities appear to articulate a specific Indigenous curriculum strategy on their websites. This observation stems from our review of publicly available online documents, rather than from published literature. It should be viewed as indicative, not definitive, and specifically within a moment in time (during the month of November in 2023) when presented on their websites. It should be noted that there are several Indigenisation initiatives occurring across Australian universities beyond those listed here, and this snapshot provides merely a litmus test of current practices and the variations in approaches that have been published openly.

The remainder have focused on aspects of Indigenous employment, including retention, success and support. Understanding this terrain is the first step. However, in order to make a difference, we must progress from issues of Indigenous staff retention and understand how these relate to student intake, as well as those (i.e., Indigenous and non-Indigenous staff) that have the means to build Indigenous knowledge capacities, capabilities and cultural competencies.

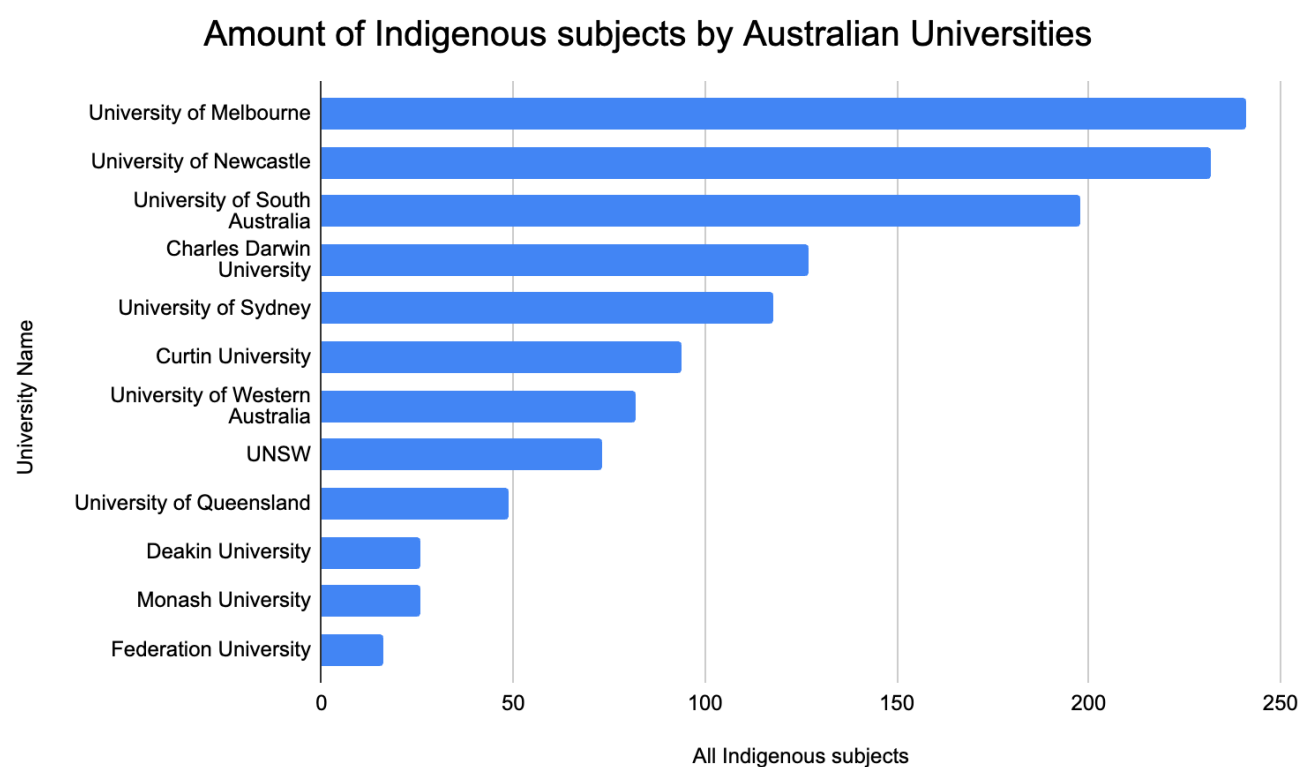
The research in this paper was conducted to benchmark current Indigenisation practices across 39 universities in Australia and was based on publicly available information using a content analysis (CA) methodology (Krippendorff, 2018). This benchmarking exercise does not aim to identify best practices or to suggest what best practice looks like. Instead, it showcases the multitude of approaches that have been used to Indigenise the curriculum. We refer to Bullen and Flavell (2017, 2022) to mitigate the assumption that Western quality indicators are the only sources of “truth”.

Context

This research was conducted on Larrakia Country in Darwin, Northern Territory (NT) where the Casuarina main campus of Charles Darwin University (CDU) is located. The NT has the highest proportion of Indigenous people (30.8%) relative to the total population size (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2021) of any other state or territory in Australia. While CDU is one of Australia’s smallest universities, it has the largest percentage of Indigenous staff on full-time, contract and fractional appointments (CDU, 2022). Further, while CDU is 14th in the higher education sector for Indigenous student load overall, it is one of the highest in the sector when considered as a proportion of the

population. Figure 2 might suggest that CDU also has the fourth-highest number of Indigenous subjects in comparison to other universities (Mateo-Babiano et al., 2023); however, it is unclear whether these subjects comprise primarily Indigenous content or only partially integrate it. Further clarity is needed drawing from Mateo-Babiano et al. (2023) to capture the nature and depth of this content to fully understand and validate this metric.

Figure 2: All Indigenous subjects by Australian universities (adapted from Mateo-Babiano et al., 2023)



Key features of the embedding program

There are several considerations that educators and institutions should consider when Indigenising their curricula. First and foremost, Indigenous perspectives from Indigenous people must be included. This is to ensure the perspectives are authentic and generated through genuine co-design (Akama et al., 2019). Next, it must be based on genuine collaboration with Indigenous communities and be conducted with cultural sensitivity and respect (Williamson & Dalal, 2007). This is not new and can be traced back at least 20 years to Battiste (2002), who suggests Indigenous voices should be included within the curriculum to balance the Eurocentric epistemologies of learning and knowledge. Cultural sensitivity and involvement of Indigenous voices are the minimum standards with approaches that move toward cultural competence. However, it is essential to point out that competence is an ongoing journey that involves enhancing the understanding, skills, and behaviours of academic and professional staff and of students, and it requires deep reflection and reflexivity (Fredericks & Bargallie, 2020).

While it may prove fruitful to Indigenise the curriculum and, at the same time, decolonise the curriculum, Nakata et al. (2012) caution against this dialectic, noting that a decolonising teaching approach should help students navigate complex ideas rather than simply switching between Indigenous and non-

Indigenous perspectives. For Nakata et al. (2012), students need to be able to navigate and critically border-cross knowledge and cultural interfaces, moving away from quick-fixes focused solely on decolonisation (Nakata et al., 2012). Indigenous intellectual property must also be upheld, valued, promoted and protected during any Indigenisation process, especially where cultural knowledge is being shared with the university community (Samaranayake, 2022).

Bullen and Flavell's (2022) review of graduate attributes across the Australian higher education sector found a consistent frame of whiteness rooted in Western philosophical traditions, whereby students must all achieve a narrow perspective of graduate attributes. Whiteness is understood here as the normative cultural and epistemological frameworks that privilege Western knowledge systems while marginalising others (Moreton-Robinson, 2004). Recognising and challenging whiteness is crucial for genuine Indigenisation. For Bullen and Flavell (2022), the system of graduate attributes acts to automate, streamline and compartmentalise learning as one that is singularised, decontextualised and disembodied from the learner. The authors argue that there is a need for graduate attributes to be centred around local Aboriginal values, ethics and principles. In particular, the authors conclude that this can be done when place-based decolonising processes are led by local elders. Specifically, "by having elders – the cultural wisdom knowledge holders – co-designing new ways of working across teaching, research and service, universities could overcome tokenistic practices associated with (1) 'Indigenising the curriculum' and (2) the issues associated with the current approach to employability" (Bullen & Flavell, 2022, p. 1408). Again, while important, this concept is not new. More than two decades earlier, Wheaton (2000) highlighted the value of learning from country. Similarly, Kutay (2018) details on-country learning experiences that immerse staff and students in Indigenous pedagogies through engineering education. Such place-based education approaches help move beyond tokenistic inclusion towards a richer, embodied understanding of Indigenous knowledges. Similarly, Holmes and Jampijinpa (2013) offer a method in which Warlpiri knowledge from Central Australia could be shared on country, through their teachings of totems, language, ceremony and law as critical components of on-country knowledge transfer systems.

Another critical factor is that professional development is to be, where possible, facilitated by Indigenous scholars, elders and community representatives. Such presenters ensure that staff development is grounded in cultural authority, reciprocity and authenticity, and is often best delivered where possible on country. They must also be able to align with policies and strategic plans to ensure the embedding project succeeds. For Goerke and Kickett (2013), academic staff must possess the graduate qualities and outcomes any university wishes to embed. At CDU, for example, one of the six graduate capabilities is for students "to be culturally responsive in their engagement with First Nations peoples and/or issues" (CDU, 2022) upon completion of their studies.

A practical and feasible model was the "at least" model, whereby at least two courses/units are implemented across a degree program (Matthews et al., 2016). Often, professional associations take the lead on curriculum development more so than the university sector. In particular, the Australian Association of Social Workers have developed their own Indigenising framework (Zubrzycki et al., 2014). This can also be said for the Australian Indigenous Psychology Education Project (AIPEP) (Dudgeon et al., 2018). However, Rochecoste et al. (2017) argue that some academic staff do not consider the embedding project within their academic role or responsibility, including for Indigenous Professional Development (PD). Nevertheless, universities need to take responsibility for the attitudes of their staff, as it is no longer acceptable to be culturally incompetent, and, by extension, such incompetence can lead to Indigenous students being singled out in an effort to expect them to offer such knowledge (Rochecoste et al., 2017). Moreover, it is not enough to provide just PD. Staff need to experience the educational, cultural and relational benefits of Indigenising the curriculum. On-country learning and

two-way learning opportunities enable staff to see firsthand the value Indigenous knowledges bring, fostering deeper engagement and cultural responsiveness.

In many cases, Indigenous studies courses and programs are often the starting point for building capacity and awareness of Indigenisation efforts within universities, perhaps acting as case studies of good practice. However, Nakata et al. (2012) suggest tensions may occur when anti-colonial critique is coupled with the hurried instatement of regenerated Indigenous knowledges, thereby tempering the enthusiasm of others to do so. In progressing with this research, we urge a measured approach to the process of Indigenisation. It is crucial to recognise that merely adopting decolonisation practices as a standalone solution can be overly simplistic. A more nuanced and structured exploration is necessary to address the complexities more effectively. Hence, we make clear what genuine Indigenisation initiatives are, as distinct from Indigenous studies programs unless those programs are designed to educate non-Indigenous staff and students.

Benchmarking and criteria

Benchmarking, originally a geological term, was adopted by businesses for performance assessment, notably by Xerox, to evaluate their operations against competitors (Vlasceanu et al., 2004). It is understood here as a consistent, objective process of measuring and comparing procedures from one organisation to another, which effectively applies an external lens to internal actions (Vlasceanu et al., 2004, p. 34). Although there are various benchmarking types, our study privileges an implicit-functional external approach using publication data for cross-institutional analysis that aims not to rank, but rather offer a spectrum snapshot of varied approaches. This method relies on voluntary reporting since it analyses existing data from university websites. It aligns with a functional external benchmark by comparing similar institutions.

Examples of embedding Indigenous knowledge in curricula

Integrating Indigenous knowledge within the Australian higher education sector is a complex process with many layers that are marked by varying levels of engagement. We explore distinct university approaches to curriculum Indigenisation. While some are more strategic and comprehensive than others, our purpose is to reflect the diverse commitment levels, implementation strategies and depth of Indigenous knowledge integration within educational frameworks for each institution. Rather than benchmarking or ranking institutions, we highlight key principles, patterns and illustrative examples derived from publicly available information on university websites. We acknowledge that this snapshot may not represent on-the-ground realities and that the data requires more nuanced verification. Some universities have provided a strategic and comprehensive approach to embedding of Indigenous perspectives throughout their curricula, indicating a deep and wide-ranging approach rooted in their strategic plans. Others offer a more faculty-based targeted approach, showing concentrated yet significant initiatives in particular disciplines or programs, that perhaps was not evident in all faculties. Some others, while they have demonstrated new initiatives and programs to engage with Indigenisation, these often were targeted, specific projects that lacked broad institutional integration. Lastly, a sizable minority of universities are in their early phases of recognising and addressing Indigenisation, with initiatives still under development. Nevertheless, our aim here is not to categorise these institutions regarding their level of embedment but, rather, offer a detailed view of the current state, complexity and variations of Indigenous curriculum integration in Australian higher education. Our purpose is to outline the institutions' achievements, challenges and continued progress towards a more inclusive and representative academic environment in Australia.

Findings

Moving away from categorising universities into rigid tiers, we highlight broad principles and patterns observed from publicly available materials. While some institutions articulate comprehensive frameworks and cultural competency strategies, others present targeted initiatives or are in the early stages of awareness. Without verifiable data, any assessment or ranking would be speculative.

Nevertheless, some universities who have adopted a whole-of-university strategic approach provide room for other universities to realise how such practices could be adopted. These institutions not only include Indigenous perspectives, but they also ensure they are interwoven throughout the entire educational fabric and from policy, to strategy, to practice. This approach often involves extensive collaboration with Indigenous communities, a solid commitment to cultural competence, and a systemic restructuring of curricula to include Indigenous knowledge, methodologies, and epistemologies. Such universities typically have clear, strategic policies and programs; a dedicated website; resources; and institutional support to ensure incorporating Indigenous knowledges is not just an add-on, but a value-add. Our analysis shows how this has occurred within universities, each with detailed nuance.

For example, the University of Melbourne collaborated with the Indigenous Knowledge in the Built Environment (IKBE) department to infuse Indigenous perspectives into the design curriculum (2023a). They created 391 pedagogical resources and established a resource bank to enrich Australian school curricula with Indigenous knowledge. The university deployed seed grants and a faculty-focused pilot program to serve as a template for other faculties. The recent Indigenous strategy (for the period 2023 to 2027), called *Murmuk Djerring*, signals a progressive and ambitious blueprint to advance the university's engagement with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities (University of Melbourne, 2023b).

The University of Sydney, especially its MBA program, has developed a strategic approach to integrate Indigenous cultural and intellectual property in collaboration with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. This was achieved via their overarching 10 principles aimed at ensuring informed consent and empowering Indigenous voices in decision-making. A key aspect of their strategy includes conducting pre-workshop surveys to tailor staff development and embedding Indigenous perspectives into the curriculum effectively. The approach offered curriculum mapping and ongoing development to broaden its impact beyond the MBA program to the entire university community. This was unique for two reasons: (1) it was one of few universities that specifically mapped and aligned their Indigenisation process, and (2) it allowed other faculties to follow suit.

The Indigenisation process at The University of Queensland (UQ) showcases a comprehensive, university-wide, top-down approach led by an Indigenising Curriculum Working Party (ICWP). The ICWP's mandate advocates for best practices to integrate Indigenous perspectives within the curriculum, highlighting emerging educational and digital trends in Indigenisation, and identifying support and training needs for staff that teach or may be willing to teach Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander content (Browne, 2019). Their systematic approach involved benchmarking and strategic planning and the development of a green paper that was presented for feedback and consultation, which provided other universities a clear roadmap to follow.

The University of Wollongong does not provide information about its curriculum or plans to include Indigenous content, however, its program called *Jindaola* focuses on Indigenous Australian studies curriculum and offers professional development courses for staff. One of the few taught on country, it is driven by six key principles: (1) respect, (2) responsibility, (3) reciprocity, (4) regularity, (5) routine, and

(6) relevance (Kennedy et al., 2019). They reported a total of 167 professional and academic staff across 17 teams had participated in the program. It aims to reconcile different types of knowledge and follows protocols based on respect, responsibility and reciprocity. It includes workshops, symposiums and informal gatherings over five days. The university also has a cultural alignment framework to integrate appropriate Indigenous knowledges and perspectives into the curriculum. Some courses have already implemented changes to incorporate Aboriginal knowledges and perspectives, including the integration of Jindaola in the MBA program and within the arts discipline (Kennedy et al., 2022). They have also developed an online area with faculty-related resources for sharing best practices, case studies and exemplars, which are all quite impressive.

Central Queensland University (CQU) presented a strategic framework for curriculum Indigenisation in their 2020–2022 plan, which aimed to integrate Indigenous perspectives through collaborative development and professional growth. They sought to enhance postgraduate qualifications, conduct cultural competency workshops and create an Indigenous graduate attribute matrix for academic reference. Despite this comprehensive approach, CQU's success metrics appear ambiguous, opting to measure "excellence" rather than tangible expertise in cultural competence. Their *Great Guide to Indigenisation of the Curriculum* offers explicit strategies to integrate Indigenous pedagogies and frameworks into academia. However, there is an implied discrepancy between these strategies and their actual application in the past (Al-Natour & Fredericks, 2016). The university's approach is pioneering in its scope, but the effectiveness of its Indigenisation efforts would be significantly enhanced by clear, outcome-focused metrics and transparent reporting.

Curtin University's Mooditj Katitjiny: Indigenising the Curriculum Project demonstrates a significant effort to embed cultural competence within its curriculum through a well-structured matrix and policy framework. Despite this, there is a lack of clarity regarding the practical implementation and evaluation of this framework, especially since their pioneering work in the development of a university-wide framework nearly a decade earlier (Goerke et al., 2015). While the Centre for Aboriginal Studies plays a critical role in facilitating Indigenous learning, the extent of Indigenous representation inside faculty and the impact of cultural competence training within curriculum design and delivery remains uncertain. Curtin's commitment to Indigenisation is articulated in policy and as a graduate attribute, but further details on the effectiveness of these policies and the influence of Indigenous voices in the university's governance would provide a more comprehensive picture of the success of these initiatives in more recent times.

The University of South Australia (UniSA) has integrated Indigenous perspectives into its undergraduate psychology curriculum – an effort anchored by the pioneering work of Ranzijn et al. (2006). This integration includes a mandatory unit on colonisation and culture, co-taught by the Indigenous studies and psychology disciplines, and an elective unit titled Psychology and Indigenous Australians. Indigenous content is also woven throughout the psychology program, reflecting a commitment to inclusive education. UniSA supports its curricular initiatives with *Yurirka: Proppa Engagement with Aboriginal Peoples*, a comprehensive resource designed for broad applicability across the university community. However, the potential of Yurirka as an online unit remains untapped, indicating an area where UniSA could further strengthen its Indigenisation efforts by maximising the accessibility and impact of such resources.

Charles Sturt University (CSU) has instituted an Indigenisation strategy, anchoring its educational framework in cultural competence and responsiveness, endorsed by its Indigenous Board of Studies (n.d.). The plan is structured around a pedagogical matrix that scales cultural proficiency and contextual

understanding of culture from generic to discipline-specific. However, the critical efficacy of this approach, drawn from Ranzijn et al. (2006), is contingent upon its consistent application and depth of integration into various disciplines. CSU's policy rigorously aligns course content with Indigenous graduate learning outcomes, aiming to imbue students with the knowledge and skills necessary for culturally informed professional practice. The university's ethos, Yindymarra Winhanganha, suggests a holistic cultural shift, an ethos-driven framework led by student outcomes, academic involvement and community engagement. The strategy's strength lies in its detailed policy and intellectual framework with academic and professional development being at its core.

The University of Tasmania (UTAS) pursued a comprehensive Indigenisation agenda, with a dedicated webpage outlining its approach. Within the webpage lives Michael Guerzoni's PhD thesis, which provides a systematic review of current university practices towards Indigenisation and offers recommendations for the university in their approach (Guerzoni, 2020). UTAS's strategy, featuring a matrix-based framework, has successfully executed audits and established committees. Yet, the implementation of other facets, such as mandatory units and broader faculty engagement with Indigenous perspectives, remains uncertain. The Aboriginal cultural safety program exemplifies cultural safety education, but the efficacy of such programs and their integration into the broader curriculum needs ongoing assessment. The Indigenisation Committee's role in overseeing curriculum integration is commendable, but the overall impact hinges on the rigour of annual faculty dialogues. UTAS's strategy aims to forge a culturally competent academic environment and, on the surface, has done so well.

The University of Technology Sydney (UTS) has embraced an Indigenous education strategy with the standout innovation of developing Indigenous graduate attributes (IGA) across various faculties (Page et al., 2019). However, research by Bodkin-Andrews et al. (2022) presents a critical lens on the heterogeneity of these IGAs, revealing a disparity in their integration and varying impacts on student attitudes, suggesting that the effectiveness of IGAs is subject to context in academic disciplines. While the strategy ambitiously seeks to augment the collaboration skills of non-Indigenous staff and students with Indigenous communities and researchers, some more specific and explicit performance indicators may help ease questions about its progress. Nevertheless, it should be noted that UTS has demonstrated one of the most consistent, comprehensive and targeted approaches to Indigenisation through their innovations within IGAs.

Targeted strategic approaches

Other universities have been able to demonstrate a specific and focused approach to embedding Indigenous knowledge within their curricula, often characterised by dedicated programs, departments or strategies. These institutions have taken significant steps towards Indigenisation but do not yet have a fully integrated, university-wide strategy. Their efforts are often innovative and impactful within particular areas or disciplines, showcasing a solid commitment to advancing Indigenous education and cultural competence through targeted initiatives.

Macquarie University's Mudang-Dali To Live strategy for the Indigenisation of curriculum stands out for its innovative approach, providing eight distinct methods for embedding Indigenous perspectives across various academic facets (Jamie & Jamie, 2023). With its 15 pedagogical principles tailored to Indigenous curriculum design, the university fosters an educational environment where assessment is aligned with Indigenous epistemologies and students engage with authentic, real-world applications of Indigenous knowledge. The Master of Indigenous Education program reflects a strong institutional commitment to social justice, community respect and societal change in its graduates. While the

Connected Literacies digital repository called iLearn boasts an impressive collection of Indigenous resources aimed at facilitating curriculum Indigenisation, the true impact of these resources hinges on their integration and usage by faculties.

Griffith University has made efforts to Indigenise its curriculum with the establishment of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Curriculum Advisory Group to oversee the developments in the Griffith School of the Environment (Howlett et al., 2013, 2008). This was quite innovative at that time when graduate attributes were still not completely part of the university's vocabulary. A dedicated working party was established to actively drive the agenda. However, there were issues around how staff were genuinely and authentically reflexive during the process, or, as the authors elegantly stated, "Unless this acknowledgement for reflexivity on the part of participating staff is addressed prior to any attempts to Indigenise the curriculum within Griffith School of Environment, genuine transformation of this particular academic space may indeed prove impossible" (Howlett et al., 2013, p. 5). They also pointed out the need for professional development opportunities for staff members, inclusive of, but not limited to, training sessions, cultural workshops and educational programs designed to enhance knowledge and understanding of Indigenous perspectives. Howlett et al. (2013) argue that such initiatives, should be implemented not only before the curriculum changes are made but also during the process and even after its completion.

The University of Western Australia (UWA), especially their Law School and the School of Indigenous Studies developed an Australian first, where Indigenous knowledge, culture and experiences were embedded throughout their Juris Doctor (JD) degree program (Kwaymullina, 2019). This process, called "Indigenisation", follows its own set of Indigenous principles. Perhaps a missed opportunity, as these principles were to become whole-of-university principles at UWA. Nonetheless, their school-based approach was the first in the country to do so within law, and their principles set the scene on how to embody a strengths-based approach beyond the reconciliation rhetoric. For example, one of their principles is to "ensure all teachers are trained in inclusive teaching before delivering content and are given ongoing support, including in the form of opportunities to share and improve their learning in this area" (Kwaymullina, 2019, p. 19).

The University of Adelaide developed an ambitious Indigenous academic strategy as a centralised, top-down university initiative. It set out 21 recommendations in 2019. However, several challenges have impacted its ability to deliver on its intended outcomes, as outlined in their mid-point strategic update (University of Adelaide, 2022). Many universities have not decided to provide a mid-point update and we believe such an undertaking should become commonplace in any university strategy to Indigenise the curriculum. With the strategy ending in 2024, there have been issues in delivering recommendations, such as embedding adequate and appropriate cultural professional development for staff. Their approach was to then audit courses in the first instance and organise faculty-specific strategies for their implementation with clear reporting lines above and below. The University of Adelaide has been effective in delivering on an Indigenous graduate attribute and several critical teaching and learning priority areas, such as capacity building. Even though efforts have been made within their geography discipline to Indigenise, Nursey-Bray (2019) outlines the challenges of such implementation, including the need to unsettle cultural shifts, not just for students, but for staff as well.

James Cook University (JCU) has embraced a faculty-centric method for integrating Indigenous perspectives into its curriculum, making an Indigenous subject compulsory in the Faculty of Arts, Education and Social Sciences and bolstering Indigenous content across other faculties. While JCU professes a solid commitment to Indigenous education through its academic plan and graduate

attributes, like many others, it offers little publicly available data on its journey or its outcomes in any formal reporting measures. Even though JCU pioneered such Indigenous frameworks within curricula several years earlier (Matthews et al., 2016), there is a pressing need now to offer a more holistic and deeply embedded Indigenisation approach that resonates and adopts some of its own advice.

Western Sydney University (WSU) initiated an Indigenous staff conference in 2023 to foster best practices and enhance capacity building via professional development, adopting a decentralised approach to Indigenisation serving their decade-long *Indigenous Futures Decadal Strategy 2023–2032* (WSU, 2023). This approach allows each faculty to tailor its Indigenous strategy to specific contexts and needs, enabling customised solutions and encouraging faculty-specific innovation. The availability of these strategies online facilitates transparency and shared learning. However, the decentralised model could potentially lead to inconsistencies in Indigenisation efforts across the university, and the long-term effectiveness of such faculty-specific strategies in fostering a cohesive university-wide Indigenous framework may require further evaluation.

RMIT University's Indigenous Reconciliation Plan, operational from 2019 to 2020, focused on creating trial curricula and piloting Indigenous programs, targeting discipline-specific Indigenous knowledge with ambitions to expand across different programs (RMIT University, 2019). Despite the lack of visible outcomes on its website, RMIT has constructed an Indigenous content platform to guide both students and educators in incorporating Indigenous knowledge into their learning and teaching. The university promotes its Advancing Reconciliation staff accreditation, which, while positive, comes from a strategy of deficit rather than of strength. The learning management system (LMS) at RMIT features customisable components such as the Womin Djeka Indigenous Orientation, a brief online course enhancing student understanding of local Indigenous languages and knowledge systems. Furthermore, the LMS offers resources such as Acknowledgement of Country and activity sheets, alongside networking opportunities with reconciliation advisors, underscoring RMIT's commitment to fostering Indigenous awareness and education. RMIT has made quite innovative efforts to Indigenise, yet seems to offer a bricolage of sporadic initiatives, mostly student-centred, that do not fully address learning and teaching Indigenisation efforts.

Making strides

Not all universities have the same resources, budgets or human capital to be able to Indigenise their curricula at the same capacity. However, several universities have made great efforts, given their budgetary constraints and institution size, to integrate Indigenous perspectives into their curricula, whether through specific programs or by faculty-led or student-led initiatives. These universities have made strides to Indigenise their curricula where possible, and, while they may be limited in scope or scale, or, perhaps more colloquially, bolted-on rather than integrated within the curricula, it demonstrates commitment by these universities towards Indigenous curriculum integration. These universities often have formalised working groups or committees towards Indigenisation or may still be working to establish broader, university-wide strategies. The focus here is to outline the progress and potential of some of these initiatives, which are laying the groundwork for more extensive integration in the future.

Deakin University's Indigenous action plan is within its early stages (2023 to 2028), with impact yet to materialise (Deakin University, 2023). The plan ambitiously aims to weave Indigenous curriculum throughout all disciplines and includes a cultural immersion program for staff, yet the specifics on how it will enforce staff cultural intelligence is unclear. While historically a forerunner in Indigenisation,

Deakin's adherence to the Indigenous cultural competency framework (ICCF) suggests a cautious approach. Their previous Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Higher Education Agenda (2016–2020) showcased commitment to global citizenship and ethical engagement with Indigenous cultures and it is perhaps too early to comment on its effectiveness.

Southern Cross University (SCU) is unique in several ways. As a relatively small university, it has established a set of guiding Indigenous principles, like UWA, known as the Gnibi Elders Principles. This rule book, so to speak, serves as a valuable document for Indigenous knowledge and cultural protocols. Additionally, it is worth noting that SCU offers the first full degree program with Honours dedicated to Indigenous studies. However, an Indigenous strategy specifically designed for teaching and learning for staff seems to be missing.

Swinburne University of Technology's past Moondani Toombadool (2019–2022) strategy presented targeted measures to integrate Indigenous perspectives (Swinburne University of Technology, 2022). This included enhanced Indigenous readings and a robust framework for monitoring, alongside an online cultural competency course that boasted a high completion rate (Turner et al., 2018). Currently, the absence of this course on their website and the presence of a cultural competency charter only raises questions about the continuity and visibility of such initiatives within their Reconciliation Action Plan (Gunstone, 2020). While Swinburne University maintains a portal for locating Indigenous content within courses and programs, the transition from a comprehensive strategic approach to a resource-finding tool suggests a potential narrowing of focus.

Monash University's Indigenising Practice unit within its Master of Architecture program, steered by Sarah Rees, strategically incorporates First Nations perspectives. Despite its alignment with professional and educational standards, the initiative's scope is limited to a single module, highlighting the need for a more extensive, university-wide approach to fully realise curriculum Indigenisation. Although Monash has made strides, ongoing efforts are required to move towards a more integrated and initiative-taking Indigenisation across disciplines. Monash's Re-School initiative marks a commendable step in cultivating critical engagement with Indigenisation among students, but lives as a bolt-on approach rather than a strategic one.

The Indigenising the curriculum strategy adopted by the Australian National University (ANU), particularly the inclusion of the Indigenous peoples' perspectives (IP-GA) as a graduate attribute, has been a crucial cornerstone in their commitment. The minimum requirement is six units, or one course equivalent, embedded in the discipline of all programs. There is, however, uncertainty as to the level of embedment. The strategy states that the IP-GA should generally be embedded in more than one course. Positive, sustained and meaningful engagement may be more fruitful in some disciplines than others. This is what Bodkin-Andrews et al. (2022) found as to why Indigenous graduate attributes have had a slow uptake in implementation.

Queensland University of Technology (QUT) started its journey by developing an Indigenous Australian Advisory Committee, aiming to align, promote and deliver on its Indigenous Education Strategy. However, it primarily provides resources for schoolteachers and unfortunately did not offer any institution-wide deliverables; rather, it focused on staff understanding to support reconciliation. While still important, the strategy offered a minimum viable approach to Indigenisation rather than a transformative one. Despite outlining key performance indicators, (which was not common for this review) QUT's lack of transparent progress updates makes transparency difficult. Notwithstanding, they do offer grants and audits reflecting a commitment to Indigenisation, yet, once again, such audits are

absent in the public domain. Furthermore, its pursuit of Indigenous graduate qualities and guiding principles for embedding Indigenous perspectives is a positive step, but these measures need to be part of a more cohesive and deeply integrated strategy. They also developed an Australian-first Indigenous Higher Education Academy Fellowship, which is worth mentioning.

The University of Newcastle's Indigenous Framework for 2020–2025, while ambitious, like many others lacks clear goals and specific measures of success. Even though it aims to improve retention, reconciliation and cultural understanding, it falls short by not specifying how proficiency in Indigenous content will be achieved or how curriculum inclusiveness will be measured. A critical problem is the absence of defined goals and indicators for tracking progress, such as the application and assessment of their Cultural Capability Framework. This echoes past criticisms, such as those from Butler and Young (2009), regarding the slow development of Indigenous pedagogical frameworks and the shortage of skilled Indigenous academics. However, recent efforts towards improving staff recruitment and developing Indigenous graduate attributes show some positive movements at the University of Newcastle.

The University of Canberra's initiative was to incorporate Indigenous perspectives across all courses, and one case study developed by Romano et al. (2023) outlined how an information technology (IT) unit that previously lacked Indigenous content was Indigenised. The paper incorporated Yunkaporta's (2009) Eight Ways of Indigenous Learning framework into the unit's content, teaching methods and assessments, as outlined in the course materials. The study employed a design science research (DSR) methodology to evaluate the original course outline, develop a new design, and observe and reflect on the implementation process over one semester with a specific group of students. The Office of Indigenous Leadership at the University of Canberra is currently consulting with external and internal stakeholders in the development of its Indigenous Leadership Strategy 2023–2025.

Moving in the right direction

Other universities have made real movements towards their Indigenisation. They might not yet have holistic and cohesive strategies, but they have made efforts to embrace and support the embedding of Indigenous perspectives and knowledges across the entire curriculum.

For instance, Flinders University's Indigenous centre, Yungorrendi, established an Indigenous Workforce Plan to increase Indigenous employment and their Indigenous Student Success Program (ISSP) offers financial or academic support to help Indigenous students; while commendable, initiatives such as these are quite common across the sector. They do offer an online learning module via Your Mob Learning for Indigenous cultural awareness training for academic and professional staff, but it is unclear if this training is mandatory. Nevertheless, Yungorrendi does have a teaching team that teaches within a compulsory second-year education subject, however, this is not widespread.

Victoria University's previous Indigenous strategy (2017–2020) aimed at developing Aboriginal competencies among students and encouraging staff training, while at the same time building partnerships with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. However, the absence of a recent strategy and published outcomes of previous strategies suggest either limited progress or limited transparency in its Indigenisation initiatives.

Similarly, Edith Cowan University's (ECU) Indigenous engagement strategy appears superficial and lacks progressive measures. While it emphasises student engagement with Indigenous content to

develop cultural competency, it does not provide a comprehensive plan. The outdated reference to Universities Australia's *Indigenous Strategy 2017–2020* highlights the need for a clear, current strategy with specific examples and measurable outcomes. Despite these shortcomings, ECU made notable progress in Indigenising their sports curriculum in 2017 and were leading faculty-based Indigenisation several years ago (Young et al., 2017).

Conclusion

The efforts of various Australian universities to embed Indigenous knowledge within their curricula demonstrates a range of approaches and levels of commitment. A clear outcome of this study is that no consistent approach exists. While some universities have made concrete efforts to operationalise their strategic plans, most universities could benefit from more explicit and specific outcome metrics and more transparent reporting and evaluation. Setting broad-brush objectives without accountability measures and specified timelines within university strategic documents further complicates execution. Nevertheless, the objective here was not to outline a correct approach, categorise their embedment or compare their outputs. Instead, we offer a range of techniques that universities have considered and adopted in the hope that the other half of Australian universities across the sector currently without an Indigenisation strategy might consider developing one.

Drawing on publicly available information from university websites at a specific point in time (1 to 25 of November 2023) presents its limitations. There are dozens of initiatives progressing or not published on their institutions' websites that have not been captured here and we understand that our findings can be outdated, selectively positive or fractional. However, our aim was to serve as a starting point of what current approaches to Indigenisation are occurring within the higher education landscape.

While each university has its own unique context, country, community and resources, there is a pressing need to stocktake the ongoing and evolving commitment of Australian higher education institutions to honour and integrate Indigenous knowledges within curricula.

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