



WESTERN SYDNEY
UNIVERSITY



INDIGENOUS FUTURES

DECADAL STRATEGY 2023–2032

Building the Next Generation of Indigenous Leaders



ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF COUNTRY

Western Sydney University acknowledges the Darug, Eora, Dharawal and Wiradjuri People and thanks them for their support of its work on their lands (Greater Western Sydney and beyond). We acknowledge that the teaching, learning and research undertaken across our campuses continues the education that has occurred on these lands for tens of thousands of years.

MESSAGE FROM THE VICE-CHANCELLOR AND DEPUTY VICE-CHANCELLOR INDIGENOUS LEADERSHIP

Western Sydney University is deeply committed to the diverse Indigenous Australian communities. We value and respect the First Nations People of this country and are proud of the positive relationships we have developed over time. The University acknowledges that we benefit from the significant knowledges and guidance Indigenous People have kindly shared with us, and similarly we have a responsibility to reciprocate in a genuine manner that serves the community.

Western Sydney is Australia's third-largest economy and fastest growing region. What happens here in the next decade will have a transformational impact on the nation. The sheer scale of the challenge, the unrivalled depth of our commitment to this region, and the extraordinary possibilities that world-class teaching and research brings, demand we do even more.

The *WSU 2020-2025 Indigenous Strategy* aims to position Western 'to be a university that serves and empowers our community as an anchor institution to the region while being recognised as a national leader in Indigenous education, employment and research' (pg4).

The *Indigenous Futures Decadal Strategy 2023-2032* builds on this strategic work and will position Western Sydney University as a place that fosters, develops and supports the next generation of Indigenous leaders.

As the nation enhances technology and knowledge capabilities for the future, this *Indigenous Futures Decadal Strategy* combines local access with global possibilities for the next generations of Indigenous People. For this reason alone, we welcome the opportunity to create a bold strategic vision for the future.

PROFESSOR BARNEY GLOVER AO FTSE
VICE-CHANCELLOR AND PRESIDENT
WESTERN SYDNEY UNIVERSITY

PROFESSOR MICHELLE TRUDGETT
DEPUTY VICE-CHANCELLOR
INDIGENOUS LEADERSHIP
WESTERN SYDNEY UNIVERSITY





Cumberland Plain Woodland, Hawkesbury campus located on Darug Country. Photo by Brittany Hardiman.

VALUES DRIVING THIS STRATEGY

Western's strategic approach encompasses connecting with First Nation People across the globe. We aim to harness our Indigenous research and teaching success and to augment Indigenous People determining their cultural, economic, political and social autonomy, in a changing world. In order to be successful, the key values for this Indigenous Futures Decadal Strategy are based on the fundamental principles of social justice and self-determination.

SOCIAL JUSTICE

Western Sydney University is deeply committed to social justice and Indigenous self-determination. The United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous People (UNDRIP) enshrines the rights of Indigenous People, including Indigenous Australians, to cultural, social and economic autonomy, to be free of discrimination and to have access to all levels and forms of education. Western is devoted to establishing real solutions that will improve the socio-economic fabric of society and in doing so, ensuring that Indigenous Australians can contribute to and benefit from regional growth, development and prosperity. Western will be globally recognised as a leading social innovation institution, educating the Indigenous leaders of the future. Our activities will be aligned with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals to end extreme poverty, reduce inequality and protect the planet. We will leverage our institutional talent, expertise and creativity to collaborate with local, national and global partners to advance these ambitions. In addition, we will create opportunities for all staff and students to support Indigenous self-determination and success.

SELF-DETERMINATION

Western Sydney University is an institution that is deeply committed to the self-determination of Indigenous Australians. We will work in partnership with Indigenous communities to develop strategies that contribute to Indigenous People determining their cultural, economic, political and social futures. In doing so, we will work with Indigenous staff, students and communities to provide opportunities for advancement and support self-determination. A key component is ensuring that Indigenous people are well positioned to make decisions about their futures and that of their families. This will be done through the provision of first-class educational opportunities, institutional procurement practices that create business and entrepreneurship opportunities, and centring Indigenous voices in all University business.



OUR AMBITION

We aim to build the next generation of Indigenous leaders. These qualified, skilled, and globally connected Indigenous graduates will contribute to their communities, region, Australia and beyond.

Demand for skilled Indigenous graduates outstrips supply and is concentrated in Humanities and Social Sciences fields, particularly in the Society and Culture area, with an urgent need for building capacity in the STEM disciplines. There also continues to be a gender disparity with approximately two thirds of Indigenous students being female and the cohort continues to be skewed towards older students (Department of Education, Skills and Employment, 2022). Growing the leaders of the future will require focus in all of these areas.

The Ancestor's careful custodianship of this land has ensured a powerful legacy for current and future generations. Their ingenuity, endurance and capacity has ensured Indigenous People have survived throughout colonisation to thrive in new and exciting ways. Indigenous Australians have been educators and researchers for many generations. Through agency and ongoing determination Indigenous communities have built strong foundations for the future. Western Sydney University will nurture the next generation of Indigenous Australian leaders who will contribute to the ongoing advancement of their communities and the nation.

Indigenous Knowledges will be critical to solving the major dilemmas facing Australia and the world. This is already evident in Indigenous contributions to understanding caring for Country in relation to the climate crisis but is also evident in health service delivery and the law. Western seeks to engage Indigenous students in a wide range of fields, built on a rich educational environment which provides not just access to tertiary education but aspires to deliver enriching undergraduate, postgraduate and research programs with an emphasis on seamless transitions and global connections.

Indigenous People worldwide utilise a network of research and education resources and mechanisms to share and advance Indigenous matters. We aim to connect our Western students and researchers to this international network to enhance learning and cultivate research collaborations and initiatives to help solve the problems of today and the future.

Western aims to be known as a national leader that develops our academic and professional staff understanding of Indigenous Peoples Knowledges, languages, histories and culture in Western Sydney. Indigenous Knowledges and perspectives will be a part of every program of study at Western Sydney University. Western graduates will be prepared to work effectively with and for Indigenous Australians as part of a suite of employability skills designed to serve Indigenous People and communities and to enhance professional and industry capacity to deliver effective services for Indigenous Australians. We will drive sector leading teaching and learning practices through Western's Badugulang Centre for Teaching and Learning Excellence which furthers aspirations to recognise and reward innovations in Indigenous teaching and learning, showcase Indigenous teaching innovation, build creative Indigenous curriculum and ensure ongoing Indigenous professional development for academic staff.



Indigenous Australians have handed down knowledge from one generation to the next since the beginning of time. We use stories as a key method of knowledge transmission as it offers a mechanism for us to share, learn and thrive. Though a relatively young organisation, Western Sydney University has also developed its own rich history with many stories that highlight our evolution and journey over the past three decades.



Artwork - 'Those Who Came Before Us' - In 2020 over 120 staff and students, Indigenous and non-Indigenous, contributed to the painting. "Those Who Come Before Us" is owned by none, yet owned by all, and is a great example of reconciliation in practice.

The stories of Indigenous People and Western Sydney University have over time become shared stories that are interwoven into the organisation and broader community. They are stories *of people, of place and of partnerships.* Most importantly, they are stories of strength, courage and leadership. Together we thrive.



PEOPLE

Our people are our strength. Western will continue to grow our Indigenous capability and capacity to foster global Indigenous Education and Research Excellence. We aim to forge international university and industry partnerships to bolster undergraduate and postgraduate programs generating innovative professional learning opportunities.





GLOBALLY CONNECTED INDIGENOUS RESEARCHERS

Our Indigenous and non-Indigenous researchers undertake excellent and impactful research of relevance to Indigenous aspirations in a range of fields. There is synergy in much of the research conducted by First Nations People across the globe. Common themes of resilience, cultural repatriation, resistance, empowerment and survival emerge – with goals that underpin First Nations People’s mission to maintain control of Indigenous-related research. Research production provides a valuable tool to respond to challenges and opportunities across the globe. Through research we can find ways to improve the socio-economic indicators for First Nations People and importantly, research can play a key role in achieving self-determination.

We recognise that in 2019, Indigenous Australian students account for only 1.61% of all Indigenous Higher Degree Research enrolments across the nation¹ and understand we have a responsibility to increase this number to reflect population parity of 3.8%², at a minimum. Drawing on strategic commitments outlined in the *WSU Indigenous Research Strategy*, we commit to building the next generation of Indigenous scholars through providing outstanding supervision and opportunities to Indigenous Higher Degree Research students. We will ensure a first class research environment where scholars can provide practical solutions and advice to respond to research questions posed by Indigenous people and communities.

By 2032, Western will house a Global Indigenous Research Nexus that brings together leading international scholars with a common goal to promote Indigenous Knowledges through research, undertake cutting edge interdisciplinary research and foster the development of emerging First Nation scholars as the leaders of the future.

MODELLING INDIGENOUS LEADERSHIP FOR THE FUTURE

Indigenous voice and visibility are critical to institutional vibrancy. Western is committed to ensuring it is a place of choice for Indigenous Australians to work. We are committed to attracting and retaining Indigenous staff through focusing on providing excellent support, opportunities and nurturing their careers.

We aim to continue to build on Western’s coherent and cohesive Indigenous Leadership structure which ensures that Indigenous voices are heard at all echelons of the university, contributing to institutional strategic and operational decision making. Modelling Indigenous leadership in practice, our Deputy Vice-Chancellor Indigenous Leadership (DVCIL) role drives strategic vision, guides relevant policy development and maintains a university wide focus on Indigenous success. The senior leadership role takes the advice of our Indigenous Elders Advisory Committee and is supported by a leadership network that includes Directors from Indigenous Research, Learning and Teaching, as well as Associate Deans Indigenous who provide leadership direction in the Schools enmeshing Indigenous voice and visibility at the functional hubs of the University.

By 2032 we aim to embed a suite of leadership opportunities for Indigenous staff (academic and professional) and Indigenous students (undergraduate and postgraduate), across the institution to build leadership capacity that serves the University and broader community.

IGNITE INDIGENOUS TRAINEESHIP PROGRAM

Western Sydney University is proud of the *Ignite Indigenous Traineeship Program*. The program provides a vocational pathway for Indigenous participants to gain paid experience in university operations as business administration trainees. Participants are employed as professional staff members and will acquire a unique business skillset from a host School, Division or Institute within the university, embedding Indigenous staff in a variety of settings across the University, not just in Indigenous focused areas.

By 2032 we aim to have hosted at least 50 Indigenous trainees, building a professional pathway into the University, which has strong demand for skilled administrator, as well as providing career development opportunities across the Greater Western Sydney region. Graduates of the Traineeship program will have developed skills that will be needed in Indigenous community organisations, government, and businesses in Greater Western Sydney.

1. 2021 Universities Australia Indigenous Strategy Annual Report.

2. The Australian Bureau of Statistics note that in 2021 there were 984,000 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, representing 3.8% of the total Australian population



PLACE

Our campuses are built on Aboriginal lands. We aim to embed historical and contemporary Indigenous stories on our campuses, through greater visibility of Indigenous languages, striking and creative places and exciting facilities for our staff and students.

CELEBRATING INDIGENOUS CULTURE ON CAMPUS

We aim to cultivate a strong sense of belonging and inclusion for Indigenous (and non-Indigenous) staff, students and community through creative and artistic places, practice and partnerships. We want to ensure that our campuses are places that welcome Indigenous community members and celebrate Indigenous cultures. We will do this by enhancing the visibility of Indigenous People and cultures on campus. We have multiple campuses, with a network across wider Western Sydney, so we connect with not just one Aboriginal nation but a number of Aboriginal nations which all have strong voices, cultures and aspirations. Our creative and innovative Indigenous spaces will draw prospective students and staff, as well as community members to our campuses.

The Western Sydney First People Walk, located on the Kingswood campus is a creative installation which offers an aural and atmospheric experience for students, staff and visitors. A misted gateway signals entry into the space, referencing cultural smoking and cleansing, while audio, incorporating oral history, ambient sounds, and songs, evokes a strong sense of place. Signage adds an additional layer of information, offering visitors a unique experience each time they move through the space

By 2032 each of our campuses will have will have unique Indigenous spaces that incorporate Indigenous stories, histories and contemporalities. These spaces will connect the University with Indigenous communities and be places that celebrate Indigenous cultures.



RESPECTING INDIGENOUS LANGUAGES

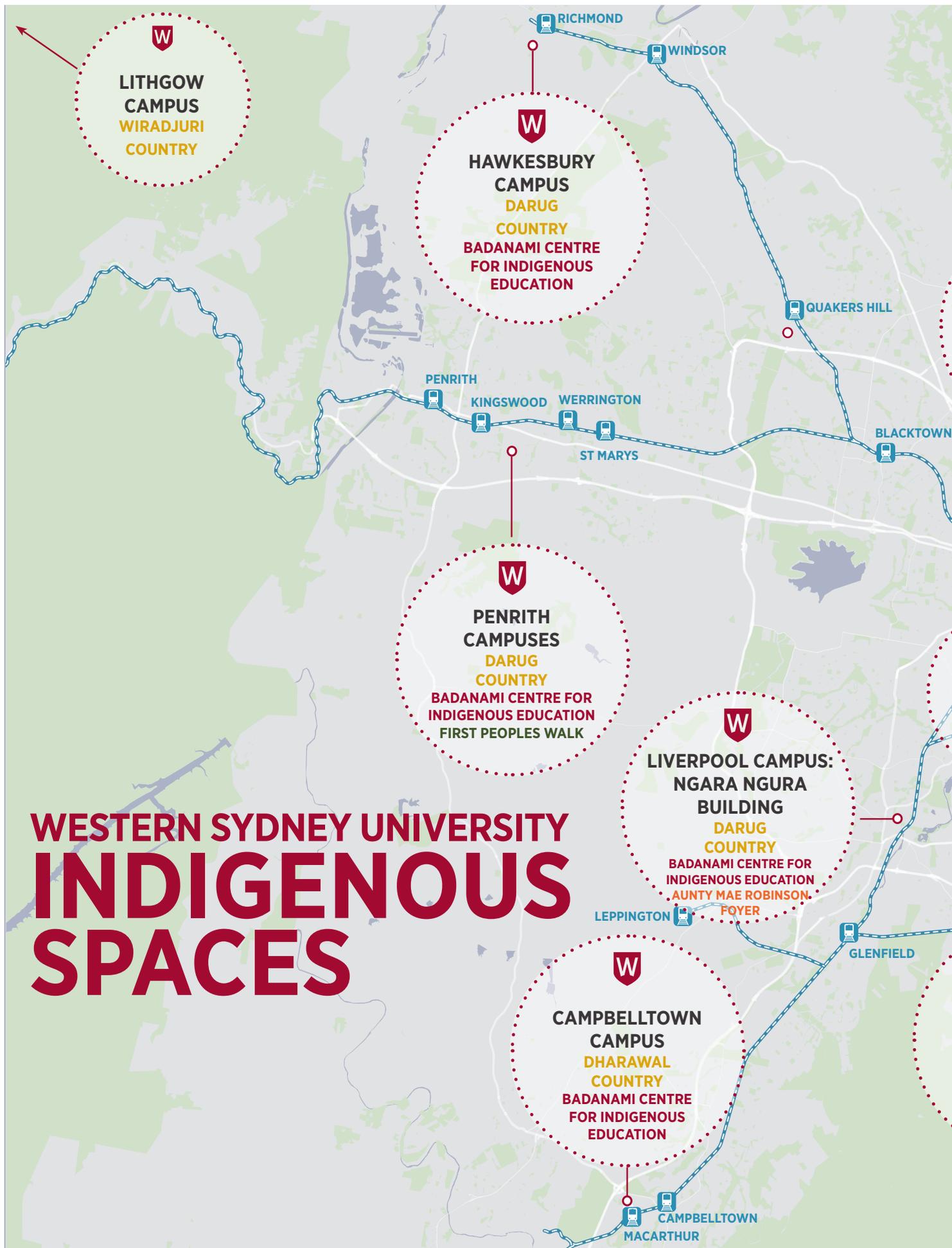
Article 13 of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples states that Indigenous peoples have the right to revitalize, use, develop and transmit to future generations their languages, oral traditions, writing systems and literatures.

Western Sydney University recognises its role in revitalising and celebrating Indigenous languages in Australia. In collaboration with local Indigenous language speakers, we are creating Indigenous signage on our campuses and naming our buildings to honour Indigenous languages and community members. We will make Indigenous languages an integral component of all campus planning activities, ensuring its rightful prominent place across our campus network.

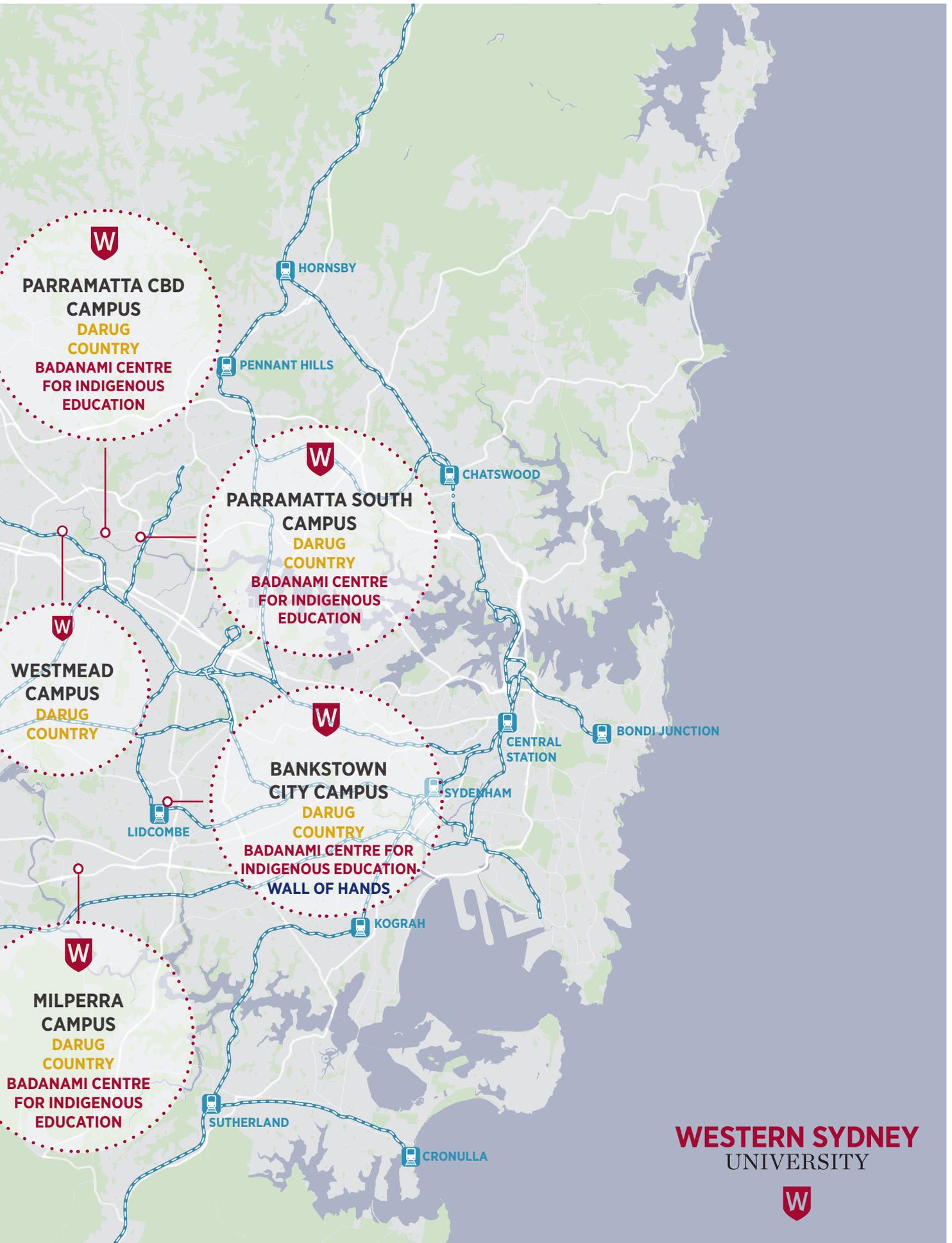
As a university dedicated to serving the region, we commit to ensuring that by 2032 all students have the opportunity to undertake an Indigenous language course in partnership with the local Aboriginal community. Our commitment to the revitalisation and protection of Indigenous languages will be sector leading.

SUSTAINABLE FUTURES

In 2022 Western Sydney University was named number one in the world for its social, ecological and economic impact in the latest Times Higher Education (THE) University Impact Rankings. The ranking uses the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) to assess universities performance, using a range of indicators across the four broad areas of research, stewardship, outreach and teaching. Linking to the Western Sydney University Sustainability and Resilience Decadal Strategy 2030 we have an ambitious plan to embrace and make visible Indigenous knowledges as pathways to sustainability and caring for Country.



WESTERN SYDNEY UNIVERSITY INDIGENOUS SPACES



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PARTNERSHIPS

The University recognises the need to work collaboratively with the local Indigenous communities. In doing so, we commit to treading gently, listening, and working in partnership to respond to the needs of those communities.

PROMOTING INDIGENOUS BUSINESS AND ENTERPRISE IN GREATER WESTERN SYDNEY

We aim to promote business and entrepreneurship opportunities for future generations through creative academic and research programs along with strong external partnerships.

We will build on Western's commitment to develop a comprehensive procurement policy to support Indigenous business in the Greater Western Sydney region, by providing resources to support established and emerging Indigenous businesses. We will work in partnership with Indigenous businesses and broader Indigenous communities to provide targeted support through Western's research infrastructure, human resources and financial assistance. Notably, there is an opportunity to contribute to new industries to drive the local economy. We aim to contribute Indigenous expertise to the growth and development of the region.

DEVELOPING PIONEERING EDUCATION PROGRAMS TO MEET COMMUNITY NEEDS

We aim to develop creative education offerings from degrees to short courses that will bolster the Indigenous workforce in current and future areas of need. We will co-design curriculum with the Indigenous community and ensure that our academic offerings meet their needs. We will also ensure that research opportunities align with the community vision and provide practical solutions that will enhance community self-determination while responding to key social justice issues. In doing so, we recognise the importance of building the next generation of Indigenous scholars who will be leaders in both the Australian higher education sector and the community. Western Sydney will be recognised as a region where the University works in collaboration with the community to create a better future for all through investment and ongoing commitment.



INDIGENOUS STAFF AND STUDENTS AT WESTERN

The Australian Government's Closing The Gap initiative outlines a commitment that by 2031, we will see an increase in the proportion of Indigenous Australian people aged 25-34 years who have completed a tertiary qualification (Certificate III and above) to 70 per cent

(<https://www.pc.gov.au/closing-the-gap-data/annual-data-report/2021/snapshot/socioeconomic/outcome-area6>).

Western Sydney houses the largest urban Indigenous population in the country. Therefore, Western Sydney University has a responsibility to ensure this target is achieved. We also recognise the importance of creating valuable employment opportunities for Indigenous staff and thank them for their contributions to the University.

Western Sydney University commits to meaningful actions and accountability in order to serve our region for many generations to come.

STUDENTS

CURRENT INDIGENOUS STUDENT PROFILE

Table 1: Indigenous Student Headcount 2019-2022

| | 2019 | 2020 | 2021 | 2022 |
|---------------------|------|------|------|------|
| Indigenous Students | 732 | 744 | 809 | 846 |

Table 2: 2022 Indigenous Student Commencing and Continuing Course Load (EFTSL)

| | Post-graduate | Under-graduate | Enabling | Cross-Institutional | TOTAL |
|------------|---------------|----------------|----------|---------------------|-------|
| Commencing | 27.5 | 197.9 | 5.2 | 0.3 | 230.9 |
| Continuing | 25.0 | 293.9 | 0.1 | 0 | 319 |
| TOTAL | 52.5 | 491.8 | 5.3 | 0.3 | 549.9 |

Table 3: Indigenous student enrolment by cluster

| | Western Sydney University | All Australian Universities |
|--------|---------------------------|-----------------------------|
| STEM | 13.7% | 13.7% |
| HEALTH | 39.2% | 22.2% |
| HASS | 47.1% | 64.1% |

Table 4: Indigenous student completions 2019-2022

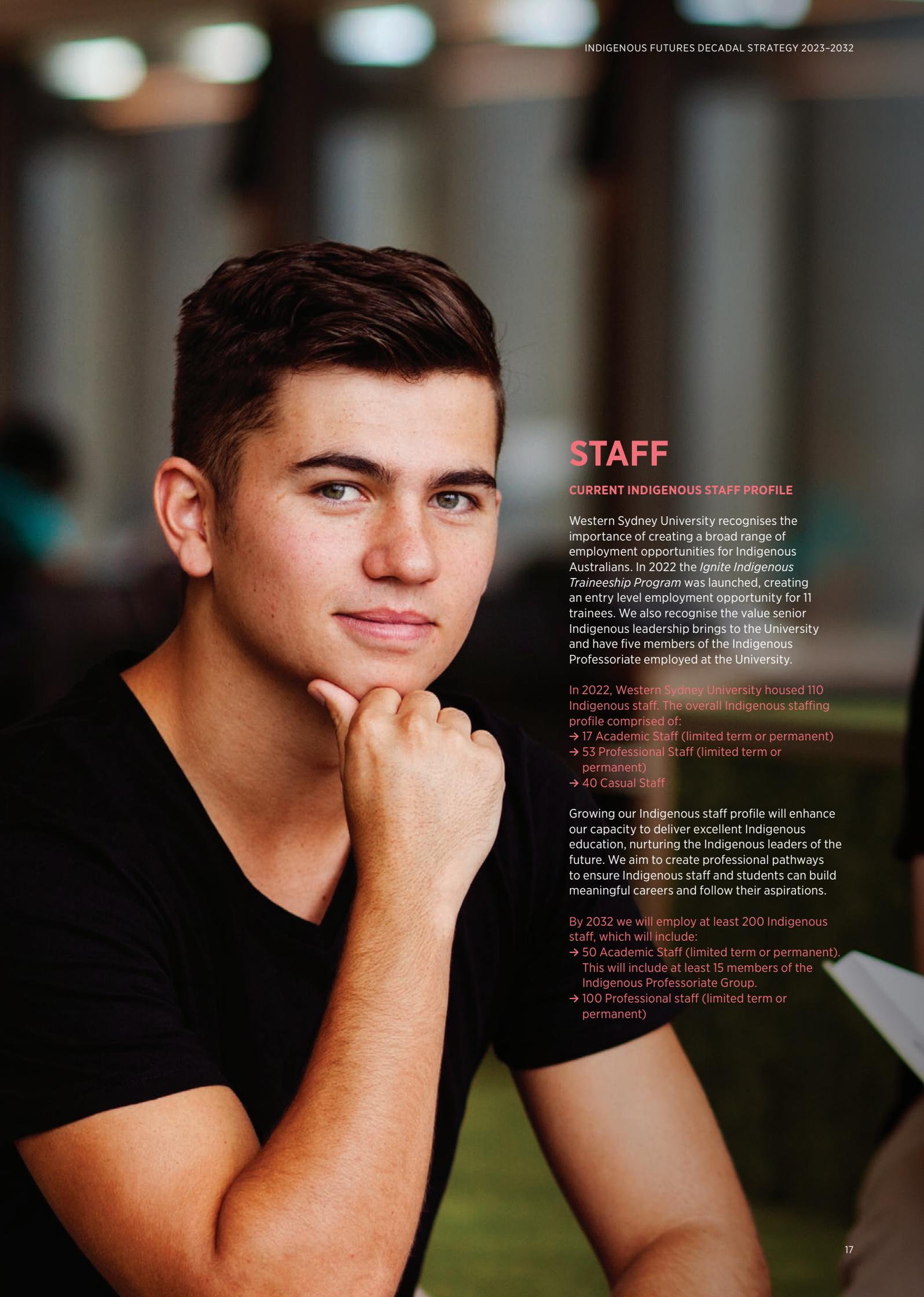
| | 2019 | 2020 | 2021 | 2022 |
|---------------------|------|------|------|------|
| Indigenous Students | 109 | 121 | 135 | 179 |

In 2020 the Indigenous retention rate for Indigenous students at Western Sydney University was 74.1%, which was slightly higher than the retention rate of 73.4% for non-Indigenous students. We commit to ensuring Indigenous students are provided with the best opportunities to succeed in their academic journeys and will focus on increasing the retention rate every year.

By 2032 we will position ourselves as the University of Choice for Indigenous students. Western Sydney University will be known for the excellent Indigenous graduates who will be leaders in their disciplines.

In 2032 we will achieve:

- 1,500 Indigenous students enrolled at the University.
- A retention rate of at least 80% for Indigenous students.
- 250 Indigenous completions per year.



STAFF

CURRENT INDIGENOUS STAFF PROFILE

Western Sydney University recognises the importance of creating a broad range of employment opportunities for Indigenous Australians. In 2022 the *Ignite Indigenous Traineeship Program* was launched, creating an entry level employment opportunity for 11 trainees. We also recognise the value senior Indigenous leadership brings to the University and have five members of the Indigenous Professoriate employed at the University.

In 2022, Western Sydney University housed 110 Indigenous staff. The overall Indigenous staffing profile comprised of:

- 17 Academic Staff (limited term or permanent)
- 53 Professional Staff (limited term or permanent)
- 40 Casual Staff

Growing our Indigenous staff profile will enhance our capacity to deliver excellent Indigenous education, nurturing the Indigenous leaders of the future. We aim to create professional pathways to ensure Indigenous staff and students can build meaningful careers and follow their aspirations.

By 2032 we will employ at least 200 Indigenous staff, which will include:

- 50 Academic Staff (limited term or permanent).
This will include at least 15 members of the Indigenous Professoriate Group.
- 100 Professional staff (limited term or permanent)



OUR COMMITMENT TO THE FUTURE

To build the next generation of Indigenous leaders.

We will nurture the next generation of Indigenous Leaders, generating opportunities for Indigenous People and communities in Greater Western Sydney, and illuminating Indigenous cultures and achievements. We aim to be recognised as international leaders in First People Education and Research.

To reach our goals in 2032, we will:

- Cultivate a strong sense of belonging and inclusion for Indigenous (and non-Indigenous) staff, students and community through creative and artistic places, practice and partnerships.
- Forge international university and industry partnerships to bolster undergraduate and postgraduate programs generating professional learning opportunities.
- Promote next generation business and entrepreneur opportunities through creative academic programs and strong external partnerships for regional growth.
- Create a suite of leadership opportunities for Indigenous staff (academic and professional) and Indigenous students (undergraduate and postgraduate) across the University.
- Create a world-class interdisciplinary research environment that will respond to the needs of the Greater Western Sydney region.
- Advance excellence in Indigenous teaching and learning to foster Indigenous and non-Indigenous graduates who can promote local, national and global Indigenous advancement.





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