



WESTERN SYDNEY
UNIVERSITY

INDIGENOUS RESEARCH STRATEGY

2024 – 2028

Sharing Knowledges in Good Spirit

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF COUNTRY

With respect for Aboriginal cultural protocols, and out of recognition that the campuses of Western Sydney University occupy the Traditional Lands of multiple Aboriginal Nation and Language Groups, the authors of this policy document acknowledges and offers our deepest respects to the Darug, Eora, Dharawal, and Wiradjuri peoples. In addition, we pay our respects to the surrounding Aboriginal Nations and Language Groups that may also have connections to these lands, and all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples who visit, learn, and work at Western Sydney University.

COVER IMAGE:

A segment of the artwork titled 'Those who came before us.' This work was coordinated by artist Allan McKenzie, a Wiradjuri-Gamilaroi man from Griffith NSW. Well over 120 staff and students, Indigenous and non-Indigenous, contributed to painting this piece of art. It is owned by none, yet owned by all, and is a great example of reconciliation in practice.

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FOREWORD

Western Sydney has 54,000 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples residing in our region, the largest population in the country. We are very proud of the many strong relationships that exists between Indigenous communities and the University. We recognise that each of our campuses within Australia are built on unceded Indigenous lands. We acknowledge the Traditional Custodians of these lands who have cared for and nurtured their Countries from the beginning of time. These lands have been a place where education and research has occurred for time immemorial.

Western Sydney University promotes Indigenous excellence across key strategic objectives, including enhancing student opportunities, research, community engagement, leadership, cultural knowledges, and teaching and learning. The Indigenous Centre of Excellence, to be built on the University's Parramatta South Campus, will consolidate Western Sydney's position and help achieve these ambitions by committing to the recruitment, capacity development, sustainable leadership and governance, and sovereign ethical responsibilities of Indigenous academics and the Indigenous communities they, and the university, engages with. This will put Western Sydney University at the national forefront of Indigenous education, employment, engagement and research, celebrating the plethora of Indigenous cultures, knowledges and heritage. The Indigenous Centre of Excellence is scheduled to open early 2026. This will provide significant opportunities for Indigenous students and staff to be work in a state-of-the-art space that will have facilities including an Indigenous library and archive space. It will house the Indigenous Research Institute, one of the key strategic actions outlined in this strategy. Indigenous communities will have the opportunity to not only feel a sense of connection with the Centre, but they will also have available to them researchers who can help communities find answers to current research issues or gaps in knowledge. We will be known as the University that serves Indigenous communities through robust, ethical, Indigenous-led, and co-designed research. We want the communities to not only have knowledge of the research programs at WSU – but to help drive and co-design such programs, to directly benefit from, and to be proud of them. From this foundation, the Indigenous Centre of Excellence

will further extend its reach and impact to develop meaningful partnerships with international Indigenous and First Nations peoples and communities, both directly and through the universities they may engage with. In doing so, the Indigenous Centre of Excellence will create a global footprint of best practices for working with, and empowering Indigenous and First Nations communities around the world.

This 2024-2028 Indigenous Research Strategy outlines Western Sydney University's commitment to designing, implementing and resourcing important initiatives that will make meaningful change that will positively impact Indigenous peoples both immediately and for many generations to follow. Our University is well positioned to become national leaders in Indigenous research as we commit to investment and capacity building that will strengthen the very spirit with which Indigenous research is conducted. This is an exciting opportunity which we hope staff, students and broader communities embrace.



Professor Michelle Trudgett
Deputy Vice-Chancellor Indigenous Leadership



Professor Deborah Sweeney
Deputy Vice-Chancellor Research, Enterprise and International

INTRODUCTION

THE SHARING KNOWLEDGES IN GOOD SPIRIT¹ THEMES, INITIATIVES, AND ACTIONS

It is the purpose of the Western Sydney University's Indigenous Research Strategy – *Sharing Knowledges in Good Spirit* – to provide a series of strategic initiatives within the University to enable pathways towards a stronger, local, and world-class Indigenous Studies Research environment. In doing so, this strategy empowers and supports Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander² scholars within the University regardless of their disciplinary alignment, and assists non-Indigenous scholars to work ethically and productively with and for Indigenous Australian peoples and communities. *Sharing Knowledges in Good Spirit* enables the centring of Indigenous voices, sovereignties, and truth-telling in Indigenous Studies Research by supporting Indigenous researcher autonomy to build and strengthen Indigenous methodologies and methods. *Sharing Knowledges in Good Spirit* also seeks to ensure that all research at Western Sydney University that impacts Indigenous peoples and communities gains new rigour from these Indigenous-led research innovations. *Sharing Knowledges in Good Spirit* will also act as a key foundation to support the establishment and future operations of the Indigenous Research Institute within the upcoming Indigenous Centre of Excellence.

Defining Indigenous Studies Research

The United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (2007), Article 31.1 states:

Indigenous peoples have the right to maintain, control, protect and develop their cultural heritage, traditional knowledge and traditional cultural expressions, as well as the manifestations of their sciences, technologies and cultures, including human and genetic resources, seeds, medicines, knowledge of the properties of fauna and flora, oral traditions, literatures, designs, sports and traditional games and visual and performing arts. They also have the right to maintain, control, protect and develop their intellectual property over such cultural heritage, traditional knowledge, and traditional cultural expressions.

¹ This name was jointly decided upon by Indigenous Higher Degree Research candidates and Indigenous academic staff within the WSU Indigenous Researchers Network and the WSU Elders Advisory Committee.

² To align with most key national policy documents, the label 'Indigenous Australian peoples' will be used to represent the wide diversity of peoples and cultures that fall under the broad label of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples within Australia.

A key source of strength for *Sharing Knowledges in Good Spirit* is the recent advances in recognising and respecting Indigenous Studies Research as a discipline in its own right (Australian and New Zealand Standard Research Classification Codes [ANZSRC], 2020). Through sector-wide consultations with universities, governments, Aboriginal, Torres Strait Islander, and First Nations research stakeholders and scholars, “Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander research”, “Māori research”, “Pacific Peoples research”, and “Other Indigenous Peoples research” were recognised as core elements of the Indigenous Studies Research discipline (ANZSRC, 2020).

From this foundation *Sharing Knowledges in Good Spirit* operationalises Indigenous Studies Research as research that encapsulates the lived and living experiences of Aboriginal, Torres Strait Islander, and other First Nations individuals, peoples, communities, societies, cultures, policies, Knowledges, and lands, skies, and waters (Country). Indigenous Studies Research may include data directly or indirectly (e.g., incidentally part of a larger dataset) collected, and that such data may be new or pre-existing (e.g., archival) in nature. Indigenous Studies Research is identified when such data is used to directly represent Indigenous Australian and international First Nations peoples and cultures through any form of dissemination outputs and translational practices (AIATSIS, 2020; ANZSRC, 2020; Maiam nayri Wingara, 2018). *Sharing Knowledges in Good Spirit* enables Western Sydney University to grow with these current advances; committing both Indigenous and non-Indigenous researchers to best practices when engaging with Indigenous Knowledges and methodologies, ensuring that the impact of Indigenous Studies Research is for the benefit of, for, and with Indigenous Australian peoples, communities, cultures, and their sovereignties.

Development of *The Sharing Knowledges in Good Spirit*

The *Sharing Knowledges in Good Spirit* Research Strategy has been developed by drawing on the accumulated wisdom of:

- Indigenous Australian and international First Nations scholarship (e.g., Bin-Sallik, 2003; Davis, 2018; Rigney, 1999; Smith, 2012; Walter, 2018; Wilson, 2008).
- The Western Sydney University Indigenous scholarly community.
- Indigenous alignments in existing Western Sydney University policies and strategic documents (e.g., Western Sydney University 2020-2025 *Indigenous Strategy*; Western Sydney University 2023 – 2032 *Indigenous Futures Decadal Strategy* and other Western Sydney University Decadal Strategies, and Sustaining Success 2021-2026).
- Key national and international Indigenous strategic documents and reviews (e.g., Behrendt, Larkin, Griew, R. & Kelly, 2012; United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, 2007; Universities Australia Indigenous Strategy 2022 – 2025).
- Seminal Indigenous ethical and protocol guidelines (e.g., *Code of Ethics for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Research*, AIATSIS, 2020; *Indigenous Knowledge: Issues for protection and management*, Terri Janke and Company, 2017; *Ethical guidelines for research with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples*, NHMRC, 2018).



Dr. Jonathan Armstrong and Prof. Michelle Trudgett, 2022 graduation. Photo by Sally Tsoutas.

From this process, five key themes have been identified which form the core foundation to strengthen Indigenous Studies Research at Western Sydney University.

These themes are:

1. University Governance
2. Indigenous Staffing
3. Indigenous Higher Degree Research
4. Indigenous Communities
5. Indigenous Research Protocols.



THEME 1:

UNIVERSITY GOVERNANCE

Indigenous leadership and governance is a key issue identified within the Indigenous Studies Research setting. Whether it be within national Indigenous ethical and protocol guidelines (AIATSIS, 2020; NHMRC, 2018), the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (2007), or Universities Australia’s strategic call that “Universities ensure Indigenous views are represented either directly or through a governance mechanism to the Council or Senate and to the senior executive” (Universities Australia, 2022, p. 40). Whilst university governance bodies are required to commit to Commonwealth and State funding and legislation conditions, there remains a need for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander authority within university governance. The following strategic actions are offered to help ensure appropriate Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander representation exists across key decision-making mechanisms, thus strengthening university research governance.

STRATEGIC ACTIONS

- 01.** Establish an Indigenous Research Institute within the landmark Indigenous Centre of Excellence. This institute will act as a central mechanism for managing, connecting, promoting, funding, and celebrating Indigenous Studies Research throughout Western Sydney University.
- 02.** Ensure appropriate Indigenous representation across all levels of Western Sydney University Research governance bodies (e.g., Academic Senate, Research and Ethics committees, School/Institute committees).
- 03.** Clear engagement with, and respect for, diversities within and across Indigenous Australian peoples, communities, Country, and languages will be evident in all Western Sydney University research policy and strategic documents.
- 04.** Ensure the Western Sydney University Elders Advisory Committee is provided regular updates on key Indigenous research initiatives and progress.
- 05.** Align appropriate Indigenous Studies Research outputs with the ANZSRC 45 FoR Indigenous Studies coding and 21 SEO Indigenous.

- 06.** Ensure, when possible within funding guidelines, that all Indigenous Studies Research grant applications meaningfully commit to the development of Indigenous scholars (e.g., Indigenous employment opportunities such as research assistants and postdoctoral research fellows and/or contributing towards scholarships for Indigenous Higher Degree Research candidates).
- 07.** Support a stronger ethical movement towards Indigenous empowerment through Indigenous leadership, co-design and co-dissemination with Indigenous communities and representatives.

KEY SUCCESS MEASURES

- Establishment of an Indigenous Research Institute.
- Provide opportunities to celebrate Indigenous Studies Research across the whole university.
- Indigenous representation embedded within major Research Committees.
- Processes established to ensure Indigenous Studies Research grants have a clear alignment to the development of Indigenous scholars.



 Josh Mason speaking at NAIDOC Week First People's Walk. Photo by Sally Tsoutas.

THEME 2:

ENHANCING INDIGENOUS STAFF RESEARCH CAPACITY

A strong and successful Indigenous Studies Research agenda relies on having a critical mass of adequately resourced Indigenous research academics. Western Sydney University recognises the significant contributions Indigenous Australian staff make to our university and acknowledges the dearth of Indigenous peoples in the Australian Higher Education sector. The 2022 Universities Australia report notes that as of 2021, only 1.4% of university staff (academic and non-academic) identify as an Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander person. This reduces to 1.17% when isolating the rate of Indigenous academic staff (1.57% for Indigenous non-academic staff). In addition, the Universities Australia report revealed that Indigenous academic staff are more likely to be employed at lower levels (Associate Lecturer and Lecturer positions), and they are less likely to be employed in more senior leadership roles (Senior Lecturer, Associate Professor and Professor) when compared to non-Indigenous academic staff. With the establishment of the Indigenous Centre of Excellence, WSU is even more committed to growing and nurturing Indigenous Australian staff at all levels, including their professional development pathways into leadership and the sense of safety in the university environment. In addition, Western Sydney University commits to further developing a culturally safe work environment for Indigenous Australian staff by upskilling all Western Sydney

University staff capacity to respectfully work with Indigenous staff and within Indigenous Studies Research.

STRATEGIC ACTIONS

01. Establish an Indigenous Postdoctoral Research Fellowship Scheme with at least three positions allocated each year across various disciplines.
02. Schools and Institutes commit to employing Indigenous academics across all levels as outlined in their local Indigenous Strategy.
03. Schools and Institutes will identify clear pathways and opportunities for Indigenous Higher Degree Research candidates to progress to early career research positions such as Research Assistants or Postdoctoral Research Fellows.
04. Maintain and promote the university research excellence through a diversity of Indigenous Studies Research awards.
05. Make visible Indigenous Research success on key platforms (e.g., library webpages, social media, the University’s Indigenous page).
06. Establish annual grant writing and publishing workshops for Indigenous academics.

07. Establish and support international research partnerships with First Nations peoples and organisations (e.g., grants, Staff/HDR internships, visiting scholars, reciprocal advocacy).
08. Western Sydney University host annual Indigenous writing retreats and conferences that will assist Indigenous academic staff in developing their research trajectories.
09. Establish mentorship programs to support Indigenous early career researchers.
10. Provide opportunities for Indigenous academics to develop their research skillset and knowledge through providing access to external research training opportunities.
11. Identify strategies to help ensure that all Indigenous Studies Researchers (Indigenous and non-Indigenous) commit to identifying and citing Indigenous-led research, committing to critical reflexive writing practices, and adhering to Indigenous ethics and/or local protocols within their outputs.
12. Provide support for targeting Indigenous publishers, journals, and alternative research outputs, and supporting Indigenous co-authorship practices.

Monique Tait-Owens, Bankstown City Campus event. Photo by Sally Tsoutas. 

KEY SUCCESS MEASURES

- Indigenous Postdoctoral Research Fellowship Scheme established.
- Established mentorships, workshops and programs to support Indigenous academics with emphasis on early and mid-career.
- Indigenous knowledges and methodologies are recognised and valued in research practices throughout Western Sydney University.



THEME 3:

INDIGENOUS AUSTRALIAN HIGHER DEGREE RESEARCH

Western Sydney University is committed to providing excellent support to Indigenous Australian candidates. This is inclusive of a focus that extends beyond Indigenous undergraduate students, and incorporates pathways into Higher Degree Research, support for Indigenous Higher Degree Research candidates, their progress through to completion, and beyond. This approach is reinforced by Universities Australia (2022) articulating the need for such support to improve on the 2020 rates of Indigenous postgraduate research and coursework students. In 2020, only 1.65% of the postgraduate coursework university enrolments identified as Indigenous Australian, and only 1.77% of postgraduate research candidate enrolments were Indigenous. This falls well short of both the 2016 parity estimate of 3.1% and the current estimate of 3.8% as of the 2021 census (ABS, 2021).

Western Sydney University recognises that Indigenous Higher Degree Research candidates will become future leaders across diverse industries including the university sector, local communities, government agencies, and/or business and organisations, if they are not already. As a university that is committed to building the next generation of Indigenous leaders (who will be supported through the Indigenous Centre of Excellence), we note the significance and impact of their research and will provide an outstanding research environment to support their success.

STRATEGIC ACTIONS

- 01.** Establish flexible pathways for Indigenous candidates into all post-graduate research that recognises exemplary cultural, community, industry, and scholarly experience.
- 02.** Incorporate strategies within Institutes, Schools, and Badanami to identify high-achieving Indigenous undergraduate students, and ascertain their interest in undertaking Higher Degree Research studies (from MRes to PhD).
- 03.** Mobilise summer and winter scholarships as pathways to research mentoring and publications for Indigenous undergraduate and Master of Research candidates.
- 04.** Provide expert guidance and support for all prospective Indigenous Australian students applying to undertake Higher Degree Research at Western Sydney University.
- 05.** All Indigenous Higher Degree Research candidates will have the opportunity to have an Indigenous supervisor. In circumstances where no suitable supervisor can be located within the University, an external supervision panel member (e.g., industry, cultural, Elder) will be sought and they will be appropriately reimbursed for their expertise.
- 06.** The Indigenous Research Network will meet 6 times per year and is open to all identified Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Higher Degree Research candidates and researchers.
- 07.** Ensure Higher Degree Research candidature project support funding opportunities (e.g., capacity development, community engagement) are adequately flexible to support research with Indigenous communities and associated responsibilities.
- 08.** Ensure visibility of all Indigenous Australian candidate research outcomes across the University (e.g., Indigenous Researchers Week, identifying and supporting publishing opportunities).
- 09.** Ensure Indigenous Higher Degree Research candidates are encouraged, and supported, to attend regular Indigenous Research seminars (e.g., Indigenous Professoriate lectures) to enhance candidate capabilities.
- 10.** Hold annual Indigenous Writing Retreats, Indigenous Studies Research conferences and symposiums led by senior Indigenous scholars.
- 11.** Provide Indigenous Higher Degree Research candidates the option of a six-month Yarramundi scholarship extension to undertake one of the following activities:
 - Translate thesis to language;
 - Publish from thesis whilst under review;
 - Develop research grant applications (e.g., an Australian Research Council Discovery Indigenous application).

KEY SUCCESS MEASURES

- Significant progress towards the equity target of 3.8% (and beyond) of all enrolled domestic Higher Degree Research candidates will be Indigenous by 2028.
- Monitor Indigenous candidate engagement with a suite of activities and programs designed to support their candidature (e.g., Summer/Winter Scholarships, event participation and attendance).



Amelia Corr, NSWVCC Indigenous Professional Staff Annual Conference. Photo by Sally Tsoutas. >

THEME 4:

INDIGENOUS COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Western Sydney University recognises that Indigenous Australian communities in Greater Western Sydney and beyond play a pivotal role in contributing to the research environment both internal and external to the University. It is critical that we respond to the needs of Indigenous communities, including being aware and respectful of what Indigenous communities and their representatives may gift to this university.

We are mindful that Indigenous ways of knowing, being, and doing may be shared in many differing ways. This includes the gifting of placed-based Knowledges (e.g., local art and language) across campuses, the sharing of Indigenous Knowledges to support Indigenous Studies Research activities, cultural support and advice offered to Indigenous and non-Indigenous students and staff, and Indigenous community representation across many steering committees. This strategy, and the Indigenous Centre of Excellence, will also provide the foundation for researchers, and the university as a whole, to give back to Indigenous communities and to respectfully showcase their enduring strengths.

STRATEGIC ACTIONS

- 01.** Establish reciprocal reporting arrangements across Greater Western Sydney Indigenous organisations, business, and community representative bodies that may partner in research projects.
- 02.** Increase the number of meaningful research partnerships with Indigenous communities, organisations, and businesses, including meaningfully engaging with Western Sydney University’s Indigenous alumni networks.
- 03.** Establish university wide Indigenous community research fund for Indigenous Studies Researchers to engage with Indigenous communities, organisations, and businesses at all stages of research.
- 04.** Identify and commit to strategies to ensure all prospective Indigenous Studies Researchers are ethically trained to positively and respectfully engage with Indigenous communities locally, nationally, and internationally.
- 05.** Recognise and support researcher responsibilities to ‘give back’ to Indigenous communities and organisations.

KEY SUCCESS MEASURES

- Indigenous community research fund established.
- Indigenous ethical training programs introduced to researchers.
- Evidence of community collaboration in Indigenous Studies Research outcomes (e.g., papers, grants, Indigenous procurement activities)



Adrian Atkins, Social Justice Network - The Voice Forum Event, Bankstown Campus. Photo by Sally Tsoutas.



Yarramundi Lecture Event - Parramatta South Campus. Photo by Sally Tsoutas.

THEME 5:

INDIGENOUS RESEARCH PROTOCOLS

Western Sydney University requires all our researchers to act with integrity and respect when conducting Indigenous Studies Research. We recognise that offensive and inappropriate research practices have been imposed on Indigenous peoples and communities throughout the nation and we have no tolerance to such practices continuing. As such, we are committed to following key national protocols as set out by bodies such as the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies (2020). The University understands that self-determination and advocacy should be at the centre of all Indigenous research. We commit to providing systems and processes that support this direction and acknowledge our role in serving the needs of the Indigenous communities through research.

STRATEGIC ACTIONS

- 01.** Provide workshops for a stronger awareness of Indigenous Research Methodologies and Methods.
- 02.** Provide support for regular internal and external training opportunities for Indigenous Studies Researchers to attend Indigenous ethical and protocol workshops.
- 03.** Ensure that all Indigenous Studies Research ethics applications undergo preliminary review by the Director of Indigenous Research and/or Indigenous Professoriate representatives, and that the relevant ethics committee be advised on the merits of the research.
- 04.** Ensure Indigenous-led review of all grant and research applications that have an Indigenous Studies focus to ensure adequate support is offered to maximise the success of the research.
- 05.** Establish and adhere to university specific Indigenous Cultural and Intellectual Property Rights guidelines for Indigenous Studies Research.

KEY SUCCESS MEASURES

- Indigenous Research Methodology, Ethics and Protocol workshops for staff are well attended.
- A clear recognition and adherence to Indigenous research ethics in all key Indigenous Studies Research outputs (e.g., publications, theses).



Left to Right: Prof. Gawaian Bodkin-Andrews, Aunty Fiona Towney, Dr. Stacey Coates, Prof. Michelle Trudgett, Prof. Susan Page Graduation Ceremonies, Parramatta South Campus 2023. Photo by Sally Tsoutas.



Andrew Webster and Kristy Bell, NAIDOC Week First People's Walk and Decadel plan launch Event. Photo Sally Tsoutas.

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▲ Aunty Rasmie Prior, Meriam woman from Zenadth Kes. Yarramundi Lecture Event - Parramatta South Campus. Photo by Sally Tsoutas.

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