

Beyond the doctorate: Indigenous Early Career Research trajectories

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Growing research into the experiences of non-Indigenous early career researchers (ECRs) has identified a multitude of challenges that can impede early research career development. Expectations to publish, secure research grants and to deliver large teaching loads contribute to high levels of frustration and stress. While additional challenges—often associated with cultural work—have emerged in the literature with regards to Australian and international Indigenous academics, research focused specifically on Indigenous Australian early career researchers is severely lacking. This paper begins with an examination of the Australian Indigenous pipeline to early career positions through undergraduate and postgraduate study. It reviews the trajectories of non-Indigenous early career researchers and then draws on emerging research by Indigenous academics in Australia and abroad to advocate specific investigation of the career trajectories of Indigenous Australian early career researchers. In accordance with a commitment from Australian universities to increase the number of Indigenous students and scholars, it is critical that experiences and needs of Indigenous early career researchers are investigated and understood. With a deeper level of understanding, more effective strategies and systems can be implemented to better support and facilitate career trajectories of Indigenous Australian early career researchers and thus build a richer academy.

Keywords: early career researchers, Indigenous strategies

Introduction

While there are increasing numbers of Australian Indigenous people gaining doctoral qualifications (Trudgett et al., 2016), the focus has been on how to move Indigenous people through the pipeline from undergraduate to postgraduate studies. Indigenous engagement and participation in higher education has a relatively young history in Australia, as formal measures to encourage and specifically cater to the needs of Indigenous students were not undertaken until the early 1970s. The establishment in 1973 of the Aboriginal Task Force program (ATF) was a late but significant development, and is a recognised turning point in achieving successful engagement of Indigenous people in higher education (Bin-Sallik, 2003; Coates et al., 2021; Holt & Morgan, 2016; Rigney, 2001; Trudgett, 2009;). Up until this point, Indigenous participation in higher education was rarely, if ever, seriously considered as a priority by the higher education sector (Rigney, 2001).

An important outcome of the ATF program was the creation of Indigenous support units (ISUs), which were specifically designed to address identified barriers to Indigenous engagement and participation in higher education. These specialised study and social spaces enabled inclusion of Indigenous knowledges, culture, and histories, creating culturally safe learning environments in which Indigenous students

engaged and successfully completed their studies (Bin-Sallik, 2003; Coates et al., 2021). Following the initial centre in South Australia, ISUs were gradually adapted and/or replicated as the main source of support for Indigenous students in almost every university across Australia (Asmar et al., 2015; Holt & Morgan, 2016; Rochecouste et al., 2017). Results from the ATF program provided sound evidence that Indigenous students were more than capable of completing studies in higher education (Bin-Sallik, 2003). Increasing Indigenous student engagement led to research that focused on undergraduate students (DiGregorio et al., 2000; Malcolm & Rochecouste, 1998), transition to higher education (Oliver et al., 2013) and seeking answers to what fostered success for undergraduates (Devlin, 2009). There was little need at this time for research into graduate trajectories or higher degree research success.

More than 30 years after the launch of the ATF program, the *Partnerships, Pathways and Policies – Improving Indigenous Education Outcomes* report (Indigenous Higher Education Advisory Council, 2006) and the subsequent *Review of Australian Higher Education* (Bradley et al., 2008) identified comparable challenges and made similar recommendations to address ongoing constraints to Indigenous access and engagement in the global academy. Further, the reports outlined challenges and recommendations to achieve parity between Indigenous and non-Indigenous participation and success (Coates et al., 2021; Page et al., 2017). Notably, these reports provided the impetus for an Indigenous-specific higher education review. The *Review of Higher Education Access and Outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People* (Behrendt et al., 2012), often referred to as the Behrendt Review, outlined 35 recommendations in the effort towards achieving parity for Indigenous students. Moreover, the review panel noted that: “Success in higher education will lay the foundations for an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander professional class that can contribute to closing the gap and to Australia’s broader wellbeing and economic prosperity” (Behrendt et al., 2012: p. xi).

Clearly, the Behrendt Review (2012) advocated beyond the mere engagement of Indigenous students in higher education; it also pointed out the benefits that Indigenous professionals would bring to the academy and the broader Australian community. This prompts the need to extend enquiries of Indigenous education from a singular focus on participation through to investigations of Indigenous completion and employment in the academy. As Indigenous higher degree research completions grow, it is timely to consider the post-doctoral career trajectories of Indigenous scholars both to understand the experience and to maximise opportunities for individuals and institutions.

The authors of this paper comprise two Indigenous professors (authors two and three) and an Indigenous early career researcher (author one). This paper provides a literature review and premise for a three-year longitudinal study, funded by the Australian Research Council (ARC). The Developing Indigenous Early Career Researchers project aims to address a gap in the research literature regarding the experiences of Australian Indigenous early career researchers (ECRs) and ultimately to establish a model of best practice to support the emerging careers of Indigenous ECRs.

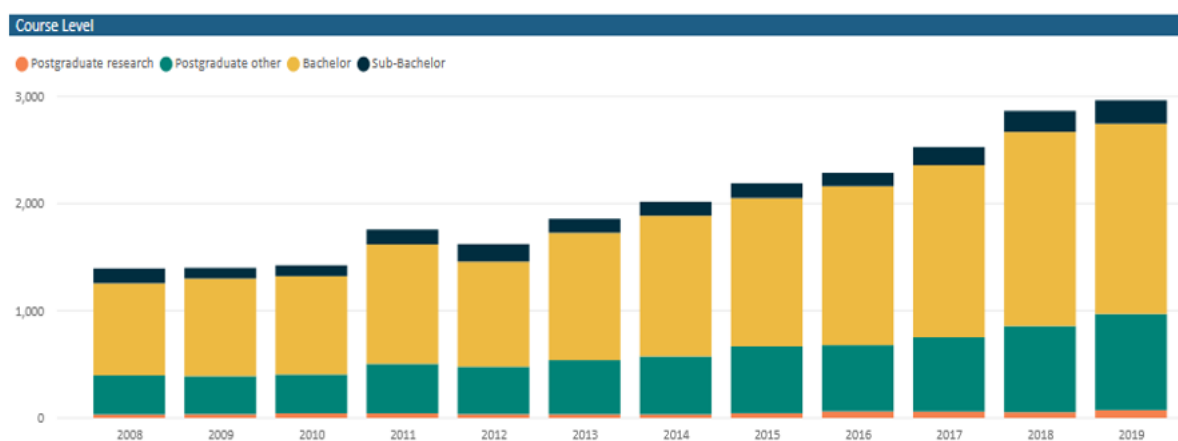
The paper firstly examines Australian Indigenous student enrolments in higher education and then explores Australian literature focused on the experiences of Indigenous students in their progression from undergraduate to doctoral studies in the Australian academy. Examining related literature, the paper identifies barriers faced by non-Indigenous ECRs in establishing an academic career trajectory. Using this as a basis, the paper then explores emerging literature of Indigenous academics in Australia and Indigenous ECRs abroad to identify barriers and expectations that may also impact on the establishment of a sound Indigenous ECR track record.

For clarity, and in line with the literature, this paper uses the following terms to respectfully identify and recognise different First Nations peoples. In this paper, “Indigenous” refers to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples of Australia (Andersen et al., 2008; Behrendt et al., 2012; Coates et al., 2021). “Māori” are recognised as the indigenous peoples of New Zealand (Baice et al., 2021; Grant & McKinley, 2011; McAllister, 2019). “Pacific” are the indigenous peoples of the Pacific Islands (Baice et al., 2021; Naepi, 2019; Thomsen et al., 2021). The term “faculty of colour” is used in line with international literature exploring the experiences of both Indigenous and other racialised peoples (Garrison-Wade et al., 2012; Joseph & Hirshfield, 2011). Finally, as the term “Indigenous” is used in literature about Canada’s First Nations peoples (Louie, 2019; Mohamed & Beagan, 2019) the term “Indigenous (Canada)” will be used so as not to confuse these peoples with Australian Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander peoples.

The growth of the pipeline through higher education in Australia

Since the release of the *Review of Higher Education Access and Outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People* in 2012, there has been a steady increase in the number of Indigenous students enrolling in higher education. The 2020 Universities Australia (UA) *Indigenous Strategy Annual Report* notes a marked increase in Indigenous enrolments from 1.3 per cent in 2008 to 1.9 per cent in 2018; however, UA also notes that population parity between Indigenous and non-Indigenous students remains significantly disparate and, to reach this, Indigenous student enrolments would need to be 3.1 per cent (p. 12). Figure 1 below provides a clear pictorial representation of growth in Indigenous completions across different course levels between 2008 and 2019. However, it is clear that the growth in postgraduate research completions is markedly smaller than the growth in lower course levels, such as bachelor awards.

Figure 1. Number of Indigenous award course completions, by course level



Source (Department of Education Skills and Employment, 2020)

To effectively address the disparity between Indigenous and non-Indigenous enrolments and completions, it is essential that significant efforts are made to support Indigenous students through to completion and on to academic positions, should this be their intended career ambition. This point was clearly articulated more than a decade ago in the 2008 *Review of Australian Higher Education*:

The panel is of the view that a target should be set for higher education attainment (completion of a qualification) rather than access (commencement) or participation

(enrolment), as graduates feed directly into the workforce to meet labour market demand. Even if targets based on access or participation were achieved, they may have less impact on growth and productivity if a high proportion of students do not complete their studies. (Bradley et al., 2008, p. 30)

Whilst the completion of degrees is essential to increasing Indigenous employment capacity, course level completion undoubtedly also determines professional, academic and/or research career trajectories. An increase in the number of Indigenous academics and researchers will provide upcoming Indigenous students with greater access to mentors that are capable of meeting both their academic and cultural needs (Andersen et al., 2008; Behrendt et al., 2012; Trudgett, 2009; Trudgett, 2011). Shifting from a particular focus on Indigenous enrolments to increasing Indigenous completions and progression beyond undergraduate studies necessitates an exploration of the literature to understand the needs and experiences of postgraduate students, who move closer to the possibility of a career in academia and/or research.

Beyond undergraduate degrees: Building research careers

Initial investigations into Indigenous experiences of higher education logically focused predominantly on undergraduates and Indigenous support units (ISUs) (Andersen et al., 2008; Asmar et al., 2015; Bin-Sallik, 2003; Rigney, 2001). However, as an increasing number of Indigenous students progressed and successfully completed graduate and postgraduate degrees, the focus of research broadened to include the experiences and requirements of Indigenous postgraduate and doctoral students (Barney, 2018; Manathunga, 2017; Page et al., 2016; Page et al., 2017; Trudgett, 2009; Trudgett et al., 2016). Not surprisingly, enquiries with doctoral students identified specialised needs and requirements that differed from those of undergraduate students.

Specific differences between the needs of undergraduate and doctoral students were identified by Trudgett (2009) in research examining the capacity of ISUs to support Indigenous students engaged in higher education studies. The paper provided nine recommendations for the sector's consideration in response to finding that ISUs were often ill-equipped to effectively meet the distinct needs of Indigenous higher degree students (Trudgett, 2009). This finding was also supported in literature noting that resources and skills provided by Indigenous centres generally cater to the largest cohort of students, which are more often than not undergraduates (Page et al., 2016). Other studies in Australia and New Zealand (Grant, 2010; Grant & McKinley, 2011; Page et al., 2016; Trudgett, 2014) investigating the support needs of postgraduate and doctoral students moved away from the role of ISUs to the roles and influence of supervisors on higher degree student experiences and completion.

However, literature on the supervision of Indigenous and minority students was preceded by enquiries investigating non-Indigenous postgraduate and doctoral student supervisor experiences. In this body of research, relationships between non-Indigenous students and their non-Indigenous supervisors have long been recognised as problematic, complex, tenuous and, at times, contrary to the agency of the doctoral student (Grant, 2005; Hopwood, 2010; McAlpine et al., 2012). In addition, supervisor and student preconceived expectations of their roles in the supervisory relationship have also been shown to influence graduate experiences and outcomes (Grant, 2005; McAlpine et al., 2012).

Research in Australia and abroad found that the supervisory relationship was further challenged when supervisors and students held conflicting worldviews and expectations (Hutchings et al., 2019; Manathunga, 2017; Trudgett, 2014). McKinley et al. (2011) specifically note that "the central tension often

experienced by Māori students is the need to meet both cultural and academic obligations and standards” (p. 127). Grant and McKinley (2011) noted that family and community responsibilities of Māori students are often underestimated or disregarded by non-Māori supervisors. However, research in New Zealand stresses the valuable role that family and community play in the academic success of Māori and Pacific students (Kidman & Chu, 2017; Thomsen et al., 2021). Specifically, Chu et al. (2013) state that “for Pacific people, learning is not confined to effective teaching strategies; successful learning sits on the pillars of the family, the community, cultural capital, collaborative relationships and institutional support” (p. 4). Thus, for Indigenous, Māori, and Pacific doctoral students, a successful supervisory relationship requires that a supervisor both understands and values the family, community and cultural responsibilities.

Overall, a considerable amount of literature advocates the view that an Indigenous student’s relationship with their supervisor is paramount to successful doctoral completion (Barney, 2018; Page et al., 2016; Trudgett, 2014). This is particularly important in Australia, as the Behrendt Review has resulted in a concerted push to address the lack of Indigenous staff in the academy: “Increasing the number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander academics will greatly assist, for example, in building teaching capacity, providing high-quality supervision for postgraduate students, embedding Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspectives in curriculums, and increasing research capacity” (Behrendt et al., 2012, p. 211).

Building a richer academy with an increased pool of Indigenous professionals, scholars and researchers is key to providing upcoming Indigenous students with culturally respectful and appropriate supervisors (Andersen et al., 2008; Behrendt et al., 2012; Trudgett, 2014). While international studies focused on Māori and Pacific ECRs is emerging, there is a paucity of literature in Australia due to a lack of research investigating the experiences of Indigenous ECRs (Hutchings et al., 2019; Moodie et al., 2018). Thus, the next section of this paper begins with an examination of the barriers and supports to the career trajectories of non-Indigenous ECRs in Australia. Following this, and to identify additional factors that may be relevant to Indigenous ECRs, literature associated with Indigenous academics in general and emerging international literature are considered.

Early career researchers (ECRs)

It is generally understood in universities around the world that a successful doctoral candidate will normally progress to the role of early career academic and/or researcher. In the Australian context, Bazeley (2003) developed the following definition to clarify what it is to be an early career researcher: “An early career researcher is one who is currently within their first five years of academic or other research-related employment allowing uninterrupted, stable research development following completion of their postgraduate research training” (p. 274).

This timeframe is supported by Browning et al. (2014) who suggest that there is a tipping point at around five years when a researcher will build more significantly on their research trajectory by securing research funding, producing post-doctoral publications and beginning to supervise postgraduate students. However, developing an early research career is influenced by a number of factors shaped by the academic workforce even before an ECR’s level of skill and/or experience has been taken into consideration (Browning et al., 2014; Crome et al., 2019; Scaffidi & Berman, 2011). Emerging domestic and international research has identified barriers and enablers that influence the level of success in building an early research career.

Barriers to developing early career researchers

The literature identifies that job security for ECRs is significantly impacted by an increase in the number of doctoral completions (Bazeley, 2003; Crome et al., 2019; Van der Weijden et al., 2015), increased competition for tenured positions (Scaffidi & Berman, 2011) and increasing casualisation of academic employment (Klopper & Power, 2014; Robertson & Fyffe, 2019). In addition, to these institutional factors, additional barriers to the development of a sound research career arise as a result of ambiguous ECR roles and responsibilities (Bazeley, 2003; Price et al., 2015; Scaffidi & Berman, 2011; Van der Weijden et al., 2015), large teaching loads (Adcroft & Taylor, 2013), publication expectations (Browning et al., 2014) and isolation (Price et al., 2015; Scaffidi & Berman, 2011). Without formal and consistent systems in place, ECRs are at the mercy of the needs and requirements of the academy and, more so, of the faculty in which they are engaged. Van der Weijden et al. (2015) noted that, as postdoctoral researchers are not recognised as a specific staff category and often work on temporary contracts, they are effectively invisible in the academy. Clearly, invisibility impedes the development of research trajectories in which publishing, presenting at conferences and securing research grants are considered as indicators of success (Browning et al., 2014; Crome et al., 2019; Sutherland, 2017).

An investigation by Adcroft and Taylor (2013) noted that ECRs are often burdened to manage high teaching loads alongside research and publishing expectations. While the ECRs in the study understood their obligation to teach, increasing class sizes continued to limit the amount of time available to conduct research and subsequently to publish. Moreover, as teaching roles and responsibilities monopolised an ECR's time, it is also true that teaching afforded less recognition towards building a research career record (Adcroft & Taylor, 2013; Sutherland, 2017). This finding has been echoed in other domestic and international studies, which suggests that this is not an isolated challenge; rather, this barrier is all too familiar to many ECRs (Adcroft & Taylor, 2013; Bazeley, 2003; Browning et al., 2014; Petersen, 2011; Price et al., 2015).

In relation to burgeoning teaching loads, ECRs invariably find themselves working extended hours with no recompense and to the detriment of their own health and wellbeing (Petersen, 2011). Concerningly, an expectation that research work will inevitably encroach on life outside the academy is reported as being normalised by mentors and institutions (Sutherland, 2017; Sutherland-Smith et al., 2011). Early career researchers who sought a more manageable work/life balance have been described by some research leaders as "single combat warriors" unable to "get with the program" or unwilling to "make the transition to the new competitive framework" (Sutherland-Smith et al., 2011, p. 337). As a result, ECRs were reported to view themselves as marginalised and/or as fringe dwellers. This sense of professional isolation reflects back to an earlier point about the invisibility of ECRs in the academy and the impact this has on the availability of networking and support opportunities (Price et al., 2015; Scaffidi & Berman, 2011).

Clearly, a barrier to the development of ECRs is created when the expectations and/or needs of ECRs are misunderstood or simply overlooked by senior academics and the institution who invariably shape and influence the ECR experience. The dissonance between expectation and reality was also evidenced in a study evaluating an early career academic (ECA) mentoring pilot program (Thomas et al., 2015). In this study, all participating senior academics indicated that they had made themselves available to the early career academics they were assigned to mentor. However, almost all stated that it was up to the ECRs to initiate contact and decide on what the mentoring interactions would entail. This approach appears counter-intuitive to the concept of mentoring and was expressed by the researchers as a "sink or swim" mentor mindset, indicating that "there is an (often implicit) expectation that protégés [ECAs] should

know what they need to ask and if they do not then they are not ‘smart enough’ or may not belong at the institution” (Thomas et al., 2015, p. 327).

Serious barriers to the development of ECRs are built and maintained by senior academics and institutions that fail to recognise or understand the experiences, needs and/or expectations from the perspective of ECRs they employ. Encouragingly, there is evidence through emerging research of initiatives and programs that seek to better meet the challenges faced by ECRs, with a view to ensuring an ongoing pool of researchers who will further advance bodies of knowledge and practice in academia.

Supporting the development of early career researchers

Emerging research identifies a variety of approaches to guide and support ECRs in developing an early career track record. In this growing body of knowledge, access to beneficial mentorship and opportunities to publish are consistently reported as crucial to academic success in the first five years of a research career. Whilst some literature focuses explicitly on the benefits and challenges of mentoring, pilot programs that combine mentoring with formal training in publishing and grant-writing skills have reported promising results (Browning et al., 2014).

There have been a number of studies focusing on the attributes of successful career mentoring. A study in the United States (Thomas et al., 2015) found that successful mentoring efforts involved an acknowledgement of the diversity of ECRs and the inadequacies of a one-size-fits-all approach. Importantly, they noted that mentoring was of most benefit to those early academics who wanted it; an important point for universities with mandatory mentoring programs to seriously consider. A study in the United Kingdom identified mentoring as one of four key components to supporting new career academics (Adcroft & Taylor, 2013). A combination of both formal and informal mentoring was noted to facilitate academic development, in collaboration with the management of expectations, career management and professional development. In contrast to Thomas et. al (2015) who found that only some ECRs requested mentors, all 12 new academics participating in the United Kingdom study (Adcroft & Taylor, 2013) described the combination of formal and informal mentoring as positive and beneficial.

An eight-month pilot program involving fourteen ECRs in a young Australian university (Browning et al., 2014) reported successful outcomes with the use of three focused strategies. Specifically, this program provided targeted workshops, the development of a focused career plan and mentoring from a senior researcher. Success from this combination of strategies was specifically measured in regard to the number of papers written and published. During the program, the cohort submitted 73 manuscripts for publication (between two and 15 each), and, by the end of the year, more than half of these had been accepted. This is more than double the average number of publications reported for all academic staff members at the same university the previous year (Browning et al., 2014, p. 124).

In reflection of this pilot program, Browning et al. (2014) advocate that successful mentoring does not involve teaching how to research, but rather teaches ECRs how to build a track record for the foundation and progression of a research career. Participant feedback also reported the value of formal and informal opportunities to network with peers in the same and in different disciplines to themselves. Other literature also evidenced the crucial role peer networks can play in developing early careers, particularly in regard to addressing ECR invisibility and isolation in the academy (Scaffidi and Berman, 2011; Van der Weijden et al., 2015).

Similarly, with a view to improving professional development opportunities and the research culture within their organisation, Price et al. (2015) documented the challenges faced by three early career academics in establishing an informal peer support network. This paper concludes that while the establishment of an early career peer network is useful in creating an informal supportive community, systemic change at the university level is required to effectively address the needs of ECRs: “While universities are increasingly dependent on ECAs, institutional support is vital in order to reduce job insecurity, workload pressure and professional isolation. Addressing these three issues will improve ECA productivity and ensure longevity of the workforce” (Price et al., 2015, p. 695).

In the academy, publications are arguably the currency of productivity and longevity (Bazeley, 2003; Browning et al., 2014; Price et al., 2015). As a result, research focused on developing early career academics/researchers inevitably investigates publication production and grant applications as a means of measuring academic success (Bazeley, 2003; Browning et al., 2014; Price et al., 2015; Scaffidi & Berman, 2011). In light of this, it is critical that opportunities for ECRs to publish are supported and facilitated. However, Sarabipour et al. (2019) note that “the protracted duration of traditional journal publishing can negatively impact ECRs seeking funding, promotion, and hiring” (p. 4). That is, the ability to build a track record through publication is greatly hindered by the drawn-out systematic process of getting a paper published. In response to this challenge, Sarabipour et al. (2019) advocate the value of preprint publications as a support mechanism for the development of ECRs. Whilst the value of preprints to ECRs has an increasing body of support (Avasthi et al., 2018; Berg et al., 2016), it is limited to disciplines such as science, life sciences and health. Currently, faculties such as the humanities in which researchers are more likely to work independently (Price et al., 2015) do not appear to be engaging in this approach.

An increasing body of knowledge has continued to identify barriers and enablers to supporting the development of early career academics and researchers (Browning et al., 2014; Price et al., 2015; Scaffidi & Berman, 2011; Sutherland, 2017). In order to effectively support ECRs in meeting the academy’s expectations of success and productivity, it is paramount to firstly understand the personal views and expectations of ECRs themselves (Petersen, 2011; Sawarkar et al., 2019; Sutherland, 2017; Sutherland-Smith et al., 2011). It is fair to say that this is an area in which further studies are required in order to improve and extend existing programs that have reported positive outcomes towards the development of ECRs. In addition, it is important to note a dearth of literature specifically investigating barriers for and enablers of Indigenous and minority ECRs. Certainly, such an inquiry is pertinent to the aims of universities in countries such as Australia aiming to increase Indigenous student success and to building an overall richer academy.

Indigenous early career researchers

Despite government and higher education initiatives designed to increase participation, retention and progression of Indigenous staff within the university sector in Australia, research specifically examining the experiences of Australian Indigenous ECRs is severely limited (Hutchings et al., 2019; Moodie et al., 2018). Emerging international research and research with Indigenous academics has brought to light challenges and stresses additional to those experienced by non-Indigenous ECRs. Such stresses stem from a growing recognition of the specialised skills and knowledges that Indigenous academics, Māori and Pacific ECRs, Indigenous (Canada) and faculty of colour bring to the academy, particularly in regard to Indigenous engagement, completion and progression (Baice et al., 2021; Behrendt et al., 2012; Garrison-Wade et al., 2012; Henry et al., 2017; Louie, 2019). This is particularly pertinent when we consider the underrepresentation of Indigenous (Canada), Māori and Pacific ECRs (Henry et al., 2017; Louie, 2019;

McAllister, 2019; Naepi, 2019) and faculty of colour academics employed in higher education institutions across Australia and other colonised countries.

In Australia, Indigenous ECRs have been identified as instrumental to future Indigenous student engagement and success (Behrendt et al., 2012). However, 2018 data indicated that Indigenous academic staff were highly underrepresented in comparison to their non-Indigenous peers. Specifically, an additional 1,185 Indigenous academic staff would need to have been employed to attain population parity of 3.1 per cent between Indigenous and non-Indigenous academic staff (Universities Australia, 2020). This is relevant to international research which elucidates the point that institutional rhetoric of diversity and inclusion does not necessarily result in a diverse or inclusive environment (Kidman & Chu, 2017; McAllister, 2019). In identifying this as “institutional speech acts”, Ahmed (2012) claims that institutions can be attributed certain qualities simply as a result of value or commitment statements made by an individual on behalf of the institution. This is certainly of benefit to the reputation and standing of an institution, however institutional speech acts do not necessarily translate to higher levels of Indigenous engagement or employment.

Despite lower rates of employment, Indigenous and faculty of colour academics are reported to spend a considerable amount of time supporting both Indigenous and minority students, as well as non-minority staff. Although the literature provides clear examples in which Indigenous and faculty of colour academics expressed both accountability and satisfaction in supporting Indigenous and/or minority students (Garrison-Wade et al., 2012; Mohamed & Beagan, 2019; Page & Asmar, 2008), two concerning factors are evident. Firstly, support and mentoring roles are often automatically delegated to Indigenous scholars or faculty of colour as a consequence of their cultural identity and this tends to remove the onus from non-Indigenous academics to work with students or subject matter contrary to their personal values, beliefs and biases (Henry et al., 2017; Joseph & Hirshfield, 2011; Staniland et al., 2019; Thompson, 2008). Secondly, research strongly suggests that the additional effort and time that these tasks require and the potential for associated risks to affect this smaller pool of academics is rarely recognised (Joseph & Hirshfield, 2011; Mohamed & Beagan, 2019; Page & Asmar, 2008). This additional and unrecognised load could potentially impede the career trajectories of Indigenous ECRs.

For example, research in Australia advocates that Indigenous students benefit from culturally sensitive and relevant support and/or supervision (Behrendt et al., 2012; Page et al., 2016; Trudgett, 2010; Trudgett, 2011), which indicates a need for a greater number of Indigenous academics. However, recent data reveals a growth in teaching-only roles for Indigenous academics (Universities Australia, 2020). Figure 2 below shows that while there has been some, albeit modest, growth in research-only positions for Indigenous ECRs, a decrease in combined teaching and research roles has largely been offset by a growth in teaching-only roles. At the same time, the growth in Indigenous teaching-only positions exceeds the growth in non-Indigenous teaching-only roles. As noted previously in regard to non-Indigenous ECRs, this is of concern, as higher teaching loads provide less opportunity for research, which, in effect, has the potential of stunting career development (Adcroft & Taylor, 2013; Sutherland, 2017).

Figure 2: Teaching and research comparison between Indigenous and non-Indigenous staff from 2005 to 2018 (Universities Australia, 2020)



Source (Universities Australia, 2020).

In addition to an increase in teaching roles, Indigenous and faculty of colour academics are often also tasked to indigenise curriculum, to teach Indigenous-specific units and to sit on committees in order for the university to meet their federally funded obligations to improve Indigenous outcomes (Gaudry & Lorenz, 2018; Page & Asmar, 2008). In literature from the United States, Joseph and Hirshfield (2011) investigated additional workloads and stresses experienced by faculty of colour, noting “numerous examples of how faculty of colour experience cultural taxation in the form of unequal expectations, being overcommitted, coping with colleagues’ problematic behaviours and having to prove they are academically qualified” (p. 36).

Faculty of colour academics reported that inclusion on committees was often more for the benefit of the institution and, as such, they viewed themselves as token non-white representatives, rather than agents of change (Garrison-Wade et al., 2012; Joseph & Hirshfield, 2011). Henry et al. (2017) noted that “equity committees were effective in raising concerns about inequities and proposing remedies, but as these committees did not have mandates to ensure implementation, often their efforts were for naught” (p. 308). This was also expressed as cultural taxation, as the expectations of attendance and participation were not often paired with a strategic plan to address racial perspectives and/or systems that continue to marginalise Indigenous and faculty of colour students and staff (Garrison-Wade et al., 2012; Henry et al., 2017).

Bunda et al. (2012) construe university policies that promote equity of access for Indigenous peoples as an equity bridge: “It is a bridge of one-way access into an institutional field where the rules of the game have not been made – nor are they substantially transformable – by contributions of Indigenous agency” (p. 942). As in the aforementioned committees, Indigenous representation can be viewed by non-Indigenous staff as sufficient to addressing issues of equity, particularly in faculties that ignore, or worse still, deny the existence of racism (Henry et al., 2017; Joseph & Hirshfield, 2011; Mohamed & Beagan, 2019). However, for Indigenous and faculty of colour academics, an invitation to attend is fraught with tension, as dominant whitestream expectations and assumptions can render Indigenous standpoints invisible (Bunda et al., 2012; Henry et al., 2017; Mohamed & Beagan, 2019).

Recent research in Canada exemplifies the equity bridge concept in its review of targeted Indigenous academic recruitment. Specifically, the creation of targeted positions offers a virtual bridge to enable

Indigenous staff equitable access to the academy. However, as the positions are defined by whiteman requirements and conditions, equity is severely compromised. Louie (2019) conducted a comparison of 15 advertisements for Indigenous (Canada) academic positions against 15 academic positions that were not specifically targeted at Indigenous academics in faculties of education in Canada. In all Indigenous (Canada) specific advertisements, applicants were expected to demonstrate Indigenous knowledges and connections to Indigenous (Canada) communities. No such requirements were stated in any of the advertisements not specifically targeting Indigenous (Canada) applicants.

Whilst this finding firstly evidences systemic racial profiling, the most revealing aspect was the fact “that none of these capacities are recognized within funding allowances, workload allotments, or tenure and promotion committees” (Louie, 2019, p. 791). In order to apply, Indigenous (Canada) academics were required to demonstrate greater skills and abilities than their non-Indigenous peers; however, there was no allocation of additional monetary or academic benefits to appropriately reward or compensate the successful Indigenous (Canada) applicant. Thus, the supposed strategy of providing equitable access for Indigenous (Canada) academics serves to meet university needs, and the successful Indigenous candidate is employed in a position that is defined and controlled by a whiteman institution. Hidden expectations such as these may be pitfalls for unwary Indigenous ECRs, which they have little authority to remedy.

Whilst this research was conducted in Canada, the expectation of Indigenous academics to freely access and provide Indigenous knowledges to students, colleagues and the executive is also pertinent to Australian universities. Regrettably, in line with the Canadian study, this expectation is not conducive to further development or promotion of Indigenous ECRs: “In career terms, being seen as the ‘go to’ person for any Indigenous issue or need arising in one’s workplace is rarely recognised in a system which mainly rewards formal publications” (Asmar & Page, 2018, p. 1682).

To date, an emerging body of research has brought to light the inequitable level of responsibility and stress experienced by Indigenous ECRs and faculties of colour. Whilst some research has investigated ways in which to support non-Indigenous ECRs in developing career trajectories in Australia and abroad (Browning et al., 2014; Crome et al., 2019; Sarabipour et al., 2019; Sawarkar et al., 2019), there is a dearth of research investigating ways in which to best support the development and career trajectories of Indigenous ECRs, particularly in Australia (Ewen et al., 2019). Certainly, the first step in addressing these challenges and barriers is to further investigate experiences and perspectives of Indigenous Australian ECRs. This is the focus of a current project that aims to identify the key barriers and facilitators associated with advancing the research careers of Indigenous Australians who have completed a doctoral qualification during the past five years. Emphasising the importance of building research capacity amongst Indigenous scholars, the study also aims to establish a model of best practice to support the emerging careers of Indigenous ECRs.

Conclusion

Research into the experiences of early career researchers is currently limited and reliant on studies investigating the experiences of non-Indigenous ECRs, as well as the broader international literature. Underrepresentation is only one of a number of challenges faced by Indigenous and faculty of colour ECRs that the literature has begun to explore. Research investigating Indigenous and faculty of colour academics has identified common issues and barriers that are primarily the consequence of racism, unequal workloads, invisibility and isolation within the academy. With a commitment from Australian

universities to increase the number of Indigenous students and scholars, it is critical that the experiences and needs of Indigenous ECRs are investigated and understood. With a sound and deeper level of understanding, it should be possible to develop an effective model in which to better facilitate Indigenous ECRs to secure tenure and contribute to the growing body of research that aims to achieve parity between Indigenous and non-Indigenous participation and success in the academy. The Developing Indigenous Early Career Researchers project aims to address this gap in the research literature regarding the experiences of Australian Indigenous ECRs with the aim of establishing a model of best practice to support their emerging careers.

Acknowledgements

We would like to thank the Australian Research Council for funding this project and all participants who kindly shared their knowledge with us.

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Please cite this article as:

Locke, M., Trudgett, M., & Page, S. (2022). Beyond the doctorate: Exploring Indigenous early career research trajectories. *The Australian Journal of Indigenous Education*, 51(1). DOI 10.55146/ajie.2022.13



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