STRENGTHENING EVALUATION IN INDIGENOUS HIGHER EDUCATION CONTEXTS IN AUSTRALIA

EQUITY FELLOWSHIP REPORT

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Strengthening Evaluation in Indigenous Higher Education Contexts in Australia

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Executive Summary

This report aims to unpack ways to strengthen evaluation in Indigenous higher education contexts in Australia. It is based on the outcomes of a 2017 Equity Fellowship funded by the National Centre for Student Equity in Higher Education (NCSEHE), and hosted through the Office of Pro Vice-Chancellor — Indigenous Leadership at Charles Darwin University (CDU). The Equity Fellowship was undertaken by Professor James Smith, with the support of Kellie Pollard, Kim Robertson and Fiona Shalley. An Expert Project Advisory Group was established to guide the direction of the project from the outset.

The *Review of Higher Education Access and Outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People* (Behrendt, Larkin, Griew, & Kelly, 2012) provided a clear mandate for investing in policies and programs that support Indigenous pathways, participation and achievement in higher education in Australia. While there have been notable investments and significant national reforms in Indigenous higher education over the past few years, the recommendation within this report to develop a monitoring and evaluation framework is yet to be actioned. Similarly, in 2015, prior to its abolishment, the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Higher Education Advisory Council (ATSIHEAC) recommended the development of a 'performance framework'. This has also remained unactioned. As such, there remains minimal publicly available evaluation evidence in this space. In particular, there is scant evaluation evidence about program and policy effectiveness — that is, what does or does not work and why.

Interestingly, a similar trend has been noted in the broader Indigenous affairs landscape in Australia. Concern has consistently been raised about the lack of quality evaluation evidence generated through Commonwealth and philanthropically funded Indigenous affairs programs (Hudson 2016). As such, the Productivity Commission (2013), Australian Government Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet (2017) and the Australian National Audit Office (2017) have all acknowledged the importance of strengthening evaluation in Indigenous program and policy contexts across Australia, including that relating to higher education.

This report brings these two national conversations together. It begins by providing a snapshot of Indigenous higher education participation and achievement in Australia. This provides a background as to why evaluation in this context—which draws on Indigenous perspectives—is important now, more than ever. We then draw on recent academic scholarship and grey literature to discuss what we currently know about evaluation in Indigenous higher education.

The report then presents our findings from a qualitative research study involving 38 individual interviews and one group interview with two participant groups — (a) Indigenous scholars within higher education institutions; and (b) government policymakers with a role in equity and/or Indigenous higher education program and policy development and reform. The study asked questions about the current challenges and opportunities associated with undertaking evaluation in higher education contexts; the enablers and barriers associated with using evaluation evidence in policy and programs contexts; and ways to strengthen evaluation moving forward. We have deliberately privileged the voices of Indigenous scholars through this research process, as a commitment to valuing Indigenous worldviews and expertise, and in promoting concepts associated with data sovereignty. We demonstrate the utility of using this approach in evaluation research of this nature. Narratives from individual interviews with policymakers have, at times, been interwoven with those of Indigenous scholars. Efforts were made to undertake the research in consultation with key national stakeholders and peak bodies involved in Indigenous higher education, such as the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Higher Education Consortium (NATSIHEC).

Our research findings indicate that three key themes emerged from the thematic analysis:

1. Conceptualising 'evaluation' as a broad term
2. Towards a greater appreciation of qualitative methodologies and evidence
3. Towards greater accountability

Our research also identified 14 key enablers and drivers of evaluation in Indigenous higher education contexts. These included: growing Indigenous leadership; increasing funding and resources; investing in strategy development; leading innovative policy development, implementation and reform; investing in cultural transformation, change and quality improvement; addressing white privilege and power; improving Indigenous student outcomes; valuing Indigenous knowledges and prioritising Indigenous epistemologies; incentivising cultural competence; embracing political challenges as opportunities; promoting cultural standards and accreditation; reframing curricula to explicitly incorporate Indigenous knowledges and practices; investing in an Indigenous workforce; and recognising sovereign rights.

Through our research analysis, we demonstrate that these key enablers and drivers of evaluation in Indigenous higher education are primarily related to one of three domains of control — Indigenous control, government control; and university control. We argue that moving towards a greater synergy between these domains of control is important for strengthening evaluation in Indigenous higher education contexts in Australia. In some instances, privileging Indigenous control would be particularly advantageous.

Using our research findings, and in response to participant requests, we developed a conceptual model of potential performance parameters to strengthen Indigenous higher education monitoring and evaluation in Australia (presented on page 76). The model has four distinct spheres, each relating to the other. These include:

- students
- families and communities
- schools and other organisations
- universities.

We envisage the conceptual model can be used in multiple ways by practitioners, policymakers and researchers working in Indigenous and/or equity higher education contexts. For example, the model can be used as a preliminary benchmark to examine what is currently being collected and used to monitor progress; to identify current gaps in monitoring and evaluation to drive future national monitoring, performance and evaluation discussions; to visually represent potential performance parameters in a format that can be easily digested by key stakeholders; to demonstrate that potential performance parameters span multiple micro and macro levels; and to provide baseline information that could inform the development of a National Indigenous Higher Education Performance and Evaluation Strategy.

Seventeen recommendations for strengthening evaluation in Indigenous higher education are presented in this report. These recommendations span research, policy and practice contexts, and often sit at the nexus between them. In parallel with recommendations from previous national reports, we conclude by suggesting that the development of a National Indigenous Higher Education Performance and Evaluation Strategy is urgently required to advance Indigenous student outcomes in Australia.

Recommendations

1. The Australian higher education sector, National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Higher Education Consortium, Universities Australia and the Australian Government **prioritise the development of a National Indigenous Higher Education Performance and Evaluation Strategy**. This should be Indigenous-led and appropriately resourced.

2. The Australian Government should **include a suite of Indigenous higher education targets**, aligned with a National Indigenous Higher Education Performance and Evaluation Strategy, **as part of the Closing the Gap refresh**.

3. The National Centre for Student Equity in Higher Education and the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Higher Education Consortium **co-host a national summit about evaluation in Indigenous higher education contexts**. This should be used to strategically discuss the scope and nature of evaluation priorities and to map key areas for action. This should be Indigenous-led and appropriately resourced.

4. Co-develop a **glossary of terms associated with evaluation in higher education** in consultation with key stakeholders including Indigenous scholars, policymakers and practitioners to ensure diverse viewpoints are captured.

5. **Stories and narratives are explicitly incorporated into reporting and evaluation processes examining the impact and outcome of Indigenous higher education.** They provide a legitimate, culturally relevant and contextual source of evidence.

6. The **Australian Government explicitly incorporates qualitative reporting and evaluation processes into all higher education program funding agreements** which aim to improve Indigenous higher education access and outcomes. This should complement existing quantitative data sets; and provide greater contextual information to inform future policy and program development and reform.

7. Investment into the **development of innovative qualitative evaluation strategies aligned with Indigenous methodologies and methods** could provide new insights suitable for reforming Indigenous higher education policy and practice in Australia. This should be completed in consultation with Indigenous scholars.

8. **Accountability within Indigenous higher education contexts must be viewed as a shared responsibility** between universities and government, and should involve both Indigenous and non-Indigenous stakeholders. The 'community' should remain the focal point in such discussions.

9. A better and **more visible harmonisation of communication and reporting processes associated with Australian Government policies and programs that support Indigenous higher education students and staff**. This includes both Indigenous and equity-focused programs. Strategies which reduce working in silos within and between Australian Government Departments should be a priority.

10. Clearly defined **performance measures relating to the adoption whole-of-university approaches to Indigenous higher education should be embedded into all senior university executive contracts and reviewed regularly** to increase individual accountability. Performance against these measures should be managed proactively, with clear consequences for poor performance.

11. The Australian Government, NATSIHEC and the TEQSA should work collaboratively to **expand the scope of Indigenous-focused higher education accreditation standards to increase university accountability**.

12. The Australian Government and philanthropic organisations mandate that a **minimum of 10 per cent of all program funding in Indigenous higher education contexts is invested into evaluation**; and that the Australian Government and universities are held to account against this mandated requirement, preferably through legislative change.

13. The Australian Government make a **dual and parallel investment in Indigenous capacity building focused on (a) evaluation knowledge and skill development; and (b) Indigenous leadership and governance**, to increase Indigenous control in Australian higher education contexts.

14. The NATSIHEC, Australian Government, universities, Universities Australia and other key stakeholders work collaboratively and strategically to **invest in the 14 enablers and drivers identified in this report, with preference given to those associated with Indigenous control**.

15. The Australian Government recognises the sovereign rights of Indigenous peoples, as espoused in the UN Declaration of the Rights of Indigenous Peoples and the Coolangatta Statement on Indigenous Peoples' Rights in Education by ensuring there are **dedicated and appropriately resourced Indigenous education policy and program units in government departments, separate to those associated with equity funding**.

16. **Use the conceptual model as a baseline for developing strategies and actions associated with the development of the NIHEPES**.

17. Conduct a **meta-analysis of Australian research studies and evaluation reports examining Indigenous student and staff perspectives about pathways, transitions, participation, success and achievement in higher education**.

1. Introduction

Increasing Indigenous[1] participation and achievement in higher education is an issue of global significance. Scholars from Canada, New Zealand, the United States, and Australia have been particularly vocal about this issue for multiple decades (Kirkness & Barnhardt, 1991; Jefferies, 1998; Smith, 2000; Deloria, 2001; Battiste, 2002; Guillory & Wolverton, 2008; Behrendt et al., 2012). Indeed, within Australia, widening participation in the context of Indigenous higher education has been discussed as a policy priority for more than four decades (Behrendt et al., 2012; Anderson, 2016; Street et al., 2017). Indigenous students have long been identified as a priority population, including one of six equity groups within the Australian higher education system (Bradley, Noonan, Nugent, & Scales, 2008; Behrendt et al., 2012; Liddle, 2016). Some of these students also fall into other underrepresented categories, including students from low socioeconomic status (SES) backgrounds; students from regional and remote areas; and students from non-English speaking backgrounds (Bennett et al., 2015). This means Indigenous student exposure to disadvantage can be cumulative.

An understanding of the education trajectories of Indigenous students provides a useful starting point to examine patterns of Indigenous enrolments, participation and completions in higher education. The *2016 Census* (Australian Bureau of Statistics) shows that the proportion of the adult working age population in Australia that has achieved a certificate level qualification as the highest post-school qualification is similar between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians (see Figure 1). However, as the level of qualification increases into diploma/advanced diploma, bachelor and postgraduate awards, there is a stark decrease in completions among Indigenous students. Arguably, this represents a significant inequity within the Australian higher education landscape.
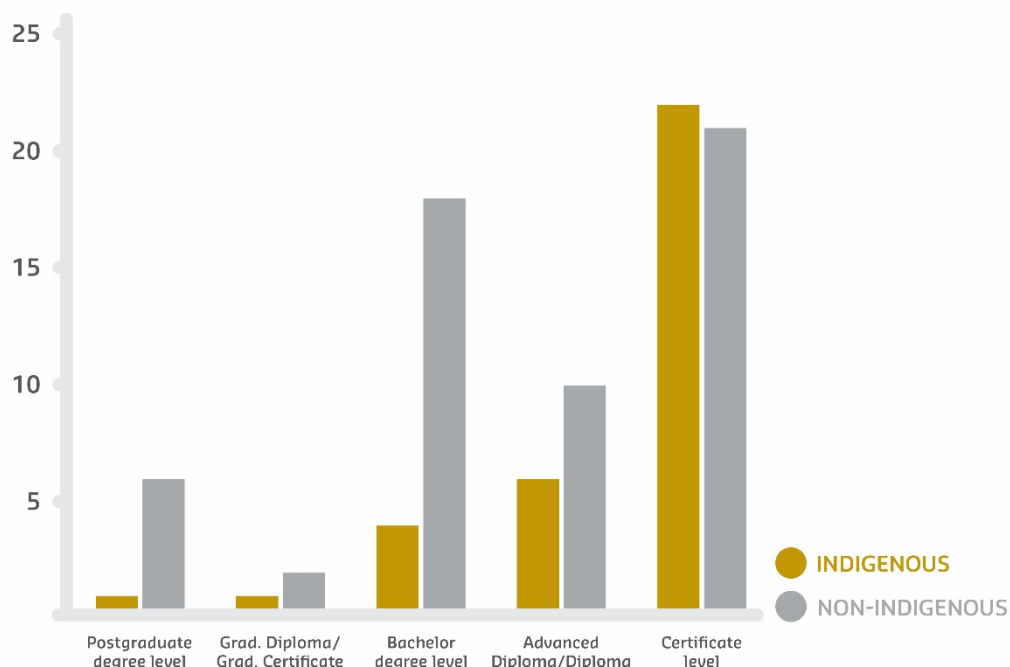
Figure 1: Highest post-school qualification as a proportion of adult working population (15–64 years), Australia 2016
Source: *2016 Census*, Australian Bureau of Statistics

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[1] For the purposes of this report, 'Indigenous' refers to Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people and/or Australian First Nations people, unless specified otherwise. This term is used for brevity. The authors acknowledge the diversity of views with regard to using these terms.

Whilst there has been a steady growth in widening participation and completion among Indigenous higher education students in Australia (see Figure 2), this has not yet reached parity with non-Indigenous student cohorts (Wilks & Wilson, 2015; Anderson, 2016; Liddle 2016). Indeed, completions in higher education remain proportionally lower among Indigenous students when compared to non-Indigenous students. However, from 2007-—2015 there was a 69per cent increase in Indigenous student enrolments, with a notable 77 per cent increase in commencing students. This is a positive trend worthy of celebration.
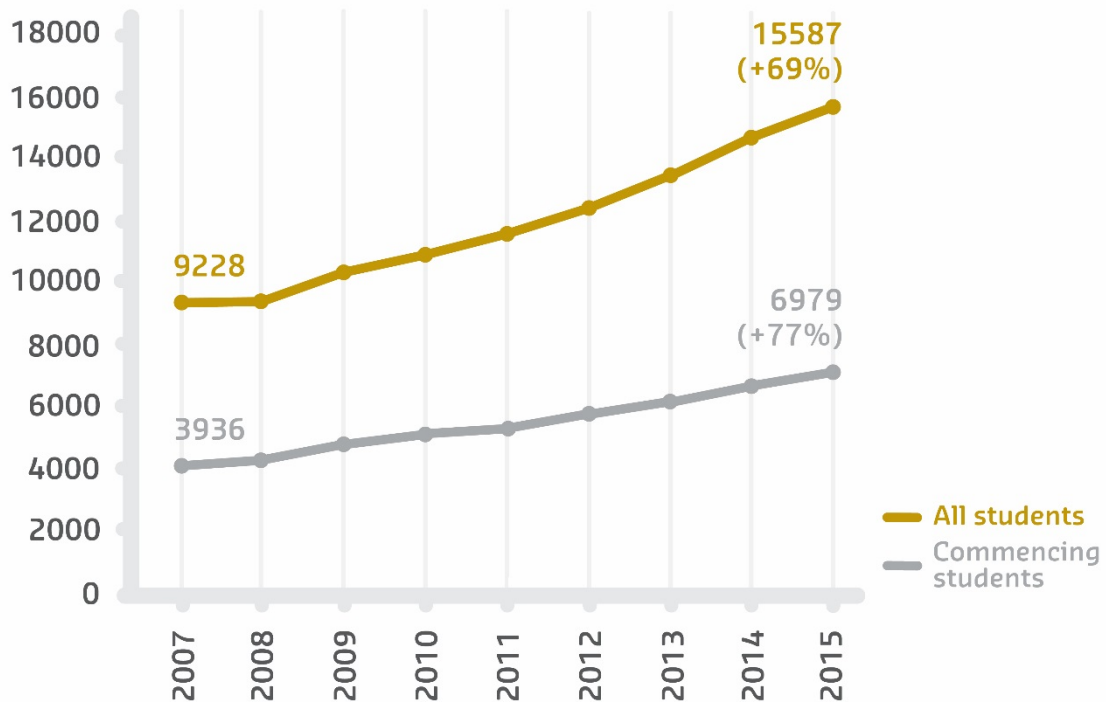
Figure 2: Indigenous students enrolled in higher education in Australia from 2007–2015
Source: Australian Government Department of Education and Training, Higher Education Information Management System, 2015

The incremental growth in Indigenous higher education enrolments is reflective of the implementation of strategies aimed at improving higher education access and outcomes for Indigenous people (Behrendt et al., 2012; Anderson, 2016; Frawley, Larkin, & Smith, 2017a; 2017b). Different approaches and activities have emerged that respond to evolving Indigenous higher education and equity policy and program contexts (Anderson, 2016; Smith, Trinidad, & Larkin, 2017a). These include the provision of enabling programs, scholarships, tutorial assistance and academic support, community engagement, partnership development, mentoring, and workforce and leadership capacity building initiatives (Wilks & Wilson 2014; Fredericks, Lamey, Mikecz, & Santamaria, 2015; Fricker, 2015; Hall & Wilkes, 2015; Priestly, Lynch, Wallace, & Harwood, 2015; Smith, Trinidad, & Larkin, 2015; Smith, Larkin, Yibarbuk, & Guenther, 2017b; Wilks, Radnidge, & Wilson, 2017).

Whilst the gains in enrolment are promising, Indigenous student progress in higher education remains limited, with less than half of commencing students (47.3 per cent) completing their degree over a 10-year timeframe; and 17.5 per cent of Indigenous students leaving after only one year (see Figure 3). This differs markedly to non-Indigenous students and represents a significant inequity that requires careful policy and program responses at institutional and national levels. This shows that universities can do much more to retain Indigenous students — ultimately supporting them to stay and complete their higher education studies.
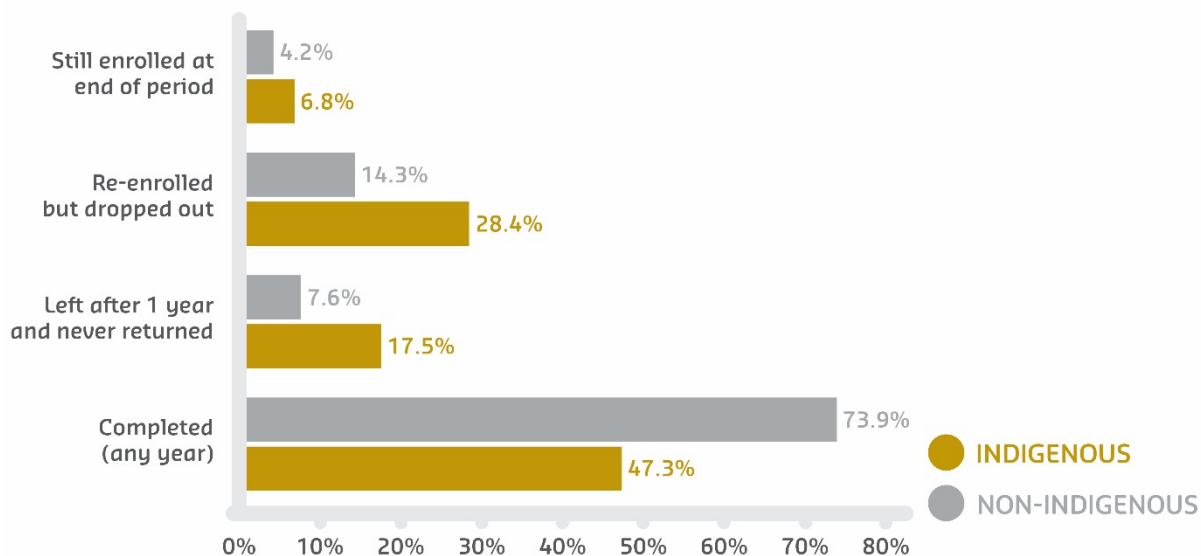
Figure 3: Student progress for students enrolled in 2006
Source: Australian Government Department of Education and Training, Higher Education Information
Management System, 2015. Cohort study

The pattern of Indigenous student engagement in higher education outlined above highlights the importance of intelligent investment in the planning, implementation and *evaluation* of higher education policies and programs targeting Indigenous students in Australia (Frawley, Smith, & Larkin, 2015). The latter concept—evaluation–has been identified as an important lever for system improvement. However, it has largely remained at the margins of government and university action. This report aims to investigate ways to strengthen evaluation in Indigenous higher education contexts in Australia. The following section provides an overview of what we currently know about evaluation happening in this space.

2. Background

Indigenous participation and achievement in education is an issue of both national and international significance. Within Australia, the *Review of Higher Education Access and Outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People* (2012) provided a clear mandate for investing in policies and programs that support Indigenous pathways, participation and achievement in higher education. While there have been notable investments and significant national reforms in Indigenous higher education over the past few years, the recommendation within this report to develop a monitoring and evaluation framework is yet to be actioned.

The recommendation to develop a 'performance framework' by the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Higher Education Advisory Council in 2015, has also been ignored. In parallel, the Productivity Commission (2013), Australian National Audit Office (2017) and subsequently the Australian Government Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet (2017) have emphasised the importance of strengthening evaluation in Indigenous program and policy contexts across Australia. Bringing these two national conversations together, and drawing on current scholarship in this space, this section describes what we currently know about evaluation in Indigenous higher education contexts in Australia.

Content in this section has been drawn heavily from the following paper:

Smith, J., Pollard, K., Robertson, K. & Trinidad, S. (2017). What do we know about evaluation in Indigenous higher education contexts in Australia? *International Studies in Widening Participation*. 4(2), 18–31.

The paper can be found on the NCSEHE website at:

https://www.ncsehe.edu.au/publications/evaluation-in-indigenous-higher-education-contexts-in-australia/

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Evaluation in Indigenous Affairs Contexts in Australia

In early 2017, the Australian Government Minister for Indigenous Affairs announced a significant investment of A$10 Million per year into the monitoring and evaluation of Indigenous programs funded through the Indigenous Advancement Strategy (IAS)[2]. This responded to numerous calls to strengthen evaluation in Indigenous affairs contexts in Australia (Productivity Commission, 2013; Department of Families, Housing, Communities Services and Indigenous Affairs, 2014; Hudson, 2016). There has been a rapidly growing discourse in Australia that the quantum and quality of evaluation evidence being generated in response to Indigenous policy and program investments is poor (Hudson, 2016, 2017; Muir & Dean, 2017). Hudson (2017, p. 13) claims 'in general, Indigenous evaluations are characterised by a lack of data and the absence of a control group, as well as an over-reliance on anecdotal evidence'.

Indeed, the need to produce more high quality evaluations that generate evidence to drive future policy and program improvements is pivotal (Productivity Commission, 2013; Hudson, 2016, 2017). A lack of robust and comprehensive evaluation evidence, whether quantitative or qualitative in nature, appears to be stifling Indigenous-focused policy and program development, implementation, and reform. However, as Muir and Dean (2017, p. 2) note, 'developing an Indigenous-focused evaluation culture will not guarantee an evaluation's

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[2] The IAS commenced in July 2014, and is the way in which the Australian Government funds and delivers a range of programs targeting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

success; however, the absence of such culture is likely to make the evaluation task more difficult and less likely to meet local community needs'. We now take a brief look at the role the Australian Government is currently playing in attempting to address these concerns.

Government Reporting and Evaluation in Indigenous Contexts

In response to issues identified by the Productivity Commission about the evaluation of Indigenous programs, the Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet (DPMC) released a draft evaluation framework for the Indigenous Advancement Strategy (IAS) in October 2017. This new framework articulates that robustness, relevance, credibility and appropriateness are considered best practice principles underpinning Indigenous evaluation work (DPMC, 2017). A key element of the framework is the distinction of performance (monitoring grants and activity reviews) from evaluation (process, impact, outcome and cross-cutting evaluations) (DPMC, 2017). This is discussed further later in the report. Previously, there have been minimal attempts to divide concepts of performance and evaluation in this way within Indigenous affairs contexts — perhaps with the notable exception of the *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Performance Framework*, which has been used as a reporting framework in the health sector for now over a decade (AHMAC, 2017).

Whilst the *Indigenous Advancement Strategy Evaluation Framework* outlines that activities must be respectful to Indigenous Australians, there is minimal detail about what this may constitute and how this could be achieved, other than a cursory note that participatory methods are encouraged. Perhaps the most important element of the IAS Evaluation Framework is the concept of cross-cutting evaluations. This insinuates there is potential to link evaluation work in Indigenous contexts within sectors, such as between schools and universities; and between sectors, such as health and education. There is also potential to expand the concept of cross-cutting evaluation work between Indigenous and equity contexts, but an understanding of the complex legislative arrangements and philosophical underpinnings which govern Indigenous higher education is important to understand.

At present, there are numerous programs that support Indigenous higher education in Australia. The Indigenous Student Success Program (ISSP) and the Higher Education Participation and Partnerships Program (HEPPP) both fall under the Higher Education Support Act 2003. ISSP is administered through DPMC, whereas HEPPP is administered through DET. This means that the programs fall under different Ministers — the Minister for Indigenous Affairs, and the Minister for Education and Training. To avoid any confusion, HEPPP is an equity-focused program targeting low SES students. It is not considered to be an Indigenous higher education program. However, the recent HEPPP evaluation indicated that 19 per cent of HEPPP projects were targeted towards Indigenous students from low SES backgrounds (ACIL Allen Consulting, 2017). This equated to 15 per cent of the total program funding — an estimated A$150.45 million from 2010–2016 (ACIL Allen Consulting, 2017). This is a conservative estimate given that some HEPPP programs have involved Indigenous students, without them necessarily being a targeted beneficiary. It can be argued that HEPPP is an incredibly important part of the broader Indigenous higher education policy landscape, although perhaps more implicit than explicit.

There are also other programs aimed at providing financial assistance to Indigenous students either directly or indirectly. Funding for ABSTUDY falls under the Student Assistance Act 1973 with different components administered through the Department of Social Services and Department of Human Services. In addition, funding for the Away from Base (AFB) program falls under the Appropriations Act and operates under dual guidelines associated with the Indigenous Education (Targeted Assistance) Act 2000. AFB funding is quarantined as part of the IAS and is administered by DPMC.

Confused? Rightly so. This quagmire of different Acts, departments and programs makes Indigenous higher education in Australia difficult to navigate and helps to explain why it has become the complex jigsaw it has. It has also made cross-jurisdictional and international

comparisons difficult and muddied calls for tighter reporting and accountability. We argue that a cross-government evaluation of the combined effectiveness of different Indigenous higher education policies and programs is needed. We recognise the current system is complex and multifaceted, but we need to know whether this is meeting the needs of Indigenous students and the aspirations of Indigenous peoples. The recent call for cross-cutting evaluations within the IAS framework reiterates the need for such an approach.

Until recently, there had been little evaluation of financial incentives that support Indigenous students to participate in higher education. We know that payments through ABSTUDY have not significantly increased since the 1980s, despite financial strain remaining a significant barrier to participation in higher education for Indigenous students. A recent report from the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Indigenous Affairs (2016) recommended an independent review of ABSTUDY. The Australian National Audit Office (ANAO, 2017) has since completed an audit of ABSTUDY in relation to compliance and performance measures associated with the administration of ABSTUDY by the Department of Social Services and the Department of Human Services. However, the parameters of the audit did not extend to include an evaluation of the effectiveness of ABSTUDY programs in relation to improving educational outcomes for Indigenous students. It was merely an audit of departmental performance. The need for an evaluation of the impact and outcome of ABSTUDY remains.

A critical element of the above discussion involves understanding that Australian universities are required to report against the funding they receive. This is an accountability measure, routine for governments, and includes reporting against targeted funding related to Indigenous and equity-focused higher education programs. For example, ISSP has an annual reporting requirement, consistent with its past equivalents. The purpose of ISSP is to provide scholarships, tutorial assistance, and support services to Indigenous higher education students. The reporting parameters outlined in the reporting template were co-developed with key stakeholders within the Indigenous higher education sector, including those involved in a time-limited Indigenous Advisory Group. ISSP performance funding allocations are currently based on Indigenous student enrolments, success and completions data. This data is routinely collected through the Higher Education Information and Management System (HEIMS) managed by the DET. To remain eligible for ISSP funding, universities are also required to maintain and report on an Indigenous Education Strategy, Indigenous Governance Mechanisms and Indigenous Workforce Strategy. This has been established as a descriptive reporting process — primarily activity-based reporting. At present it does not require reporting on the effectiveness and efficacy of investments from an impact and outcome perspective. It does, however, reflect a movement towards monitoring systemic and structural factors within higher education institutions. This is a welcome transition. The intent to undertake a review of ISSP guidelines and reporting processes has already been flagged for 2018 and is likely to assist in making further quality improvements within the ISSP.

It is clear, from the information presented above, that a national Indigenous monitoring and evaluation framework needs to be robust enough to traverse multiple ministers, departments and programs; and be flexible enough to suit very different university contexts and student aspirations. It will also need to value, and be responsive to, Indigenous knowledges and practices. At present, the extent to which government reporting is driving university evaluation processes in Indigenous higher education contexts is unclear. Further qualitative research about the ways in which evaluation data is being collected and used in this space, and the respective drivers for undertaking such work, is urgently required. We address this gap within this report, but first is it useful to explore what we currently know.

Evaluation in Equity-Focused Higher Education Contexts: Can This Help?

Prior to embarking on a discussion about the need for a National Indigenous Higher Education Performance and Evaluation Strategy, it is useful to note that there has been a parallel discussion in relation to the equity and higher education national agenda (Downing, 2017; Burke & Lumb, 2018). As Downing (2017, p. 19) notes:

> *Despite significant funding flowing into higher education for programs aimed at improving participation, access and success, there still exists a limited amount of systematic evaluation taking place within the sector. In some institutions (including universities, research centres and centres of excellence), a greater level of onus has been felt in recent years for the need to ascertain whether funding sources such as the Higher Education Participation and Partnerships Program (HEPPP) have led or are likely to lead to positive equity-related outcomes.*

Substantial progress has already been made in developing measures of equity performance in higher education in Australia (Burke & Lumb 2018). For example, Ryan Naylor et al. (2011) developed *A Critical Interventions Framework for advancing equity in Australian higher education*. This was subsequently revisited by Anna Bennett et al. in 2015 through the development of an Equity Initiatives Framework, which has since been further developed as an Equity Initiatives Map by Nadine Zacharias (Zacharias, 2017). An important aspect in the way the second framework was developed was an explicit acknowledgement that the framework should be modified according to context and stakeholder needs (Bennett et al., 2015). That is, there was a clear recognition that a one-size-fits-all approach was not necessarily going to work in an equity and higher education space. In parallel, the NCSEHE developed *A Framework for Measuring Equity Performance in Australian Higher Education* (Pitman & Koshy, 2015). This work was guided by that which had already progressed in the health sector a decade prior, with specific reference to the *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Performance Framework*. In its final recommendations to the Australian Government, the ATSIHEAC (2015) acknowledged the work of the NCSEHE and indicated that this was a solid basis from which further monitoring and performance framework discussions in the Indigenous higher education landscape could occur.

More recently, the *Evaluation of the Higher Education Participation and Partnerships Program* has spurred increased interest in improving evaluation. Indeed, there was a recommendation and subsequent policy commitment to develop an evaluation framework as part of the review (ACIL Allen Consulting, 2017). The policy commitment was fast — an expression of interest (EOI) for the development of an evaluation framework was released within days of the release of the review. The EOI was used as a mechanism to seek proposals to develop a HEPPP evaluation framework, with an expectation that the framework would be developed within less than six months. This tight timeframe drew criticism from the equity and higher education sector. The EOI was subsequently abandoned and a decision was made by DET to pursue the development of the evaluation framework internally. This work remains in process at the time of writing this report.

A well-articulated submission to the *Reform of the Australian Government Administration* in 2010 indicated the risks inherent in such an approach by stating that 'most evaluation activities within the Australian Public Service [APS] are shaped by people who have no professional technical expertise in evaluation' (Diamond & O'Brien-Malone, 2010, p2). The submission also identified that evaluation functions within each APS agency should be centralised to maximise the use of limited evaluation expertise (Diamond & O'Brien-Malone, 2010). DPMC currently has a model of this nature, hence its capacity to develop the IAS Evaluation Framework, as previously discussed. However, DET – where the evaluation framework for HEPPP is to be developed - does not currently have a centralised evaluation

unit. As O'Brien-Malone and Diamond (2010, p. 10) articulate in a separate submission about the development of the Australian Government's research workforce strategy:

> … the knowledge base which underpins evaluation is highly technical, and good intentions and being a skilled bureaucrat do not equate to having knowledge and skill in evaluation. This failure on the part of departments to recognise that evaluation is a profession with a detailed, technical, knowledge base has to stop if government is to get good value from its evaluator dollar.

We are not suggesting that DET does not have the evaluation capacity and capability in-house to undertake this task. Rather we are suggesting that there are risks associated with pursuing an evaluation framework in this way. Whilst there is significant potential to acknowledge emerging frameworks that relate to equity and higher education in Australia, there are also unique considerations specific to the Indigenous higher education landscape that need to be included. The inclusion of Indigenous worldviews is a critical additional element that needs to redefine what technical expertise in Indigenous evaluation contexts might look like. It is about the underpinning values that shapes what, how and by whom evaluation takes place (Burke & Lumb, 2018). At this juncture it is important to note that there are both synergies and differences in equity and Indigenous policy agendas in Australia that need to be recognised and addressed as part of this conversation (Bunda, Zipin, & Brennan, 2012; Nakata, 2013; Smith et al., 2017a). We start to unpack this further below.

Evaluation in Indigenous Higher Education: Is There a Problem?

In 2012, the Review of Higher Education Access and Outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People (Behrendt et al., 2012, p. 154) stated that:

> While considerable data was available through departmental program-based reporting to monitor progress, there was not always sufficient evidence to assess the overall success or otherwise of specific programs. In some cases, there were no independent evaluations of programs for the Panel to draw on.

The review subsequently recommended that the Australian Government and Universities work together to develop a national Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander higher education monitoring and evaluation framework (Behrendt et al., 2012). However, this recommendation is yet to be formally actioned. More recently, in its final advice to government prior to its abolishment, ATSIHEAC (2015) provided a number of recommendations to accelerate the pace of change in Indigenous higher education. Working towards an agreed national minimum data set and framework for Indigenous higher education was a strategy recommended to provide critical support for assessment of progress at a system level (ATSIHEAC, 2015). In this sense, concepts of 'evaluation' and 'performance monitoring' were broadly conflated. This contrasts the separation of these concepts as advocated through the release of the draft IAS evaluation framework. Irrespective of the way in which these concepts overlap, the need for a national monitoring and evaluation framework has also been heightened by the recent release of the *Universities Australia Indigenous Strategy 2017-2020*, which outlines a broad range of targets for Australian universities. There appears to be some broad alignment with reporting parameters associated with ISSP. Of course, the variables that have impacted on widening participation in Indigenous higher education contexts in Australia are not limited to Indigenous student enrolments, success, and completions as currently captured through the ISSP. There are also a range of historical and contemporary social policy and systemic barriers to education, that also need to be considered in the context of evaluation in Indigenous higher education in Australia, and arguably elsewhere across the globe. These are discussed further below.

Contextualising Evaluation in Indigenous Higher Education

It has previously been noted in Indigenous education contexts that outcomes frameworks need to be developed flexibly, so that educational responses are tailored to local needs at systemic and institutional (school) levels (ACIL Allen Consulting, 2014). As Frawley, Smith and Larkin (2015, p. 10) explain:

> One key challenge we face in Australia is to move beyond basic process and impact evaluation approaches about Indigenous higher education pathways and transitions. We need to develop more sophisticated evaluation models that reflect more rigorous, comprehensive and nuanced understandings of what Indigenous higher education trajectories look like, the inherent complexities they bring, how they can best be navigated, and the tangible outcomes Indigenous-specific programs can achieve. This includes the capacity to examine and monitor new and innovative institutional and organisational culture change to reform Indigenous education within higher education settings … emerging evaluation approaches that build on Indigenous knowledge systems could be useful in this regard. These will need to privilege Indigenous epistemologies, ontologies and axiologies.

The notion of incorporating Indigenous knowledge systems into evaluation in Indigenous higher education contexts aligns well with recent commentary about the concepts of decolonising methods and data sovereignty within Indigenous research contexts. Indeed, we argue that repositioning Indigenous knowledges as being a central element and core philosophy underpinning evaluation in this space is critical. The seminal work of international Indigenous scholars, Smith (2012) and Kovach (2010) is particularly influential in relation to the use of decolonising research methods. For example, the privileging of narrative forms of qualitative evidence, such as Indigenous student success stories, can provide important contextual information about achievements in the Indigenous higher education landscape (Frawley, Ober, Olcay, & Smith, 2017c). Similarly, the work of Indigenous academic Maggie Walter (2010, 2016) is equally important in relation to concepts of data sovereignty and the culturally appropriate use of statistical data. In an attempt to increase the cultural appropriateness of statistical data reporting and usage, recent scholars have developed a draft quality framework for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander higher education data and statistics (Drew, Wilks & Wilson, 2015). This aligns with claims made by Bunda et al., (2012, p. 943) that:

> The administrative gaze of policy … swallows Indigenous peoples' identities in the fetish of statistics, objectifying through numbers. In doing so, it continues long-standing colonial processes for categorising the 'Other' so as to avoid recognising social-cultural differences that challenge the legitimacy of whitestream-centred power.

Whilst these concepts have seldom surfaced (at least not explicitly) in discussions about *evaluation* in Indigenous higher education contexts, they are poignant for future discussions. They are particularly relevant at a time when Indigenous governance is increasingly being (re)emphasised as an important factor in Indigenous higher education policy and program contexts (Universities Australia, 2017). They also correspond with the national instability experienced in relation to government supported coordination of Indigenous higher education; expressed goals to grow the Indigenous higher education professional and academic workforce; and increasing expectations to improve cultural competency in Australian universities (Universities Australia, 2011, 2017). This report argues that further commentary and the privileging of Indigenous standpoints through evaluation in Indigenous higher education contexts will enhance evaluation effectiveness, and produce better quality, and more comprehensive, data to inform policy, program, and system improvements. The work of Foley (2002, 2003a, 2003b) and Rigney (1999, 2011) is particularly useful in

suggesting how Australian Indigenous standpoint theory could be used as a means to reframe the way evaluation in Indigenous higher education contexts is approached. An approach that privileges an Indigenous stance aligns with parallel literature emanating from an Indigenous *research* realm (Foley, 2003a; Ardill, 2013; Nakata, 2013).

In addition to the epistemological and ontological positioning and privileging of Indigenous standpoints, a Whole-of-University (WOU) approach to Indigenous education has been repeatedly recommended by peak bodies and advisory groups over the past few years (Behrendt et al., 2012; ATSIHEAC, 2016; NATSIHEC, 2017; Universities Australia, 2017). It is probable, if this transition occurs, that there will be new expectations about what to evaluate, and how to evaluate, and key investments supporting improved outcomes for Indigenous students participating in higher education in Australia. Some scholars argue for alternative evaluation frameworks that respond to emerging calls for WOU approaches to 'Indigenise' universities (Frawley et al., 2015; Rigney, 2017). Rigney (2017) has already presented a conceptual Design and Evaluation for Indigenisation (DEFI) that can guide institutional change. This sentiment is reiterated in a recent report about accelerating Indigenous higher education prepared by the NATSIHEC (2017). The report talks about the need for the DET, the Tertiary Education Quality Standards Authority (TEQSA), and NATSIHEC to work together to determine WOU quality standards and accountabilities in relation to measuring the quality of Indigenous student and staff participation in universities (NATSIHEC, 2017). It also outlines that strategies used to incorporate Indigenous knowledges within universities should be included as a measure of quality in the provision of higher education (NATSIHEC, 2017). NATSIHEC recommends a process whereby NATSIHEC and TEQSA work collaboratively to evaluate performance of universities against Indigenous imperatives on an annual basis (NATSIHEC, 2017). This seems sensible. The World Indigenous Nations Higher Education Consortium (WINHEC) has already developed a global Indigenous-led higher education accreditation process (Malina-Wright, Robertson & Moeke, 2010) that could be used to inform reforms of this nature in Australian universities. This accreditation is explicitly about cultural standards and protocols. At present, the Wollotuka Institute at the University of Newcastle, and Batchelor Institute of Indigenous Tertiary Education, are the only two organisations in Australia that have received WINHEC accreditation status. Behrendt et al. (2012) and Universities Australia (2017) have also pointed out the utility of WINHEC accreditation as a means to monitor university performance in relation to enhancing Indigenous higher education outcomes in Australia.

Akin to discussions about the incorporation of Indigenous knowledges into higher education institutions, there have also been parallel calls to more explicitly embed Indigenous pedagogies into university curricula. Larkin (2015) has convincingly argued that the objective of critical race pedagogy is to create inclusive approaches that recognise and support spaces where Indigenous students can learn from culturally relevant pedagogies. The concept of embedding Indigenous knowledges into university curricula has also been reinforced in the *Universities Australia Indigenous Strategy 2017-2020*, but there is little guidance about how universities can monitor and evaluate investments of this nature. There is an increasing urgency for Indigenous higher education stakeholders to identify ways to capture and implement innovative conceptual designs that are explicit. Perhaps drawing on the aforementioned Indigenous knowledge systems and Indigenous standpoints would be a useful starting point? Some of these issues are explicitly addressed throughout this report.

Summary

There are multiple recommendations emergent in key national reports and peak bodies that demand the development of a National Indigenous Higher Education Performance and Evaluation Strategy. To date, there has been minimal government and/or university response to such recommendations. Limiting factors have been a poor articulation of exactly what such a strategy or framework might look like; how it might be developed; who is best positioned to develop it; and the timeframe in which it should be developed. That is, the

Indigenous higher education sector has not been collectively engaged in high-level strategic discussions of this nature. Clearly, further qualitative research with policymakers (particularly those in DPMC and DET) and Indigenous scholars/thinkers working in higher education institutions across Australia, such as those used throughout this report, will help to guide this conversation. But the imperative is to enact an effective innovative evaluation framework now. Understanding the enablers of, and barriers to, change in this space needs a nuanced perspective in further research. In parallel, contemporary scholarship about the application of Indigenous research methods and Indigenous knowledges as they relate to evaluation in Indigenous higher education contexts is required to aid such perspectives. A useful starting point could be the articulation of the principles and philosophical assumptions that underpin such work, with particular reference to key global documents that consistently emphasise Indigenous rights within education contexts (Task Force of the National Organizing Committee of the 1993 World Indigenous Peoples' Conference on Education, 1999; United Nations, 2008). Doing so would mean that concepts such as self-determination and data sovereignty could underpin further conversations. Indeed, Indigenous methods, concepts and standpoints could potentially re-conceptualise the purpose of monitoring and evaluation in Indigenous higher education. This could include further discussion about what should be monitored and evaluated, when, why, how, and by whom. Indigenous standpoints are epistemologically and ontologically different from parallel frameworks current in the broader equity and higher education space, but we argue that they are not necessarily incompatible. Rather, it is important to understand the synergies and differences to examine these intersections more critically. An Australian Indigenous informed evaluative framework would benefit from achievements in New Zealand, Canada, the United States, and Norway, where strategies designed to empower Indigenous design and input have resulted in improved, targeted investments for Indigenous students in higher education. The Australian Government, NATSIHEC, Universities Australia, TEQSA, the NCSEHE, and all Australian universities should commit to engaging in a joint national strategic conversation about evaluation to move this agenda forward. This would make a significant contribution to the international Indigenous higher education landscape and enhance action aimed at widening the participation among Indigenous students both in Australia and globally.

3. Project Scope

Aim

To investigate ways of strengthening evaluation in Indigenous higher education program and policy contexts in Australia

Research Questions

- What do we know about the quality and utility of evaluation in Indigenous higher education contexts in Australia?
- What are the current challenges and opportunities associated with planning and undertaking evaluation in Indigenous higher education contexts in Australia?
- What are the enablers and barriers associated with using evaluation evidence to inform policy and program development and reform aimed at supporting Indigenous participation and achievement in higher education in Australia?
- What strategies might be useful for strengthening evaluation in Indigenous higher education contexts in Australia?

Project Approach

This 2017 NCSEHE Equity Fellowship was multifaceted. It was the combination of activities that made this fellowship unique. This included:

- The formation of an Expert Project Advisory Group (EPAG) with representation from key national scholars and stakeholder groups with an interest in Indigenous higher education (see Appendix A for membership and Terms of Reference). This met three times across the course of the Fellowship.
- Three one-week secondments in Canberra with the Governance, Access and Quality Branch within the Australian Government Department of Education and Training. Secondments occurred in March, May, and November 2017. This included additional stakeholder consultation with other areas of DET; the DPMC (including both the Tertiary Education Policy Co-ordination Branch; and the Information and Evaluation Branch); Centre of Excellence for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Statistics within the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS); Universities Australia; and the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies (AIATSIS).
- The recruitment of two casual Research Fellows, Ms Kellie Pollard and Ms Fiona Shalley. These positions supported Indigenous research and statistical analysis processes associated with the Fellowship.
- An international study tour of Finland, Norway, and Canada for Professor Smith to visit six different institutions and to attend the World Indigenous Peoples Conference on Education. Institutions included:
  - Finnish Education Evaluation Centre (FINEEC), Helsinki, Finland
  - Nordic Institute for Studies in Innovation, Research and Education (NIFU), Oslo, Norway
  - Western Norway University of Applied Sciences, Bergen, Norway
  - University of Saskatchewan, Saskatoon, Canada
  - Ryerson University, Toronto, Canada
  - Simon Fraser University, Vancouver, Canada.

  Collectively, these visits involved meetings with more than 30 individuals and a presentation to more than 25 staff and interested stakeholders at the University of Saskatchewan. A brief report about key lessons learned is included as Appendix B.
- An institutional visit with the Centre of Excellence for Equity in Higher Education (CEEHE) and the Wollotuka Institute at the University of Newcastle, Australia. This

involved meetings with 10 individuals and a presentation to more than 25 CEEHE staff. A brief discussion about this visit is also included at Appendix B.

- A major component of the Equity Fellowship was undertaking empirical research about ways to strengthen evaluation in Indigenous higher education contexts in Australia. Qualitative research interviews were undertaken with:
    - eighteen policymakers working in Indigenous or equity-focused higher education policy contexts within the Australian Government DET; or the DPMC
    - twenty-four Indigenous scholars/thinkers/leaders[3] working in higher education institutions across <u>all</u> states and territories of Australia.
    Research findings from the analysis of these interviews are presented below.
- Multiple stakeholder meetings and ongoing communication and consultation with the NATSIHEC, Universities Australia, DPMC, ABS, AIATSIS, and the National Centre for Cultural Competence.
- Commentary-style submission to *International Studies in Widening Participation* entitled "What do we know about evaluation in Indigenous higher education in Australia?".
- Discussion about preliminary findings at key national forums (see Appendix C for list of papers and presentations):
    - NCSEHE and Central Queensland University Forum on Equity in Higher Education (panel discussion)
    - Australasian Evaluation Society International Conference (presentation)
    - Australian Association for Institutional Research (panel discussion)
    - Australian Association for Research in Education Conference (two presentations)
    - 2017 National Equity Fellows Forum hosted by the NCSEHE (presentation and panel discussion).
- Development of a collaborative grant application with the NCSEHE, NATSIHEC, and CDU to develop a more comprehensive National Indigenous Higher Education Performance and Evaluation Strategy. This proposal was submitted to the Australian Government through the Indigenous Advancement Strategy in December 2017. This activity mobilised a number of key national stakeholders, as per the letters of support included at Appendix D.
- Planning and delivery of a workshop and webinar in April 2018 to explore concepts of Indigenous data sovereignty in the context of evaluation in Indigenous higher education in Australia. This formed part of the NCSEHE legacy and capacity building workshop series.

Each component of the fellowship coalesced to inform the research analysis and recommendations presented in this report. That is, each of the components described below have been informed by the other.

Research Methodology

The following section describes the research methodology associated with the empirical research component of the Fellowship. This research project was approved by the CDU Human Research Ethics Committee on 13 February 2017 (H17005). The letter of approval is included as Appendix E.

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[3] We acknowledge that there are different preferences among research participants to use the term Indigenous scholars, Indigenous leaders, and Indigenous thinkers. We use the term Indigenous scholar throughout this report to refer to Indigenous people in executive, management, strategic policy, research and/or senior academic teaching positions within higher education institutions across Australia, regardless of their Western academic credentials.

Participant demographics, selection & recruitment

There were two separate participant groups included in this study. This included (a) policymakers; and (b) Indigenous scholars. A brief description of each participant group and the respective selection and recruitment processes is provided below.

(a) Policymakers

In the context of this study a policymaker was defined as someone who was working (or who had worked) in an Indigenous or equity-focused policy role within the Australian Government DET; or the DPMC within the last five years. Eighteen policymakers were recruited to this study using a snowball sampling method. This was facilitated through senior management and the researcher-participant relationships developed during secondments to the Governance, Access and Quality Branch within DET. Nine interviews were conducted face-to-face (including one group interview involving four people), and the remaining six were conducted via telephone. Two participants self-identified as Indigenous. Pseudonyms have been used to preserve the identity of participants.

(b) Indigenous scholars

In the context of this study an Indigenous scholar was defined as someone who identified as Indigenous and who was working in a higher education institution within an executive (such as Deputy Vice-Chancellor or Pro Vice-Chancellor), management, strategic policy, research, or senior academic teaching-oriented role. Twenty-four Indigenous scholars were recruited to this study using a mixture of purposive and snowball sampling. This was initially facilitated through networks known to the primary researcher or EPAG members, and then through contacts developed after presenting at a NATSIHEC caucus meeting in June 2017. Targeted efforts were made to recruit Indigenous scholars from all states and territories across Australia. Whilst we do not claim to have a representative sample, we did succeed in recruiting participants from all states and territories. In the spirit of recognising Indigenous participants as sovereign people, we also claim to have representatives from the following Indigenous language groups and regions across Australia (with permission granted to acknowledge such heritage): Worimi, Palawa, Ngugi, Birapai, Wakka Wakka, Noongar, Kungarakung, Tharwal, Kaurna, Gurindji, Narungga Ngarrindjeri, Kabi Kabi, Anaiwan, Far North Queensland, Boigu Island, Pertame (Southern Arrernte), Tugga-Gah Wiradjuri, Kokoberran, and Stolen Generation. Nine Indigenous scholars have requested their comments be attributed by name in line with recent academic data sovereignty and data ownership discussions. The other Indigenous scholars have requested to remain anonymous or have indicated they do not mind if they are identified. In these instances, pseudonyms have been used (where possible a pseudonym selected by the participant). Eighteen respondents provided details about their length of service in the higher education sector. These participants had worked on average for 17 years in the higher education sector. Many also reported having been involved in a variety of national Indigenous education-focused advisory groups and committees such as NATSHIEC, National Indigenous Research and Knowledges Network (NIRAKN), Ministerial Advisory Councils, and/or state and national Consultative Groups. Many had also been involved on University Senates and Academic Boards. This demonstrates the depth of experience among the Indigenous scholars interviewed. It also means that each respondent potentially brings their own political agenda and/or vested interest to the interview context in the way they have responded. Eight interviews were conducted face-to-face with the remaining interviews conducted via telephone.

Conducting interviews

A semi-structured interview format was used with both groups of participants. A total of 39 interviews were conducted by Professor Smith during the Equity Fellowship. Seventeen interviews were conducted face-to-face and 22 were conducted via phone. All interviews

were audio-recorded (with the exception of one request from a policymaker for the interview not to be recorded). All interviews were conducted between March and November 2017. Interviews with policymakers typically lasted between 40 minutes and 1.5 hours. Whereas, interviews with Indigenous scholars typically lasted between 45 minutes and 2.5 hours. Two separate interview schedules were used to guide interview questions with each of the participant groups (see Appendices F and G). However, the interview discussion was used to probe more deeply in some areas than others, based on participant responses.

Transcription, coding and analysis

All interviews were transcribed by a professional transcription service. Written field notes were compared with transcripts for accuracy prior to coding. All participants also had the opportunity to review their transcripts prior to coding. Coding and analysis occurred in parallel to the interview process. Coding occurred between May 2017 and January 2018.

Computer Assisted Qualitative Data Analysis Software (CAQDAS)—NVIVO 11—was used by Professor Smith to code the textual interview data. The coding of Indigenous scholar interviews involved an inductive approach whereby codes emerged out of the data (Thomas, 2006). These codes were then repeatedly examined and analysed for consistent themes and sub-themes. This thematic analysis process occurred between August 2017 and January 2018. The analysis of policymaker interviews was approached differently, adopting framework analysis. Framework Analysis has its origins in social policy contexts in the UK and is often perceived as a pragmatic approach to real-world investigations, particularly applied to policy research (Ritchie & Spencer, 1994; Smith & Firth, 2011; Ward et al., 2013). In In this instance, framework analysis involved using the codes and themes to emerge during Indigenous scholar interviews as the basis to interrogate synergies and differences in perspectives between policymakers and Indigenous scholars. The framework analysis took place between October 2017 and January 2018. In November 2017, a half-day coding and analysis workshop was held with the research team, including two Indigenous researchers, to discuss and interrogate the initial coding patterns and themes. Initial findings were subsequently presented at three national forums where some of the research participants were in attendance. This was used as a timely feedback mechanism to validate the reliability and trustworthiness of the data and themes presented.

4. Discussion 1: Key Themes

Understanding Evaluation in Indigenous Higher Education Contexts

This section is dedicated to describing how evaluation is understood in the context of Indigenous higher education in Australia. In the first instance, the voices of Indigenous scholars have been used preferentially to those of policymakers. This is deliberate; a key tenet of this research project was to privilege Indigenous voices. This is one strategy the research team has used to avoid perpetuating Western power and privilege through the research process. However, excerpts from policymakers have also been embedded throughout the discussion to demonstrate the synergies and differences that emerged between the two participant groups.

There were three key themes that emerged from the thematic analysis:

1. Conceptualising 'evaluation' as a broad term
2. Towards a greater appreciation of qualitative evidence
3. Towards greater accountability

Each of these themes is discussed further below.

The report then moves into a more general discussion about the enablers and drivers of evaluation in Indigenous higher education contexts, and explains how these intersect with three domains of control: Indigenous control; government control; and university control. The report argues that moving towards a greater synergy between these domains of control is important for strengthening evaluation in Indigenous higher education contexts in Australia.

Conceptualising 'Evaluation' as a Broad Term

Upon embarking on this project, the research team deliberately avoided defining the term 'evaluation' to observe how research participants framed and defined the concept of evaluation themselves. As one participant commented:

> I guess it's one of the dilemmas for me, in that I am unsure of what the definition of evaluation is. Having come from probably a more practical, hands on, operational, but also strategic kind of background and not necessarily being involved in the research area and research and evaluation, I find it really difficult to actually get my head around it. Because listening to people talk about evaluation, there is, I think, an assumption that people generally know what's meant by evaluation. What the design of the evaluation is, how it's structured and what its purpose is and what the outcome should look like. (Ursula, Indigenous scholar)

Interestingly, the research repeatedly highlighted this dilemma. In addition to the term **evaluation** throughout interviews, terms such as **reporting**, **measurement**, **outcomes**, **impact**, **targets**, **performance**, **monitoring**, **assessment**, **benchmarking** and **feedback** were also frequently used, sometimes interchangeably. An illustrative example from an Indigenous scholar is provided below:

> So what we want to do in terms of the student **performance** through using **evaluation** and different indicators that we've developed is build the evidence … then we might move to more of a deliverable where we work with faculties, we set **targets**, we establish the trajectories of those **targets** over a period of time, we **monitor**, and then we constantly meet them to get consistency and a pattern of work to meet the **outcomes** … and the **outcomes** really address the inequity of Indigenous students taking twice as long, at the very least, at some unis ... if

*we can actually have the evidence that addresses those problems, we're going to have an **impact** on education **outcomes**.* (Paul, Indigenous scholar)

Such conflation of terms also surfaced in policymaker interviews. For example:

*We can look at universities compacts and their Indigenous education statements to see what they're doing in the Indigenous space but it's only an inference. We can't directly see the **outcomes** of those things we can just see the movements in the data and have to draw an inference about whether they're correlated…The Behrendt recommendations about an Indigenous **performance** framework that looks at the things that work that universities do that do make a difference in the Indigenous space. Looking at Indigenous staff numbers and the services like the strengths and the services of the Indigenous education units can quantify these things. We've got Indigenous staff numbers but I still think there's more potential for looking at all of those things together to see how they **impact** Indigenous participation.* (Isabelle, policymaker)

The following provides a more thorough summary (in alphabetical order) of the way in which both Indigenous scholars and policymakers used these different terms. It demonstrates that both participant groups from across Australia often spoke about 'evaluation' in a broad sense.

Term used: ASSESSMENT

Indicative examples from interviews

*So when the students do come in, they do a needs-based **assessment**, a finance-based resilience **assessment** just to figure out where they sit in regards to academic need, social support needs, family need, and that then feeds into what the student area calls 'the student success plan'.* (Leslie, Indigenous scholar)

*I've seen a lot of people … do the **assessment** of the centre. They'd do the evaluation of whether the Aboriginal centre at whatever different university was going alright. There doesn't seem to be as much of that anymore, but there certainly was ... I do think that doing evaluation, doing all of those sort of processes in the **assessment** of things, and then sort of come out with some relative value of something, I do think it's really important.* (Stephanie Gilbert, Indigenous scholar)

*I use the IES as the more qualitative and quantitative **assessments** as well to evaluate nationally what was happening and what was successful and what wasn't successful, and particularly in areas that haven't had a lot of time to make sure at this stage, like the appointment of senior positions across the sector.* (Leanne Holt, Indigenous scholar)

*So basically, I **assess** reports and after successful **assessment** of reports I then make process payments for each region. (*Cynthia, policymaker)

*We have reports of various projects through HEPPP and various components of HEPPP. Some inspire more confidence than others. Our **assessment** is often based on the methods used, the way in which data is analysed, and the way information is presented.* (Lola, policymaker)

Term used: BENCHMARKING

Indicative examples from interviews

*When you're operationalising Indigenous higher education, you're constantly reflecting on what it is you do and how it is that you do it. You consider what's the **benchmarking** standard in the process, as well, and you try and make that argument within a university based on those sorts of **benchmarks***. (Tracey Bunda, Indigenous scholar)

We had to create a baseline that described how we saw ourselves and how people saw us. So we conducted a baseline study that compared us with a number of competitor universities. (Shane Houston, Indigenous scholar)

*So any evaluation framework has to, I think, link into the university's framework itself. Having one that links in with all other institutions based on Indigenous stuff is only going to create a **benchmarking** thing for other universities. An Indigenous framework would only help us benchmark in a sense what we're doing in Aboriginal areas across different universities … every university has different structures.* (Leslie, Indigenous scholar)

*I think that building evaluation into program design should be more widespread. So **benchmarking**, building credible indicators and performance measurement throughout the program would make a lot of programs much more easy to justify but that stuff's pretty tricky and takes a lot of time. The reality is some programs need to be rolled out really quickly.* (Billy, policymaker)

Term used: COMPLIANCE

Indicative examples from interviews

*Those sort of **compliance** and regulatory sort of things that are really crucial that we haven't necessarily had a lot of conversation around here, you know what's your baseline?* (Eric, Indigenous scholar)

*The other part of that is that there's got to be a way to capture more than **compliance** data. It can't just be a tick and flick of compliance because some things are like, 'How many students were doing a scholarship, how many students were bums on seats, how many were doing this?'* (Deirdre, Indigenous scholar)

*We've put an enormous amount of money into, to monitor our students and our student cohort. We needed this system … this is just us going to that one extra step to make sure we're **complying***. (AK, Indigenous scholar)

Term used: FEEDBACK

Indicative examples from interviews

*Most useful [evidence], for me, is from the people that are giving us **feedback**. I think it's the **feedback** that's useful for me, through the evaluation … what they want to see from the program, as well. It's kind of what they thought that the program was going to be like, whether we've delivered a good program, I guess. It's **feedback** for us, but it's also feedback for us to make it better, to say 'well, this didn't work and that didn't work' … But it's mainly about how we can change it. If you're evaluating something and you don't get any **feedback** on it to make it better or whatever, or to change it, I don't know what you're meant to do with it by evaluating something.* (Jacqui, Indigenous scholar)

One of the complaints we get frequently from students—this is non-Aboriginal students as well—is that there's no coordination across a course, of the Indigenous content. So they get the same stuff repeated again, and again, and again, which makes them so sick of it by the time they get to the end of their course, that they hate the topic. And it's always deficit-based. (Maggie Walter, Indigenous scholar)

*There's kind of an ongoing informal evaluation process because it's like constant **feedback** in terms of with student engagement and with tutors and things like that.* (Brad, Indigenous scholar)

*We know universities do do evaluations. But because we've been [busy] the past 12 months—it has been around implementing the reforms to the [ISSP] program—you know, a lot of that development, and discussions came up, but we've been more into the **feedback** that they [universities] provided to us. So similar to the way that the Behrendt Review received their information. But what we're hoping to be able to do in the future is to be able to get a better collection of that sort of information so that we can actually use it as a basis of good practice and knowledge that can be shared across universities.* (Ethan, policymaker)

*That project was going on when ATSIHEAC [Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Higher Education Advisory Council] was still formed and that was their **feedback** was that they wanted a number of Indigenous specific indicators which weren't reflected in the proposal. Their advice was that more work needed to be done in that Indigenous-specific indicator space before we could really go ahead.* (Isabelle, policymaker)

Term used: IMPACT

Indicative examples from interviews

*I'm also aware that there's a major shift that's happening in the research sector, around **impact** assessment, and measures of **impact**, so that when research is undertaken, that from the outset there is planning around and consideration given, to the **impact** of that research.* (Cheryl Godwell, Indigenous scholar)

*So there's a lot of that quantitative data that the Government requires us to report against … in some ways, the completion and the retention rates are the higher end — **impact** metrics that we ultimately are wanting to achieve … what is that overarching **impact** for Aboriginal Torres Strait Islander people by completion of the university degree? ... There's a lot of metrics that are activity based, but what we're talking about, what we're looking at, is **impact**. What we need to look at is **impact**.* (Kathy, Indigenous scholar)

*If we looked at the **impact** of what Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander support staff, academic staff, have brought to the table over those 30 years, it would be totally immeasurable because the hard work, the scholarly contributions of our people to the sector has made the sector what it is today.* (Grace, Indigenous scholar)

*It's like the HEPPP [Higher Education Participation and Partnership Program] program, the problem they [ACIL Allen Consulting] had was other government initiatives at the same time that also were based on large student growth. So identifying whether it's HEPPP or a demand-driven system is problematic. That's another thing with evaluation I guess is that other policy might have an **impact** on whether you can effectively evaluate whether the program was successful or not.* (Donald, policymaker)

*In preparing this discussion paper, I've been trying to kind of summarise support services out there for all groups, all students, and I've had to draw in a lot of evaluation of programs and of reports. Everything has been quite useful in terms of what we got out of it, what's been the **impact** on students, **impact** on universities, cost involved, how many people have been **impacted** by these different things. So I think, from what I can see, the evaluations have been - are useful at the moment.* (Kate, policymaker)

***Impact** evaluations are really important. Yeah, we want to know, are we making a difference? What is the difference that we're making? So, I think that it doesn't necessarily have to be quantitative national data that tells us that … So, yeah, in terms of types of evaluations, **impact** evaluations are really important, and I think the explanatory value of a really good theory-based evaluation is also very good to getting to understand in what context, why and how programs are working for particular communities.* (Mary, policymaker)

Term used: MEASUREMENT

Indicative examples from interviews

*How do we evaluate higher education and how does the West evaluate our human condition inside their institutions and by what **measures** do they do that? And how accurate is that? And then what's an Indigenous form of success inside higher education and how is that **measured**.* (Lester-Irabinna Rigney, Indigenous scholar)

*There's still this abrogation of any sense of acknowledging that our [Indigenous] people do have a scholarship within their knowledge, that is a **measurable**, tangible, scientific-based knowledge system that is used all over the world … eventually they'll come around when we can prove that there's a need and there's a viable, **measurable** way of doing it so that it meets both Western and cultural needs …. It would be more conducive to the country to say this is how much money we've invested into this area and these are the quality outcomes that we've been able to **measure**.* (Grace, Indigenous scholar)

*You've got the targets and Key Performance Indicators which cover retention, the various academic program, enrolments, postgrad enabling, and undergraduate completions and we also have professional and academic staff targets as well. So we have those numeric **measures** that we have to maintain …but [I'll say], how are you guys in Woden [PMC] going to know what Aboriginal knowledge is and its success, if we're just ticking the boxes … how can you **measure** up from that if you don't have an understanding of it? To what end are you **measuring** us on?* (Leslie, Indigenous scholar)

*The technical expertise to design and conduct an evaluation and include the appropriate **measurement**, tools and collect the data in the right kind of way, using the right design and analyse it and all of that [is important]. And the two things, acceptability and technical expertise, do not necessarily coincide in a person … so I think it's really important to have Indigenous people give voice to their experience of the program and whether or not it has been acceptable to the community or whatever, but that's not the same as technical competence … And if they haven't got the technical competence, it will fail.* (Gina, policymaker)

*Evaluation draws on a range of skills … the methodology is required to understand **measurement**, understand asking questions, what kind of questions you're asking for research design and method.* (Priscilla, policymaker)

Term used: MONITORING

Indicative examples from interviews

> *We needed to measure the success and **monitor** the success of our programs.* (Eric, Indigenous scholar)

> *There needs to be constant **monitoring** of the tutorial assistance program so that you are actually eliminating bad practice out of an Indigenous centre and ensuring that you've got quality tutors providing the type of support that is actually required by the students.* (Tracey Bunda, Indigenous scholar)

> *You go to NATSIHEC meetings you know that not all people have control of all their money, it's **monitored** through the uni, it's allocated some for student support, some for here, some for there, some for wherever.* (Deirdre, Indigenous scholar)

> *I would say that we actually had quite definite **monitoring** and reporting systems in place beforehand, before the new program [ISSP], and what we've got now is an adaption of the **monitoring** regime that we had in place beforehand. So what we've tried to do is to get that balance right between over-reporting and under-reporting and so try to focus on outcomes … I think the **monitoring** and reporting framework that we have certainly could meet the expectations that they [Behrendt Review] were putting forward. But I think — I think the other side of things is that there's, if you like, there's tiers of **monitoring**.* (Ethan, policymaker)

> *They [ATSIHEAC] actually were quite strong about **monitoring** and evaluation. That was part of the reason they wanted a performance framework and it's part of the reason why they were saying that the community and the Government and the universities had to work together on that one.* (Oliver, policymaker)

> *So my experience involves commissioning, designing, and working with the policy areas on what's needed. And **monitoring** and then — probably **monitoring** is crucial. **Monitoring** the conduct and quality of evaluations … but **monitoring** has to be done to ensure its [policies and programs are] on track, this poses many conundrums and challenges … there's a whole sort of stakeholder relationship management that goes with **monitoring** evaluation projects because they are often quite political and it's the nature of the evaluation.* (Priscilla, policymaker)

Term used: OUTCOMES

Indicative examples from interviews

> *The most important thing is to move from being ad hoc to being structured so that there's that ability to compare, because we want to be able to see are there measurable **outcomes**. Is there measurable change? We can't do that if we're comparing apples and oranges.* (Cindy, Indigenous scholar)

> *I think it would be good to enable researchers to look at really dynamic, innovative, global approaches to Indigenous targets and **outcomes**, and I feel like there's a lot less of that happening, like I guess, research that's undertaken from a local, state, territory, national and international perspective, but around really innovative ideas. The cutting-edge stuff. I feel like we're always constantly reviewing the status quo and very rarely are we making an investment in researching and analysing the cutting-edge … I think we're constantly still looking at the same deficits and the rhetoric around Indigenous disadvantage, around low **outcomes**, around a whole range of other things, but very rarely do*

we ever actually make an investment in researching the stuff that's actually worked. (Cheryl Godwell, Indigenous scholar)

*We just have this cross-disciplinary meeting, which includes a few areas—it includes Recruitment, Student Support, and Social Inclusion Unit—and what I'll do is I'll feed into that meeting and say 'look, this is what we've done this year and this has been the **outcomes** and these are our numbers, and this is what it looks like from last year to now' and we just do the comparison with the data, like how many students we've got and all those kind of things.* (Jacqui, Indigenous scholar)

*So what we've got — if you like, we've got the **outcomes**, but also got some inputs to it as well. So we understand how those **outcomes** are being achieved. So like you say we've got the qualitative information. But we've also got other — quite a bit of information in terms of things like the scholarships under certain scholarship categories, and by certain student cohorts. We've got information on tutorial assistance, and information on the workforce, the makeup of the workforce.* (Ethan, policymaker)

I think corporate memory's quite important for all programs, because there is always staff change and maintaining knowledge, even that there was an evaluation that occurred five years ago or something can be quite difficult, let alone what the outcomes were or what changes were made in response to it. (Gina, policymaker)

*We always want to see **outcomes** and numbers are always really useful. Qualitative evidence is really good but numbers communicate really clearly.* (Isabelle, Policymaker)

Term used: PERFORMANCE

Indicative examples from interviews

*I think Larissa Behrendt's report, the Behrendt report of the review that they conducted also argued that there are **underperforming** institutions that are receiving Indigenous funding. And is it right that they should be continued to receive funding if they're not **performing**. My view is no. I think if those institutions can't demonstrate that they are capable or that they are willing to, even do something different than what they've done historically, then perhaps they shouldn't receive the same level of funding and support.* (David, Indigenous scholar)

*I've mentioned to you before that the data people and the statistics people inside [University] have been developing some fantastic reporting tools that have culminated as a result of ongoing conversations that myself and other staff inside the portfolio have been having with them over the last couple of years. About the kind of data that we need to be able to [have to] meet external reporting requirements with [Government] agencies. So that's fantastic. It helps to demonstrate **performance** and outcomes and all of those kinds of things at [University].* (Ursula, Indigenous scholar)

*You wonder about their [Australian Government] own evaluation of their own **performance**. It must be pretty low if they're too scared to be evaluated, or have a framework put in place where they might actually be responsible for what they do.* (Maggie Walter, Indigenous scholar)

*I think there needs to be that combination of let's look at the numbers, see what we find and then see what's really driving that whether it's behavioural or institutional **performance***. (Billy, policymaker)

*In my view evaluation is about assessing whether a program or policy is appropriate, effective and efficient. A **performance** framework doesn't do that. It looks at where we're up to at the moment, and compares this to the past. Producing these types of documents and data over time demonstrates change against particular indicators over time.* (Lola, policymaker)

*I think it's a big challenge because then people will say we need a thing, we need a monitoring and evaluation framework, we need an evaluation strategy, and we need a **performance** framework. It's unlikely they mean the same thing as me and it's unlikely they know what they mean.* (Priscilla, policymaker)

Term used: REPORTING

Indicative examples from interviews

*I don't mind **reporting**. I think reporting's fine, but I mind **reporting** on stuff that's not relevant. You know what I mean? So if the Commonwealth asks me to do X, and X is irrelevant to the agenda of the university, then I object to that because it's a waste of my time and money. I'd rather spend the time and money that we've got, doing the things and measuring the things and evaluating the things that we said we would do. [It] makes more sense. But the Commonwealth being the Commonwealth will always impose their own perspective. That's what governments do.* (Shane Houston, Indigenous scholar)

*We have a lot of the formal **reporting** that everybody has to do. And a lot of it's government-led … We don't have the time or the numbers of people to actually undertake research that's not formal **reporting**, as such.* (Zac, Indigenous scholar)

*Like this morning I just had to do the **reporting** … I had to write some narrative stuff around the targets and stuff that we've set ourselves … I could pretty much write whatever I wanted in there and I don't feel as though there'd be any checks or balances to make sure that what I wrote was actually even true, you know? So that's more what I'm saying. There's a fair amount of trust I guess in those **reporting** processes.* (Brad, Indigenous scholar)

*Those **reporting** requirements that we do receive from them give us an adequate idea on how they're applying what they do to the objectives on the program. In my experience from assessing these reports I haven't found any that have been contentious.* (Cynthia, policymaker)

*So there's one thing which is a **reporting** to government, to the public if you like, and then there's another thing which is around continual improvement, which is more **reporting** across universities … so this is a point that universities consistently made during our consultations [about ISSP], is that they often feel that the burden of **reporting** on students and on government **reporting** often can take away from the actual delivery of services and support to students. So that the more staff you need to employ to fulfil your **reporting** requirements, the less staff you're applying to actually work with the students and help them succeed. So that was actually an extremely important point that was made I think, that the general thinking was that even under the previous arrangements, there was too much **reporting**.* (Ethan, policymaker)

*So the department sends out a **reporting** template, the provider completes the **reporting** template and sends it back in. It could be that sometimes the providers would tell us there's issues here or there's issues there but during the course of an evaluation it might come up that there might've been some issues around **reporting**. It could be something like around the timing of that **reporting** in particular the dates or [it's] interconnecting with some other **reporting** that they're doing on a different government program or **reporting** on something to do with a state government program and that may not have come to our attention in the regular program delivery. Perhaps something like that could be taken on board and the process for **reporting** might change.* (Frances, policymaker)

Term used: TARGETS

Indicative examples from interviews

*With the reporting, we have to do a performance report. All our **target** numbers — if we met them, if we didn't meet them. Happy to say last year we met all our **target** numbers and exceeded our — because we give an estimation at the start of the year in what we think we might come close by. But yes, we exceeded that.* (AK, Indigenous scholar)

*We need to be clearer about what our **target** numbers are for including Indigenous higher education student outcomes.* (Amber Collins, Indigenous scholar)

*How we ask them to set **targets** or how they prove their evidence and stuff is going to be much more immature as opposed to those that have been on this journey for a long period of time. There's different levels of RAPs and different requirements of what they report back on.* (Kathy, Indigenous scholar)

*So one of the other things in the Indigenous Student Success Program is the Indigenous employment **targets**. So encourage the universities to also employ more Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. That's partly to inform the way that the university works and supports Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students.* (Ethan, policymaker)

*The new government came to office with a dislike of **targets** and **target-setting**.* (Nathan, policymaker)

Understanding that both Indigenous scholars and policymakers define evaluation in a broad sense is important. This differs from the way in which the terms are traditionally used within the evaluation field, where each term has a more specific meaning (see for example International Initiative for Impact Evaluation, 2010). It also differs from the way in which the Australian Government (DPMC, 2017) is currently attempting to define evaluation within the context of the Indigenous Advancement Strategy, whereby terms such as 'evaluation', 'performance', 'monitoring', 'performance', 'impact', 'outcome', and 'activity reviews' are being defined as separate concepts (see for example Figure 4).
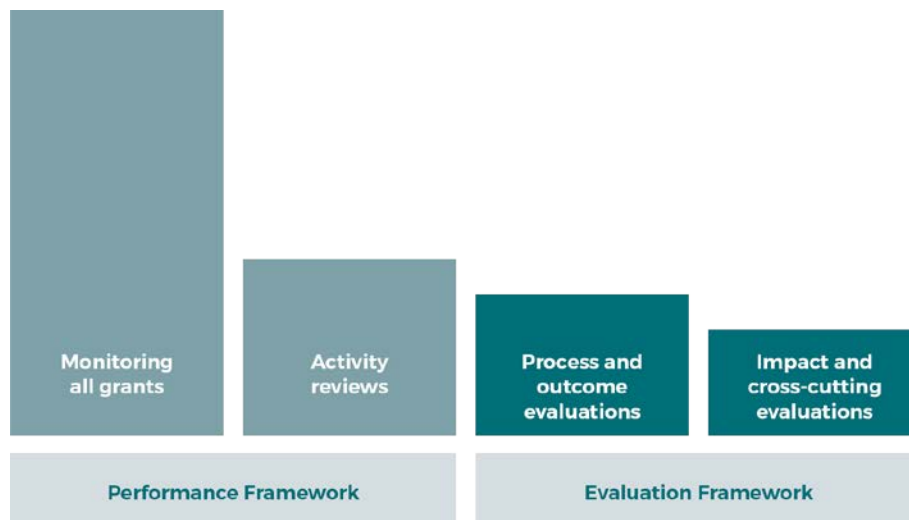
Figure 4: Monitoring and evaluation system within Indigenous Affairs Group
Source: Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet (2017, p5)

This research highlights that the concept of evaluation means different things to different people. In some respects, this could be expected. However, this has resulted in a lack of common understanding between Indigenous scholars and policymakers about what is meant by 'evaluation'. This increases the potential to talk at cross-purposes and cause confusion among key stakeholders. This has two important implications for strengthening evaluation in Indigenous higher education in Australia. Firstly, greater efforts could be made to move towards a consensus position about what is meant by 'evaluation'. However, this would need to be approached very sensitively, as principles inherent in Indigenous and equity-focused higher education work, insinuate that evaluation should not necessarily be determined by those who have the greatest power to do so (Burke & Lumb, 2018). The co-development of a glossary of terms could be a useful strategy to support this process. This would need to be a key consideration during the development of a National Indigenous Higher Education Performance and Evaluation Strategy, as per previous recommendations in the Behrendt Review (Behrendt et al., 2012) and by ATSIHEAC (2016). Secondly, the differences in terms used and the disparate ways of talking about evaluation between stakeholders means there would be benefit in bringing together key stakeholders, such as Indigenous scholars, policymakers, practitioners and representatives from key peak bodies to have a national discussion about priorities relating to evaluation in higher education. Importantly, learning from the way that other scholars, such as feminist scholars and social justice scholars, have used different theoretical frameworks to define and inform evaluation practice, could be a useful proposition. The notion of coming together was repeatedly highlighted by participants:

> *When there are meetings or gatherings, it's not a mutual purpose around brainstorming: what are the best ways forward? What's Indigenous knowledge? What's the perspective? How do we get faculties on board? There's not a lot of strategy discussion at that level … at some point, you need to come together and have a discussion around what's working, and build the evidence from there … I really think there needs to be more of a collegial group, of a national group that, you know … brought together with a clear mandate with a number of areas that are highly relevant to us for improving across the performance indicators [in the Indigenous Student Success Program] — performance measures. And I think there needs to be the risk taken from the decision-makers to expand the group … and to constantly introduce new talent.* (Paul, Indigenous scholar)

Professor Colleen Hayward AM, an Indigenous scholar from Western Australia, also commented:

What we don't do … is find the time to connect with one another in terms of all of the sharing of, 'we found this works' or 'I'm really having a problem with such and such' or 'we don't seem to be getting traction on this,' those sorts of things and really sharing.

Another participant from Victoria noted:

We get together quite regularly at the state level and share best practice, talk about different things that are happening within our institutions and stuff to sort of, you know … like sort of skill share and all of that sort of stuff … it's very much about people just sharing best practice, sharing experiences and sharing sort of information in a collaborative kind of way to try and drive the agenda at the state and national level in a better direction. (Brad, Indigenous scholar)

With the exception of some participants talking about the usefulness of NATSIHEC caucus meetings, Victoria was the only state that was mentioned throughout interviews that offered an opportunity to share information and speak strategically across multiple universities:

In Victoria we have a consortium of the nine universities, which is signed off the by Vice-Chancellors, which is called a Toorong Marnong [Higher Education] Accord … we all come together I think it was every two months … we talk about how can we come together to do marketing, recruitment, all of these things. Information sharing, what's working, all of those sorts of things for the Victorian community. So that's a good space to work in, in terms of influence, I guess, and our sphere of influence. (Zac, Indigenous scholar)

The Toorong Marnong Higher Education Accord, an agreement between nine universities jointly auspiced by the Victorian Aboriginal Education Association Incorporated and the Victorian Vice-Chancellor's Committee, was highly valued by those participants that spoke of it. With sufficient resourcing, NATSIHEC could potentially fill a similar void at a national level. Indigenous scholar, Professor Lester-Irabinna Rigney, reinforced this concept succinctly:

I think there needs to be a summit on Indigenous higher education around evaluation, and this summit needs to bring [together] some of the key thinkers in this area because we simply don't know the challenges. Evaluation in higher education is under-theorised in Australia. Whilst we ask our institutions like schools and universities to be culturally responsive, at the moment we have an un-culturally responsive evaluation in higher education. It tries to evaluate Aboriginal higher education like non-Aboriginal education, and in doing so it's a missed opportunity to really get the complete story. The first thing I would do is to run a summit to try and channel some serious theorisation of evaluation in higher education because we know that there's a problem.

At present there are no current Indigenous higher education national forums, summits or conferences taking place, where *strategic* discussions of this nature can occur. Participants were clear that his needs to change.

Towards a Greater Appreciation of Qualitative Methodologies and Evidence

Throughout the research process, participants regularly spoke about different types of methodologies and evidence collected and used through evaluation work. This was often expressed as a binary between quantitative and qualitative methodologies and the respective division of evidence derived from each. There was a consistent view among Indigenous scholars that the current higher education reporting 'system' favours quantitative methods and evidence over qualitative methodologies and evidence. There was a parallel view that this needed to change and that qualitative methodologies were more closely aligned with Indigenous epistemologies, ontologies and axiologies. As one participant explained:

> *The model that we have is a quantitative model, where we look at numbers, and we look at progressions and we look at retention and all that. And they're important things. But we need to look more closely at the qualitative measure of how we engage with community. How do we provide a culturally safe and responsive learning environment for Indigenous students? The connection between some the graduates that graduate from these institutions and then their destination, where do they go?* (David, Indigenous scholar)

Another participant also claimed:

> *We need different types [of data] other than the standardised data collection mechanisms of the Federal Department of Education and Training, which are numerically based and fairly basic. And really not substantial enough for what we need.* (Amber Collins, Indigenous scholar)

Policymaker commentary generally reinforced the notion that quantitative data was favoured within government policy contexts as well:

There's probably a predilection in the department to value things that have numbers attached to them over more qualitative evidence. I'm not going to make a value judgement about that but there's a demand for quantitative evidence that makes big datasets more useful I guess. (Billy, policymaker)

Other policymakers commented:

Quantitative evidence is very useful. It is something that people in decision-making roles can respond to. (Lola, policymaker)

There's definitely a preference for quantitative … decision-makers respond very well to quantitative findings. So, by decision-makers, I mean the government of the day. (Mary, policymaker)

A perceived over-reliance on numerical data raised significant concern among Indigenous scholars about the respective quality of national and institutional program and policy responses. Generally speaking, participants were keen for there to be a better balance in the way that governments and universities collect, report and use quantitative and qualitative evidence to increase the integrity of policy and program work aimed at improving Indigenous higher education outcomes. In talking about narrative methods as one type of qualitative approach, one participant commented:

There's a lot of discussion around the value of narratives and having successful engagement and whatever, but I don't think we do it anywhere near as well as what we could. I don't think we give enough credence to the value of that type of methodology. (Grace, Indigenous scholar)

Professor Lester-Irabinna Rigney reinforced this concept by asserting:

If you limit what you know about Aboriginal education to those evaluative factors and you seek statistical evidence of compliance on how the problem is to be represented, you only get the story that you want to get. If the story is represented differently, that these students have a whole range of other aspects that tell us bigger and insightful stories about their success or their incompletion, you then get a fuller picture about what's going on.

This concept was consistent across most of the interviews with Indigenous scholars:

I think that if evaluation only relies on quantitative data, it raises questions about the quality of that—about the kind of discussions—it goes to the quality of discussions, considerations and decisions that you can't make just off quantitative data. (Eric, Indigenous scholar)

I think sometimes it becomes problematic when there is an attempt to apply existing policies and programs without any consideration to the qualitative things … the narratives and other things that speaks to our identity. (David, Indigenous scholar)

There's a whole heap of stories that go with those stats to actually help explain what it is that is happening. (Ursula, Indigenous scholar)

Quantitative [data], as you know, is just going to give you the numbers. They don't tell you the story behind it and in my view, it is the stories behind the numbers where the richness actually lies … one of the things that I'm seeing in the Aboriginal affairs area here, and it overlaps with Aboriginal education at all levels, is we've come back to using place-based as a strategy for policy work or school practice. I have changed that terminology … anything that applies is not just place-based but [it] is also face-based, and what I mean by that is place-based to me describes the context in which people are or an incident has

happened or whatever. Face-based means you actually engage with individuals to ascertain impact on them in that context, so it goes to a different level in my view. I think that stuff is the missing bit … I think that the face-based connected with the place-based is important. (Colleen Hayward AM, Indigenous scholar)

While indicating a preference for quantitative data, policymakers also acknowledged the limitations of only using 'numbers' and 'statistics' to guide their work:

We've got the data, the data's easy to extract, but if you don't have the context, then that data is just a set of numbers and mere ciphers which is to say they're questions not answers. And if you don't have the context, you don't know how to interpret those questions or [know] what better questions to ask. (Oliver, policymaker)

Other policymakers commented:

Just having pure quantitative data, without the qualitative [data], doesn't actually show you the full spectrum or the general feel of how people view things they are looking to improve. So if we just get the quantitative data or just the numbers, we know what they are, but we don't actually know exactly what the needs are. So that's why we've been working with the NATSIHEC and the universities to try to also provide that contextual aspect. (John, policymaker)

So you've got a table full of numbers. None of that is evidence. But let's talk about it, let's interpret it … I'm much more interested in what's the set of lenses that you might use to interpret it … to come to a conclusion about what it's telling you. So those data don't speak for themselves. We make them speak. We make them say something by the way we use them … I don't buy the notion that numbers speak for themselves. (Nathan, policymaker)

Another participant also commented that:

The really small numbers of Indigenous students in higher education make it difficult to use quantitative data in the first place. (Billy, policymaker)

The discussion above does not infer that quantitative data is unimportant. Quite the contrary. There was broad consensus among both Indigenous scholars and policymakers that both quantitative and qualitative methodologies and evidence are important, and that each type of approach, and the respective information it reaps, can complement the other. In fact, some participants explicitly stated so. For example:

It's really important that we get quality data for a narrative and story to go with things, absolutely in no way does that mean we can't concentrate on getting better numerical data. (Amber Collins, Indigenous scholar)

Another participant commented:

So the numbers are really important. And then you've got to try and capture the depth and the complexity of what those numbers mean. (Brian, Indigenous scholar)

One policymaker claimed:

Statistics are always preferred, it seems. I think you can't go past really good data. But we also like to include, where we can, some case studies or anecdotes. Or quotes. (Kate, policymaker)

While these excerpts demonstrate that framing Indigenous higher education data in relation to numbers alone is considered to be problematic, the key consideration articulated is for a deeper, more nuanced, level of inquiry. When talking about his experiences of

engaging ministers and senior bureaucrats in discussion about the real-world aspects of Indigenous higher education, Professor Steven Larkin reflected 'y*ou're not going to capture that in a Likert scale'.* This provides a succinct summary of the complex nature of Indigenous higher education. It also aligns with previous commentary which has suggested that "more sophisticated evaluation models that reflect more rigorous, comprehensive and nuanced understandings" (Frawley et al., 2015, p. 10) in Indigenous higher education are required. An underlying discourse during research interviews was that qualitative evaluation approaches had greater potential to accommodate different worldviews and realities, including those associated with Indigenous knowledges, pedagogies and methodologies. As one participant expressed:

> *I think the main thing is that if we're evaluating a particular set of realities then we have to understand that there's different ways of seeing that and understanding it. It's not that one's right or wrong … it's that complementarity across different knowledge systems … to get a third space where we've got a new epistemology or a new knowledge that comes from drawing these together.* (Steve Larkin, Indigenous scholar)

This was eloquently reinforced by Indigenous scholar, Professor Tracey Bunda, who explained:

> *The concept of narrative and storying is much more a part of an Indigenous practice than the hard data in numbers, in the statistics. That's not to say that I dismiss that statistical information. But it's the narrative, it's the story that needs to be important in terms of thinking about the work we're doing in Indigenous higher education.*

Similarly, another participant stated:

> *We have to have the measures that speak to the issues we think are important, with the character, the narrative.* (Shane Houston, Indigenous scholar)

In a pragmatic sense, paying attention to stories and narratives gives a voice to key stakeholders that are often pushed to the periphery during monitoring and evaluation discussions. Reflecting on his own practice, one participant explained:

> *In terms of the qualitative components what I try to do is look at the narrative around student engagement.* (Brian, Indigenous scholar)

Whereas another participant focused on the voices of, and priorities expressed by, the broader community:

> *The qualitative information from people around — a broad range of people around their perceptions of whether or not it's worked or it's got potential, whether people are supportive … making sure that whatever is being done is reflective of the needs and directions coming out of the community.* (Ursula, Indigenous scholar)

There was, however, one policymaker who challenged the use of case studies and stories by claiming:

> *People think that rich descriptive case stories are the bee's knees sometimes. And if that's what they're offering as evaluations, well, then it's not an evaluation. Evaluation has to be much more clear-cut, and determine what you're measuring and what you want to know, and why.* (Priscilla, policymaker)

Understanding that narratives and stories are a fundamental part of Indigenous ways of knowing and being is critical to discussions about evaluation in Indigenous higher education contexts. This was recently reinforced during Associate Professor Nerida Blair's 2017

keynote presentation at the Australian Association of Research in Education national conference entitled "Researching and storying in the in-between space: people not politics". The value placed on narratives and stories cannot be underestimated, as it represents much more than a Western dichotomy between quantitative and qualitative methodologies and evidence. It draws on Indigenous and other critical epistemologies that provide a counter-discourse or interpretation of the dominant (often colonising) ways of reading and making sense of stories and narratives. It brings attention to the contested values at play in evaluation processes. It ultimately provides an opportunity for governments and universities to be more culturally responsive to the needs of Indigenous students and staff. In summary, it respects an Indigenous epistemological and ontological framing that has seldom occurred within higher education contexts. This resonates with earlier discussion about the emergence of data sovereignty as a global Indigenous research priority and the need to shift away from deficit-based reporting models. As Professor Maggie Walter claimed:

> *The problem with the deficit-based [reporting] is, is that it falls into all of those data sins, in that it's always just talking about problems and rarely do they ever use the high-quality Indigenous scholarship that's out there, that actually contextualises and engages with these topics. So you tend to just get stuff stripped out of issues of health and welfare and other bits. It's all about the 'what'; there's almost nothing about the 'why', and it's not nuanced.* (Maggie Walter, Indigenous scholar)

Our research indicates the use of Indigenous scholarship and concepts relating to data sovereignty are extremely important for strengthening evaluation in Indigenous higher education contexts in Australia, including the type and nature of data used to inform policy and practice.

RECOMMENDATIONS

5. **Stories and narratives are explicitly incorporated into reporting and evaluation processes examining the impact and outcome of Indigenous higher education**. They provide a legitimate, culturally relevant and contextual source of evidence.

6. The **Australian Government explicitly incorporates qualitative reporting and evaluation processes into all higher education program funding agreements** which aim to improve Indigenous higher education access and outcomes. This should complement existing quantitative data sets; and provide greater contextual information to inform future policy and program development and reform.

7. Investment into the **development of innovative qualitative evaluation strategies aligned with Indigenous methodologies and methods** could provide new insights suitable for reforming Indigenous higher education policy and practice in Australia. This should be completed in consultation with Indigenous scholars.

Towards Greater Accountability

Accountability within equity and higher education contexts has been a key focus of recent Australian research, with calls for greater accountability using *Equity Maps* (Brett, in press; Zacharias, 2017). This surfaced as a key theme through our research as well, albeit in

different ways. Accountability was repeatedly discussed by participants as being important within Indigenous higher education contexts. As one participant succinctly stated:

> *If people really want to see results then we actually need to interrogate that stuff and hold things - people and organisations - to a higher level of accountability.* (Brad, Indigenous scholar)

Repeated review of interview data revealed that the accountability of both universities and government was discussed relatively equally by participants. In some instances, accountability was explicitly perceived as a joint responsibility. Some participants also spoke more specifically about the need for greater accountability among Vice-Chancellors and senior university executives for improving outcomes in Indigenous higher education. An increase of accountability in these areas was ultimately perceived to increase accountability to the community.

When talking about the **accountability of government**, participants commented:

> *Look, I think one of the things that we need to actually acknowledge is the way in which the dialogue is currently constructed between the Federal Government and Indigenous higher education. It's constructed to the benefit of the Federal Government. When there are calls for change — you know, they come up with the new regime of funding, but there's no change in the funding itself.* (Tracey Bunda, Indigenous scholar)

Whilst sufficient resourcing was deemed to be an important concept in discussion about government accountability, so too was visibility of what is being reviewed and evaluated and for what purpose:

> *We have zero visibility of what the Commonwealth is actually auditing, reviewing, researching, assessing or anything. So that can be quite frustrating and I guess, it makes you highly suspicious about the motives and/or the lack of transparency around what they're doing and why they're doing it …. so it's always a reaction to what's proposed, rather than collaborative design or innovation around what these programs and initiatives could look like and how they could be reshaped.* (Cheryl Godwell, Indigenous scholar)

Another participant stated:

> *I'd want to know why the Minister [for Indigenous Affairs] was wanting the evaluation to be done in the first place. You know, given the kind of track that he and his government has had in the higher ed. space, but more specifically the Aboriginal affairs space and the absolute debacles that have happened as a result of some of those initiatives not only in the higher ed. space, but more broadly in Indigenous affairs. I'd be wanting to know why the evaluations would need to happen in the first place and for what purpose the evaluation is occurring.* (Ursula, Indigenous scholar)

This excerpt shows that understanding, from the outset, the intent and reasons for undertaking an evaluation are important. Indigenous scholars often spoke about making an assessment about the investment of time and effort they contributed to an evaluation process based on the benefit to the Indigenous community. Sometimes government expectations were unclear in this regard:

> *One of the things that we took a decision on very early was that if whoever was commissioning the evaluation was genuinely checking things out in terms of improvement or expansion, then we were in. If they were using an evaluation to potentially close a program or a service or an organisation, we didn't want to have a bar of it … really teasing out what it is that the funder is looking for*

coming out of an evaluation and then trying to read between the lines about their underpinning motivation. So it's about being vigilant and it's also about — just in Aboriginal affairs generally, one of my catch-cries is you want to reserve the right to walk away. (Colleen Hayward AM, Indigenous scholar)

A healthy scepticism towards the way government use evaluation evidence and/or commission evaluations was a prominent feature across many interviews. Noteworthy, within the context of this analysis, is that there have been some considerable changes in the way Indigenous higher education policy and program responsibilities have been administered by the Australian Government in recent years. As mentioned earlier in the report, Indigenous higher education policy and program responsibilities have been split between the DET and the PMC. In particular, the Indigenous Student Success Program (ISSP) was reconfigured immediately prior to this research. This included the development of a new reporting framework (which is scheduled to be implemented for the first time in 2018). These changes were fresh in the minds of many participants and were mentioned relatively frequently. For example:

When we report next time it's going to be the first time for all of us that we're reporting on the new system — the ISSP. I don't know that the Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet, which of course where it's administered, will collect good practice stories but it would be great if they did … if you really want something to happen you're best placed putting it in funding guidelines and reporting requirements … if good stories were being collected in that process [ISSP], they could be the start of informing the development of a framework. Prime Minister and Cabinet need to lead having been informed by what is being done rather than sitting in an office in Canberra and thinking that they can develop it from there in isolation. (Colleen Hayward AM, Indigenous scholar)

Some participants explained that PMC had made some productive inroads in recent times, in relation to Indigenous higher education reporting expectations. However, there was also some scepticism towards ISSP reporting. More specifically, about the ability of PMC to show accountability on behalf of government by, in turn, holding universities to account:

PMC are very helpful … they went away after the IAS, and they really considered what they did. They're still not there but they're starting to, I guess, formally regulate us on how we do things … but, are they the regulator — [will] they contact the university - the Vice-Chancellor and say, 'hey, look, we notice that you've got a Dean'? It's under our guidelines to be compliant for the funding, because we're not compliant if you take that letter there, that clause there. You need to have a PVC [Pro Vice-Chancellor]. (Paul, Indigenous scholar)

Another participant commented:

The Government are pretty happy, you know, as soon as you sort of throw up a question about some of that stuff they'll default back to, 'oh look, that's an aspirational target' or 'that's an aspirational kind of objective' — so kind of the wheels fall off quite quickly with a lot of the government stuff … we had a conversation with PM and C a few weeks back, which I know all the Unis have … there's a sense of the three per cent employment target, you know, people kind of question that straight away. They go, 'that's aspirational' … I mean even around governance, Indigenous governance, like a lot of that stuff has become aspirational since the guidelines were written, you know? ... a lot of that has become a little bit more ambiguous as time goes on because, you know, suddenly these hard targets become aspirational. (Brad, Indigenous scholar)

The 'split' of responsibilities between DET and PMC and the respective frustrations experienced by Indigenous scholars was also regularly highlighted. An expert panellist from the Behrendt Review reflected:

Within government you've [now] got a division between the funds and the policy expertise, the contextual policy expertise. We have people there who are working as part of [the Department of] Education and Training who work in teams that focus on Indigenous higher education, that are physically and politically separated from Prime Minister and Cabinet … so that has implications for how we might review and evaluate activities … it has those ontological and epistemological implications. (Steve Larkin, Indigenous scholar)

Other participants also noted:

We had at NATSIHEC the other day, we had Prime Minister and Cabinet, and the Department of Education and Training, sitting in the same room and they were talking about the challenges from their end and just trying to coordinate … there's like a little bit of a lack of cohesion between what the Prime Minister and Cabinet people are doing, and what the Department of Education and Training are [doing]. (Brad, Indigenous scholar)

If you're going to separate out Indigenous education, then separate all of it out and not just bits of it. So what it seems to me, we've got this bit that's sort of sliced out of the Department [of Education and Training] and plopped into PMC, hoping that things will get better. Again, it hasn't. Nothing's changed. And I don't think it will because of the bureaucracy and the challenges … we've got to have some fundamental shifts rather than just shifting the deck chairs around a bit … but having one part of two departments, or separate departments focusing on the same area, is absolutely stupid. It does nothing to bring together policy. It does nothing to bring together evaluations. (Brian, Indigenous scholar)

Policy is being developed in one department and programs and funding out of another. But I think the biggest challenge is that we're off the central agenda. So within the Department of Education [and Training] obviously that's where the higher education conversation is happening and we need to be in the mainstream conversations. How is our space considered within that mainstream context? (Leanne Holt, Indigenous scholar)

These excerpts indicate that the Machinery of Government change resulting in the structural separation of Indigenous higher education policy and program responsibilities at the federal level has stifled progress in Indigenous higher education. In turn, this has limited the ability to use evaluation evidence to influence innovative policy and program change, whether through targeted Indigenous education investments or through influencing mainstream strategy development. It appears these changes have been further hampered by a perceived lack of communication between departments, which creates difficulty in navigating pathways between them. For example, a current NATSIHEC executive member commented:

We are often mediating between departments because they're not actually communicating between each other, and there's a lack of visibility and transparency around what each other are doing. This is something explicitly between DET and PMC that we've brought to their attention on numerous occasions around the competing agendas, and equally the conflict in some of their aspirations. (Cheryl Godwell, Indigenous scholar)

Similarly, another participant claimed:

It's actually really hard to go between Prime Minister and Cabinet and going back to the Department of Education [and Training], who's responsible for curriculum,

and the national curriculum. So they will say at the federal level, 'we can't go do anything until you go back to Prime Minister and Cabinet' and vice versa. So to actually try to streamline something within teacher education is almost entirely impossible. (Zac, Indigenous scholar)

When policymakers were queried about communication mechanisms between DET and PMC, there were varied responses. Some considered current communication channels were appropriate, and some considered they could be improved. For example:

We [DET] catch up with people that are working on the Indigenous Advancement Strategy. We have a chat with them every now and then about what's going on and what's been happening. My Director, I think, meets with some of the other departments once a month or every two months or so, where they discuss some of the hot topics that are going on. So there are communications on that level. (John, policymaker)

Another participant reflected:

I think we [DET] work quite well with PMC. I think we could always work closer with them, but there are a lot of legacy program issues that come up that we need to provide advice on and they need to provide advice on. We've got contacts there. (Isabelle, policymaker)

Whereas another policymaker commented:

They [PMC] do silly things like not consult properly but they're also getting the feedback from the universities on what is working and what is not working fairly immediately and they're making the adjustments there and those adjustments are policy adjustments. So, in that sense, unless we're in regular contact with them, we're actually out of touch with the actual policy contexts. (Oliver, policymaker)

Concerns about the split between DET and PMC were also raised by Indigenous scholars in relation to the duplication of reporting processes:

I think when you have two bodies to report to, and there is a difference in the reporting requirements, then you've got some duplication. But you've also got some loss of data that would be useful to the other. (Cindy, Indigenous scholar)

A similar sentiment, albeit in relation to whole-of-government policy responses, was emphasised by a member of the former First Peoples Education Advisory Group, who commented:

It's simply ludicrous at the moment that we report on student retention rates and so on, and success and completion rates. None of this data about Aboriginal enrolment in higher education ends up in the housing sections of government services or the accommodation sections or the health sections. These present Indigenous education with a conundrum that has always been there — that government policy and agency work in silos. So the challenges of poor health and poor accommodation that a university Aboriginal student presents to an institution is not relayed to other organised areas inside government. (Lester-Irabinna Rigney, Indigenous scholar)

Concern about the way in which data is used (or not used) by governments surfaced frequently. This was particularly pertinent in relation to new reporting measures, such as those being introduced through ISSP:

I think PMC [Tertiary Education] need some help with setting up their evaluation framework by the looks of it, because they've put in these things like employment

and the curriculum and all those things. How are they really going to evaluate that it's working? (Leslie, Indigenous scholar)

Whilst many participants insisted that new and expanded measures were required to increase accountability of both governments and universities, this was mentioned with caution. Participants emphasised it was important for evaluation and reporting measures to have a clear purpose, and for these to be discussed with key stakeholders through co-design processes, well prior to implementation. That is, a clear line of sight about what was being measured, by whom, how, and why.

Another key message that emerged in relation to government accountability was the concept of minimum mandated evaluation requirements

What could be done straight away … a percent or value needs to be spent on evaluation of the activity incurred as a result of the grant. So a component of the grant has to be reserved for the evaluation of the rest of the grant. Keep in mind some of these universities for things like ISSP are getting A$500,000 to A$1.5 million or more. Surely there could be a component of that money that's reserved to undertake evaluative work as a compulsory measure. (Deirdre, Indigenous scholar)

This shifts our attention towards the **accountability of universities** and a deeper analysis of what role they might play. Again, accountability was discussed in different ways. Accountability was often discussed broadly in relation to funding associated with reporting. Such discussion often related to the performance of universities with respect to the funding they received, but also in relation to recent strategic recommendations arising from the Behrendt Review. For example:

The Department of Education have been putting out statistics on Indigenous higher education for donkey's years … we did a piece for the Behrendt Review, where we actually evaluated the performance of universities, using that data; and also examined their Indigenous support program statements. We actually rated them, which gave us great pleasure, to give them marks out of 100. It was called "On Stony Ground". Using that data, we found that most universities in Australia weren't even making a pass mark. (Maggie Walter, Indigenous scholar)

Another participant asserted:

One of the key aspects that all leaders inside of universities have to familiarise themselves with is accountability of government funds to universities for Indigenous education, and the compliance arrangements both formal and informal back to government on student numbers and what they consider to be success … If evaluation of the university's commitment to the Aboriginal student is only from the dollar that the Commonwealth funds in Aboriginal education, this becomes problematic. If evaluation of Aboriginal education is not being done by every single faculty as Behrendt suggested, it should. And [if] it's only left to the Aboriginal Pro Vice-Chancellor or the Director of the Aboriginal Centre, you've got a ghettoization of evaluation for Aboriginal education inside the institution. (Lester-Irabinna Rigney, Indigenous scholar)

Concern was frequently raised that universities had not paid sufficient attention to the recommendations from the Behrendt Review. As David commented:

I think the Behrendt Review identified and submitted 35 recommendations from memory. And again, I don't believe that institutions were honourably reflective of how we can seriously respond to these particular recommendations, because they weren't just recommendations to government. They were recommendations to the sector. Now I don't know of any university that looked at the Behrendt

Report and said okay, now these 35 recommendations … what are the recommendations that we could embrace and now let's develop a strategy for pursuing those recommendations and the principles that underpinned those recommendations. Very few universities in my opinion did that. (David, Indigenous scholar)

This was reaffirmed by another participant who claimed:

If there was an evaluation made on how areas of the Behrendt Review had progressed I don't know that it would turn up very much … I actually think it was a great review, a great report and really good pointers but then the next review comes out or the next report comes out and things get lost in the quagmire. (Colleen Hayward AM, Indigenous scholar)

However, another participant who, when speaking about their own university's Indigenous whole-of-university strategy, claimed:

I probably sound biased here, but it's the only strategy really that I've seen try to address the Behrendt Review by operationalising it, because a lot of it does touch on, you know … all those bits and pieces. (Leslie, Indigenous scholar)

Some participants preferred to take a strengths-based approach by outlining that some universities were providing an increased level of accountability by investing in the evaluation of Indigenous student outcomes and respective systemic change. As Amber noted:

Look, nationally, institutions are starting to realise that they need to evaluate Indigenous higher ed. better. There's some good examples of universities who are implementing systemic changes around the way that they measure and account for Indigenous higher education outcomes. They are being really overt about the way that they measure, why they're measuring, who is accountable and what the implications of that are — i.e. executive accountability, KPIs on their performance outcomes, relationships to contracts. There are some unis that are really putting themselves out there to demonstrate the way that they're really trying to improve and make change. I think that's really commendable. (Amber Collins, Indigenous scholar)

However, Amber also acknowledged that government expectations of universities to account for their actions through formal reporting processes were minimal:

They [Australian Government] are funding millions of dollars out to universities and their reporting requirements are actually — they're some of the simplest reporting requirements I've ever seen for the amount of money that you're getting. I've seen small NGOs have to do more copious reporting for much less money than what universities have to do. So that's where, at the national level, they can pick up their game a bit better.

However, other participants perceived that there was a heightened sense of accountability within the Indigenous tertiary education space — an expected level of accountability that is a much more rigorous than it is in other areas of university business:

When the draft guidelines came out for the ISSP [Indigenous Student Success Program] and feedback was requested, one of the main points that IRU [Innovative Research Universities] made in relation to the ISSP guidelines and reporting template and all the rest of it was the level of scrutiny associated with evaluating or justifying activity far outweighed what was required of institutions that accessed other forms of Commonwealth Government funding. The level of scrutiny and reporting was just out of proportion … Maybe that's an issue in terms of that evaluation activity; why is the level of detail and reporting

requirements that much more complicated and overzealous in Indigenous affairs (education, health, etc.) compared to reporting requirements associated with other sources of commonwealth funding to tertiary institutions? (Ursula, Indigenous scholar)

This raises genuine concern about the accountability that universities show to Indigenous education through other mainstream funding allocations, in contrast to those that specifically relate to Indigenous education, such as ISSP. Similar concerns have also recently been raised in relation to equity funding (Brett, in press).

In addition, discussion about university performance was occasionally tied to the notion of developing standards to improve quality and accountability in Indigenous higher education. For example:

I'm presenting to Senate, we're giving a presentation about our performance, and what they will want to know is not so much the gap. They will want to know how close we are to our strategic objectives. And to draw a parallel, it's like an accreditation model is more what we need … if we established a series of standards that institutions had to give serious attention to for their accreditation and that in their own way had to be able to demonstrate and convince progress towards those standards, that would be good. (Shane Houston, Indigenous scholar)

This concept was reiterated by Dr Leanne Holt who reflected on a recent project she had been involved with through NATSIHEC:

We've talked about the same thing in our report as well, so in each of our respective sections, talked about a framework being developed that possibly could sit within, TEQSA, within the TEQSA framework. (Leanne Holt, Indigenous scholar)

One of the key recommendations in the final draft of the NATSIHEC report (2017) suggests that the DET, TEQSA and NATSIHEC form a working party to develop and implement a quality accreditation mechanism for the assessment of determining quality approaches and accountability related to a series of quality standards. Our findings also support this recommendation.

Earlier in this report, we discussed the importance of embedding cultural standards into the work of universities, such as those developed by the World Indigenous Nations Higher Education Consortium (WINHEC). However, it appears that the current TEQSA standards only address Indigenous higher education in relation to the recruitment and admission of Indigenous students (2.2.2) and education policies and practices that support Indigenous peoples (6.2.1). There are notable gaps in relation teaching and curricula (3), research (4) and corporate governance (6.1). For example, as Indigenous Scholar, Maggie Walter noted:

We need to apply the same sort of TEQSA striped assessment of content, the value of the content and the course construction, to Indigenous courses. But it needs to be done from an Indigenous perspective. But even in just an ordinary TEQSA evaluation, I think, we'd find a lot of them wanting. A lot of places, like Faculties of Education, have to offer an Indigenous unit to gain accreditation, the quality of that doesn't necessarily have to be high, and often isn't.

Reflections such as these emphasise that there could be a much stronger focus on Indigenous-framed cultural standards moving forward; and that the Indigenous higher sector has an interest in working with TEQSA to advance this agenda.

Through discussion about accountability of universities, a sub-theme also emerged in relation to the **accountability of Vice-Chancellors and Executives**. There was general

acknowledgement that recent moves to increase Indigenous governance in universities, as per requirements of ISSP funding, was sensible. It was perceived that this holds Vice-Chancellors and senior executives to account. As one participant commented:

> *We have quite a concerted movement within higher education for Vice-Chancellors to have Indigenous governing bodies, in terms of funding [ISSP]. Now across the country … there's a few institutions that are refusing to actually do this. And it's a key requirement for them to get funding … So it makes Vice-Chancellors nervous that now they're going to have to consult with Indigenous experts … The Vice-Chancellors have to do it. There's nowhere to move.* (Zac, Indigenous scholar)

This was reiterated by another participant who claimed:

> *If you're a Pro Vice-Chancellor, a Deputy Vice-Chancellor, then you should be able to influence change at all levels. So I suppose where we need to be looking at is how do we evaluate that influence, apart from just looking at key indicators.* (Leanne Holt, Indigenous scholar)

The concept of evaluating senior executive influence and change within universities, whether Indigenous or non-Indigenous, is important. It is, however, a rubbery concept that needs to be thought through carefully, with the development of meaningful Key Performance Indicators. As one participant outlined, there still appears to be a lack of executive accountability if performance targets and measures are not met:

> *Has anyone ever lost their job over their performance in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander issues other than an Aboriginal person? No. Most universities don't give a rat's arse. It's not part of who they are. It's not part of their character. It's not part of their narrative.* (Shane Houston, Indigenous scholar)

The potential for increasing accountability among Vice-Chancellors and senior university executives was raised in various ways. As one participant who has held two different Pro Vice-Chancellor – Indigenous-focused roles in Australia noted:

> *I think there's a challenge to elevate the Indigenous academic sector to a space that's seen as politically important as other forms of endeavour. Largely what you're dealing with is the receptiveness and the level of commitment of individuals. If that's what you're relying on then any systemic approach to developing evidence and applying that evidence through research and evaluation activities is always going to be at risk of being limited in its impact because out of a room of 20, only one's going to get it. I don't know if that constitutes a critical mass to influence the other 19, unless of course the one person that gets it is the Vice-Chancellor.* (Steve Larkin, Indigenous scholar)

Repositioning Indigenous higher education as a political priority within higher education institutions is important. The concept of executives as champions and sponsors or getting executives 'on-board' was considered to be important by some participants:

> *You need champions in the organisation. But it can't just be the Indigenous unit or the Indigenous people in the organisation. It actually has to be champions and it has to be executive sponsors who are saying this is important and we are going to drive it through the whole organisation. I don't see that here at this university.* (Kathy, Indigenous scholar)

> *In terms of getting the senior exec. on board, and the government and whoever else to say, "oh, we're actually looking for success stories". Let's make it about that. Because in many ways, I actually think we are doing really, really, really well.* (Amber Collins, Indigenous scholar)

Another participant spoke of the advantages of having implemented a formal internal whole-of-university reporting structure within their institution:

The beauty of this traffic light system, is that is goes up through the university's Learning Committee, Academic Board and then up to the Vice-Chancellor and Executive. It's a really quick, easy way for the Executives or time poor people to go OK, we're travelling well in this area, we're not travelling well in that particular area … The Executive Deans were sort of going, "oh what am I red on, what am I orange on and what do I need to improve on?" (Leslie, Indigenous scholar)

However, other participants also spoke about the challenges faced when key leadership positions do not have the cultural competency to understand the impact of the decisions they make about Indigenous education:

I had this discussion with my Vice-Chancellor just recently where he put it [Indigenous education] under equity, right? ... to put it all under equity it sends just a really poor message, not only to us, but a poor message to department officials, to very senior government officials, to Vice-Chancellors, to senior administrators inside the institutions that Indigenous education is just part of the equity group. And that is wrong. That is so wrong. (Brian, Indigenous scholar)

The conflation of student equity and Indigenous education areas was frequently perceived as a problem within universities that Vice-Chancellors and senior executives were perceived to navigate poorly. This discussion also extended to the way in which government confused these concepts within policy and program domains.

The discussion about government and university accountability often pointed towards a central **accountability *to* community**. This is sentiment is well summarised by Kathy:

Accountability-wise, the accountability is to the universities, aside from the fact that it's Commonwealth tax payers' dollars, but it's actually accountability to the community on receiving the money that is actually meant to make an impact to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander [people] … If governments are being paid through the contributions of tax payer's dollars, they actually have a responsibility and accountability to ensure that money is being effectively used for that outcome. Yeah, it is a two-way responsibility of accountability from the universities to government, but we're all accountable to the community outcome. (Kathy, Indigenous scholar)

One strategy emphasised for ensuring accountability to community was to actively involve community in discussion about intended Indigenous education outcomes. For example:

The KPIs for those evaluations need to be set in place in consultation with our people so that the evaluation has some meaning for the people that it's supposed to be relevant to. Otherwise, you've just got bureaucrats sitting in Canberra [setting the agenda]. (Grace, Indigenous scholar)

Another participant mentioned:

Measuring different things … whether it's driven by the community so it has legitimacy from the community in terms of its authority. And then how well has been the institutional response to that? ... It's about involving Aboriginal people in every aspect of decision making. (Eric, Indigenous scholar)

Involving community in decisions about performance parameters in Indigenous higher education needs to be non-negotiable. As outlined above, it provides a mechanism for legitimising the work occurring in this space; and it also reinforces the importance of Indigenous governance and leadership as a sovereign and human right.

8. **Accountability within Indigenous higher education contexts must be viewed as a shared responsibility** between universities and government, and should involve both Indigenous and non-Indigenous stakeholders. The 'community' should remain the focal point in such discussions.

9. A better and **more visible harmonisation of communication and reporting processes associated with Australian Government policies and programs that support Indigenous higher education students and staff**. This includes both Indigenous and equity-focused programs. Strategies which reduce working in silos within and between Australian Government Departments should be a priority.

10. Clearly defined **performance measures relating to the adoption whole-of-university approaches to Indigenous higher education should be embedded into all senior university executive contracts and reviewed regularly** to increase individual accountability. Performance against these measures should be managed proactively, with clear consequences for poor performance.

11. The Australian Government, NATSIHEC and the TEQSA should work collaboratively to **expand the scope of Indigenous-focused higher education accreditation standards to increase university accountability**.

12. The Australian Government and philanthropic organisations mandate that **a minimum of 10 per cent of all program funding in Indigenous higher education contexts is invested into evaluation**; and that the Australian Government and universities are held to account against this mandated requirement, preferably through legislative change.

5. Discussion 2: Levers for Change

Enablers and Drivers of Evaluation in Indigenous Higher Education Contexts

This research had an explicit strengths-based focus from its inception. This was explicit in the project aim. As such, the coding and analysis process involved paying particular attention to the factors that could facilitate positive change within Indigenous higher education evaluation contexts. This resulted in the identification of 14 key enablers and drivers of evaluation. In the context of this research, enablers were considered to be factors that would enhance or promote evaluation practice, and drivers were the factors used to explain why evaluation was deemed to be important. These concepts are necessarily interconnected, and used interchangeably in the context of this report. The 14 key enablers and drivers identified through this research are included in below, along with indicative examples from interviews with research participants. We recognise that we have not critically engaged in a discussion about each of themes identified. We intend to do this in subsequent academic publications, post-release of this report. Instead, the indicative examples presented illustrate, in a general sense, why each of the enablers and drivers are deemed to be important.

Enabler/driver: GROWING INDIGENOUS LEADERSHIP

Indicative examples from participant interviews

> *Aboriginal people leading evaluation. Actually being at the front of the evaluation process and leading it, not just being a stakeholder or being a small part of it … we could be leading it. We could be leading the evaluation process … Indigenous people need to be involved across it: in the planning of it, in the evaluating of it. I think evaluations are very different when you have Indigenous people planning programs or involved in the programs or running the programs, or just having some leadership in it, because that can affect your whole evaluation process.* (Jacqui, Indigenous scholar)

> *I'd say that it's probably imperative that such evaluation work has got Indigenous management or Indigenous leadership and it's probably lacking now … what I worry about, is yes, at one point we're providing indigenous agency, advocacy, leadership but if we haven't changed everything else … what does that mean for us?* (Steven Larkin, Indigenous scholar)

> *It's about involving Aboriginal people in every aspect of decision making. While universities, management, governments, the Aboriginal community themselves — they agree with this, but the practice of it — between agreeing with it and the practice of it is a universe apart … in its original form, it meant that Aboriginal people were engaged at every level of the university.* (Eric, Indigenous scholar)

> *There's been some national research that I've been a part of, one was around the concept of Indigenous leadership ... I've got a fairly well established background in research and evaluation review. And I think sometimes we struggle in the Indigenous context to sometimes understand the difference and to also then have a space within which we can truly identify what are the principles upon which this research or this evaluation or this review is being conducted.* (David, Indigenous scholar)

> *I think there's already a wealth of challenge existing in universities in terms of Indigenous leadership, specialist units, and a whole lot of academics who aren't necessarily needing business specific units but are leaders in their field,*

wherever they are. So, yeah, it's just really building on that pool of talent, and I think there's been an amazing amount of work done in terms of theory building and articulating Indigenous epistemology, and it's really contributing to that literature that would be very valuable to understanding experiences within non-Indigenous education contexts and those experiences, because at the end of the day, you know, universities are the mainstream institutions that hold histories and all sorts of meaning for people about previous experiences of exclusion or inclusion. (Mary, policymaker)

I'll be radical — it [good evaluation] involves Indigenous leadership of the evaluation process so what is to be evaluated and how and it involves not just Indigenous academics, it also involves the communities and the students. And I say the communities because, as Indigenous taxpayers, they want to know that they're actually getting their value for money as well. (Oliver, policymaker)

Enabler/driver: INCREASING FUNDING AND RESOURCES

Indicative examples from participant interviews

The university data collection in relation to Indigenous students is often as a result of the need to report and acquit to Commonwealth funds rather than necessarily as a mechanism for accurate reporting and evaluation for our own purposes. So the university—and I think it's not alone—has been quite comfortable with just responding to Commonwealth delegated data and evaluation rather than seeking to implement innovative and meaningful ways to do it ourselves. (Amber Collins, Indigenous scholar)

Most claim that they're underfunded and that the evaluation mechanisms come from the Aboriginal dollar coming in from the Commonwealth. The universities are happy about equity if somebody else is funding it. (Lester-Irabinna Rigney, Indigenous scholar)

We know that there's no more funding and we know there's no magic or silver bullet that's going to fix any of this. So what's the use of doing this evaluation? The evaluation's only for the government funding, or for funding purposes. (Brian, Indigenous scholar)

Universities aren't spending hard money, so everyone's on soft money. So I think that's part of being at the mercy of the Government … these are some of the things that we have to start looking at. (Zac, Indigenous scholar)

Sometimes this prescriptive nature of government funding … is in my view counterproductive at times … we're quite often under a very tight schedule to get the program up and running and get the money out there so the people can get the benefits of it. So that sometimes means this is the sort of activity that get dropped off if you've got really tight timeframes to actually get the money on the street so you're not necessarily planning ahead for evaluation processes. So there's probably a whole range of reasons why we don't do it so well. (Donald, policymaker)

We [DET] don't have any Indigenous-specific funding that we provide to universities. The supplementary programs are run out of PMC, so we don't have a lot of money to offer. (Isabelle, policymaker)

Enabler/driver: INVESTING IN STRATEGY DEVELOPMENT

Indicative examples from participant interviews

We are still in the processes of instituting a whole range of data tools and systems, Tableau, which for the first time in the seven years that I've been working for the institution, is the very first time that we've actually had direct access to hard core data and real-time data, that actually tells us and paints a really precise picture on exactly who our students are … it actually allows us to be responsive rather than reactive, and in being responsive, it equally allows you to spend the time to actually strategically plan and target your efforts, energy and activity to try and achieve the greatest results. (Cheryl Godwell, Indigenous scholar)

We have a unit called Strategic Policy, which is doing a lot of, sort of — what do you call them? Focus groups. Evaluations for the university and different parts of the university. So for me, it was kind of like tapping into that. And we have. Just recently I tapped to into the [Strategic Policy] team and we had a student survey — so a student satisfaction survey … What's the disincentives? What are the problems? And all that sort of stuff. So I thought, well, has anyone actually surveyed them? ... so Strategic Policy crafted up a number of questions with them, and they actually ran the survey for us to see. (Kathy, Indigenous scholar)

We set up a traffic light system ... they [university executives] really like it because they can quite easily see we're travelling well with our student numbers and we are increasing, so it's easy to see the stats … it's [in its] fourth year now reporting on it, people are sort of like, 'well ok, well we've actually achieved a lot of it so we have to do a strategy refresh now' … all I did was take out the different recommendations that are actually physically in the [Indigenous strategy]. And then I just put a little traffic light next to it and split it up by faculty, so literally it's exactly what the [Indigenous strategy] outlines. (Leslie, Indigenous scholar)

When I first arrived, in the first week I was here, they launched a 10-year Indigenous strategy and my first year we developed a suite of plans that sit underneath that strategy. So a learning and teaching framework, a cultural training framework, a workforce plan, and an Indigenous research plan. I believe that the plans are important to provide a foundation of what needs to be done, but then how we're going to evaluate [that] as well. (Leanne Holt, Indigenous scholar)

It's almost like if evaluation is to be done correctly it needs to properly address from the start how you're going to collect data, so you can evaluate them [programs]. It almost needs to be part of the implementation strategy to say to universities, 'this is the sort of information we're going to require and we're going to do an evaluation on an ongoing basis' or whatever it is to try and get this red tape thing out of the way. So that I guess in some ways is a bit of a defence for why it [government program evaluation] may not have been undertaken as regularly as it could've been. (Donald, policymaker)

Enabler/driver: LEADING INNOVATIVE POLICY DEVELOPMENT, IMPLEMENTATION AND REFORM

Indicative examples from participant interviews

ISSP, last year in around October/November, we received the draft. We only had a number of weeks to provide our comments … back to the Prime Minister and Cabinet team … in January we were issued the new guidelines. They took all of

our recommendations on board. The ISSP guidelines, although they're quite broad, we were actually favoured in pretty much everything that we raised as a concern … but their whole policy was driven by their policy team, and then given to the institutions to provide comments. Which a lot of that you can see that they didn't have too much dealings with the universities in the first instance, because the comments that we provided, some were just general stuff that they obviously didn't think through [to begin with]. (AK, Indigenous scholar)

I wouldn't let it just rest upon the notions of a collective of people in Canberra sitting around a policy table, that's for sure. I don't care whether it's me or whoever, the evaluation has to be case-based. It has to have more of evidence in terms of measurable outcomes in the lives of people … KPIs for those evaluations need to be set in place in consultation with our people so that the evaluation has some meaning for the people that it's supposed to be relevant to, otherwise you've just got bureaucrats sitting in Canberra. And I think the whole IAS has been an absolute prime example of how sometimes great intentions can go incredibly wrong. (Grace, Indigenous scholar)

There's been a discussion at the higher policy level in Australia around whether the bill would go to the House of Reps and the Senate regarding fees for enabling programs. We've been contacted in my office by three different parliamentarians seeking a discussion based on that [research] report. That's all been in the last six weeks and that is a direct result because they're wanting to have a discussion in regards to the impacts as they see it. They want the human side. (Deirdre, Indigenous scholar)

When there is a fundamental policy shift—which there recently has been with the ISSP—and the fact that we're now shifting to a completions-based target, that is fundamentally altering where we are investing our time, energy and effort … I actually bring that local perspective from that kind of, front line perspective, to a national context. That at times can be quite confronting and quite challenging because in my experience, a lot of the policy when it's actually written, the drivers and the imprimatur of that policy, is very rarely tested against reality. So when you start to put it into practice, naturally that's where the gaps, the issues and the flaws start to appear. (Cheryl Godwell, Indigenous scholar)

In terms of policy development there were a couple of budget measures I can remember where both of us [DET and PMC] were involved. So coordinating that was more difficult because there's budget implications for two departments instead of just one. But in terms of using evaluation to inform that, I don't know. (Billy, policymaker)

If the programs are evaluated, it's just hard to see how that is going to be well-integrated into policy development. And vice versa, it's hard to see how the people who are working with policy development and who are trying to do things like look at the literature and so on and so forth, how that is going to transfer well into program management and program development. (Gina, policymaker)

Enabler/driver: INVESTING IN CULTURAL TRANSFORMATION, CHANGE AND QUALITY IMPROVEMENT

Indicative examples from participant interviews

With the new ISSP guidelines, we actually have a number of mechanisms now at the policy level that I see are really strong levers to create change. And I'm actually quite excited that there's a lot of this, because it feels like we're actually riding a wave. I think that, you know, you sort of keep fighting to get to the top,

and now we're actually there, and we've had this buy-in institutionally through the sector … some universities are starting to put more time into the planning, to draw on an evidence base perhaps more than what they have in the past … particularly the universities that engage with the NATSIHEC. You can actually see from people who come to that space, that are engaging, you can actually see the change within their institutions. So it actually goes, I think, anecdotally, it would say that this group, NATSIHEC, is a very powerful tool, as such, in terms of creating change. (Zac, Indigenous scholar)

Yeah, it's sort of like when you're evaluating something you're doing it for a reason—that's how I look at it—and whatever we evaluate here is because we need to improve it, or we need to do better, or we need — we need to do it from year to year to see if we are being successful, or if we are delivering a program for the community or if we are on the right track, kind of thing. That's the reason I think we are doing evaluation, and how we implement it is we actually make the changes … we'll go 'okay, we're going to change that for next year' or 'we're going to change it'; we're always changing the program, or we're always implementing any of the evaluation feedback that we get. (Jacqui, Indigenous scholar)

When the new [ISSP] guidelines and the new process I suppose started at the beginning of this year, we put a lot of thought into what are the things that we need to keep hold of until we get a better picture on things, keep hold of from the previous arrangements on it. What do we change? What are we required to change because the [new] guidelines no longer allow it? With the change in guidelines, one of the other possibilities [was to look] for things that we could do differently—and now there's that opportunity. So we actually gave it a really good go. I know that some other universities really just tried to squish the new guidelines into whatever it was they were doing or vice versa and because things happened in such a rush, really there wasn't a lot of scope for higher ed. institutions to be creative or innovative … so you're kind of constantly making the changes rather than having the time to evaluate how effective the changes have been. So it can be a little bit of a treadmill. (Colleen Hayward AM, Indigenous scholar)

The evaluation of procedures in higher education for Aboriginal education cannot be tinkered with as it has [been] done. It needs superior step-change. We've tinkered with the system for too long and expected change and we've done things the same way and we've hoped for change. Now we're in a moment of history where there's been no movement, which is terrifying, in the outcomes of Aboriginal children in school since 2008. That has a knock-on effect to higher education. The systems of evaluating higher education necessarily, because of this key historical moment, has to change. (Lester-Irabinna Rigney, Indigenous scholar)

There are other programs where simply they've gone on for a long time unchanged, and if you want to know whether a program's working or not, then having it stay the same for a while always helps. If you change things along the way, the trade-off between being responsive and evaluating things — if you change your program it might be that it does improve it, and improves outcomes. But then evaluating it is more difficult because it's no longer the same as it was, so you can't be sure quite what it is you're seeing the effects of. (Andrew, policymaker)

I think the usefulness of information [evaluation evidence] depends on the type of work you're doing. Definitely the practical day-to-day things that I can change myself, are very important. Information that might be available to offer some

advice around policy direction, that's useful as well … I guess for me practical things are always important because they're things that I can change and I can implement in my everyday work. (Frances, policymaker)

We don't do the legislative change ourselves we get the legislation teams to do it but that [evaluation data] certainly helps providing drafting instructions/drafting guidelines which we do do. (Isabelle, policymaker)

I have been involved in two significant reform processes with the most recent reform processes changing with a change of Prime Minister and Minister. This means completing more work — i.e. administering the program plus looking at potential changes associated with the program. It does, however, provide an opportunity for change and to test ideas internally and sometimes externally. (Lola, policymaker)

I would try and pull the timetable for making policy back from being always quite as precipitously short as it usually is, to allow for more integration of evidence in the development of policy. Then subsequent to that, the development of programs in a way which allows their evaluation downstream. (Gina, policymaker)

Enabler/driver: ADDRESSING WHITE PRIVILEGE AND POWER

Indicative examples from participant interviews

When you are surrounded and immersed in a system that is not your own, it is very hard to get a footing, be able to build. Of course, in the neoliberalist world, which has impacted upon the university with its madness for compliance, you can actually end up being punished because you don't get that footing. (Tracey Bunda, Indigenous scholar)

I'd probably argue that Indigenous people have probably come to try and better understand and appreciate the non-Indigenous one [ontology] because they've had to. They've had to. They're not the dominant culture and they've had to survive in it. So they've had to understand as best they can how non-Indigenous people see the world and how they do things and why, what the logics are. I don't think there's been that sort of interest necessarily from the other way … to me the issues we've talked about in relation to the importance of whose standpoint is being applied and which one has primacy, I still think it gets structured hierarchically like that rather than horizontally. (Steve Larkin, Indigenous scholar)

If we're actually perpetuating this colonial narrative [in universities]—and I'm thinking particularly to lawyers, to doctors, to teachers—we're not, at the higher education level, we're not doing any good … because we know that those who engage in higher education tend to go on in their careers to actually be managers, to be people of influence, and in positions of power. So if we're not actually shaping those minds, we're not doing a very good job. So that's my focus in the higher ed. space. (Zac, Indigenous scholar)

You've got to talk the white way and then the black fella way and if you talk too white you get called a coconut and if you talk to black fella then you get called noisy. So there's that polarity that I've noticed ... I'm noticing that with the leaders, or leaders in inverted commas, that they do dip in and out. (Leslie, Indigenous scholar)

You had this sort of simpering white solicitude on the part of some of my equity colleagues, but no real engagement on the issues or with people. (Nathan, policymaker)

Enabler/driver: IMPROVING INDIGENOUS STUDENT OUTCOMES

Indicative examples from participant interviews

The majority are women, and the majority of our students are aged between 20 and 50 so they're having to manage a household as well as try and study part-time whilst holding down a full-time job. Whilst necessary, imperfect evaluations of an Aboriginal student cohort just based on retention, success and completion rates don't tell the full picture of what's happening. (Lester-Irabinna Rigney, Indigenous scholar)

One of the reasons Indigenous students drop out is financial. But philanthropic groups will say, 'not all our scholarships get taken up', that's the other reality and that's true. And it's not whether it's in this uni or other unis, sometimes it's hard to give scholarships away, whether they're research or undergraduate scholarships. So I want to look at what are the things we are doing then around support of those students in scholarships to assist them to continue to get through, and what are some of the things we know so we can say these are the definite things we know, this is what we don't know, but how can we improve not just the uptake, but how have those students applied? Have they applied because they've booked online for it, and we can tell that because they have to tick that when they apply for the scholarship? How did they find out about it? (Deirdre, Indigenous scholar)

We have four studies underway that sit behind our operations. So we screen students when they come into our system, across a number of dimensions, both academic and non-academic; a financial as well. We look at resilience, their academic needs, their social and emotional wellbeing, and their financial need and their academic. And we plug them into services where the funding comes from the Commonwealth … We're cataloguing support across the university so that we can map or track how students interact with the university … These students are going to come to our university if we offer the right conditions for them. A lot of this needs to be built, and there's not always the support. (Paul, Indigenous scholar)

Like someone can come to uni and we sort of Westernise their failures because they quit after a year or so. But you know, then their nephew comes the following year and he graduates. Do you know what I mean? So then in and of itself that person who came for the year, you know, it doesn't matter to their family whether they passed or failed, they actually came and made it seem possible, you know? So that can be conceived as a success. (Brad, Indigenous scholar)

The Higher Education Standards Panel will look at ways that they can improve the success rates of students across the industry. (Kate, policymaker)

So we've given [universities] information on if you like their relative standing across other universities against the four main criteria. Four main funding drivers, which are the full-time student load, the full-time student load for regional and remote students, success rate, and the completions. Obviously they're all associated with Indigenous students. So that data is stuff that they know and we know, and the stuff that's required [is in] the initial letter. But at the same time, we also provide a reporting template where we ask them to reflect on that and where — and on the basis for that data, and talk about what they've done to improve things over the course of the year. (Ethan, policymaker)

Enabler/driver: VALUING INDIGENOUS KNOWLEDGES AND PRACTISING INDIGENOUS EPISTEMOLOGIES

Indicative examples from participant interviews

We do need to be able to have that larger dialogue about what this actually means within Indigenous ways of knowledge. We need to be able to think outside of what we have at the moment. (Tracey Bunda, Indigenous scholar)

All of the evaluation mechanisms and compliance mechanisms are targeted towards the students' success and abilities. None of the evaluation mechanisms talk to whether the institutions are prepared or capable of dealing with Indigenous epistemologies, Indigenous knowledge and so … these common evaluations are missed opportunities to meet Aboriginal unmet hopes … So if we talk generics, the evaluation techniques are pretty much really focused on situations of whether students succeed or not and their personal abilities. Very rarely are the causes of student failure inside universities sheeted back home to the cultures of institutions. (Lester-Irabinna Rigney, Indigenous scholar)

One of my colleagues just recently … criticised Indigenous standpoints to me because he said well, as a white fella I can't criticise that because I just can't comment on it. (Brian, Indigenous scholar)

When we think about Indigenous thinkers — that also privileges our knowledge systems and the wisdom that resides in that. Some of our academics who are trained with the Western domain, they still hold to that … rather, evaluation and all the other arms of it, needs to be looked at in terms of a ceremony. And what do Indigenous people bring to that table, and what are the things that underpin our particular world view? And how is that incorporated into the work that we do? (David, Indigenous scholar)

The recognition of the Indigenous knowledge should be part of that [evaluation process]. And it's highly controversial and I'm a bit miffed they haven't had the argument yet, because in Canada there's been the debate … with Indigenous ontologies and epistemologies being essentially [perceived as] witchcraft and magic. What it boils down to is that allegation, that's made against them, as opposed to Western knowledge as being articulated and measurable and all that kind of stuff … there is a real reticence on the part of a lot of Indigenous academics to push their case about cultural competence, Indigenous knowledge and inherent racism and decolonisation, but a few of them are getting pretty bolshie about it. (Oliver, policymaker)

Enabler/driver: INCENTIVISING CULTURAL COMPETENCE

Indicative examples from participant interviews

As an Aboriginal person, the cultural competency framework stuff has been theorised and conceptualised into a bit of a box whereas for Aboriginal people, it's actually a very visceral, real experience. And it's very easy to interpret whether a place appears to be culturally safe, secure and competent. (Amber Collins, Indigenous scholar)

When a university says to our people, 'we will provide a culturally safe study and work environment' … you can't offer people a culturally safe study and work environment and then expect them to compromise something about their cultural integrity to such a degree that it has no relevance at all to our people. So that's why this whole concept of cultural competency is very critical to research, to teaching, to student supports, to engagement, to partnerships and pathways …

when you think that you have to compromise your cultural integrity to either get ahead or be patted on the head or to be successful in your work — everyone has to compromise to a degree but when you compromise to the extent that you almost abort the reality of what it is like to be an Aboriginal person in this country, then that's not integrity, that's you selling your soul, your cultural soul, just to get ahead. And that's a dilemma; that is a big dilemma for a lot of our people whether it's in higher ed. or health or whatever. (Grace, Indigenous scholar)

No matter how many different policies we have of engagement, and getting the students in, if we're not making the learning environment safe for them, in terms of seeing themselves reflected positively in the curriculum … we're not actually going to change very much … if you thought about it in terms of a diagram, it's putting Indigenous as sovereign people in the centre, rather than the periphery of people's eyes. (Zac, Indigenous scholar)

I think no matter what level of evaluation we're doing whether it be at the local, national or other, I believe that there's different levels of how that evaluation should be utilised … it should be utilised to determine accountability for not delivering as much as accountability for success. Accountability to do things right, I mean from an Indigenous perspective, the cultural accountability. (Leanne Holt, Indigenous scholar)

There was a workshop that ATSIHEAC had done and I was a note-taker … they were talking about cultural competency and the way that they were talking about, you've probably come across the notion of threshold concepts. I reckon that for us, for me as a Westerner, cultural competence is actually one of those threshold concepts along with racism. It's very hard to get your head around it. (Oliver, policymaker)

Enabler/driver: EMBRACING POLITICAL CHALLENGES AS OPPORTUNITIES

Indicative examples from participant interviews

I think there's the research and evaluation of existing policies, programs, parameters, outcomes and impacts and whatnot, but I think that there needs to be more research into the reality of circumstances. So what's the current demographic telling you; what's the current picture telling you; what's the projections around that demographic telling you? So trying to project and anticipate strategically, politically, socially, et cetera, what is on the horizon. Because I think far too much research is always looking backwards … rather than being future-focused. (Cheryl Godwell, Indigenous scholar)

You know you've got a change in government every four years. They need to make their mark and stamp on particular things. So things come and go. A lot of times, there's no reference back to what's been done previously. Indigenous affairs is subject to that probably more so than anywhere else across the political agenda. It comes back to my point before, about going around in circles. Oh, here, we'll try something new, which is really something old that has just got a new name. (Ursula, Indigenous scholar)

If you actually look at things like the Closing the Gap report, which, let's face it, it's been — that report shows that the Government's failed dismally in almost every area. Right? Now higher ed. was not in the Closing the Gap report and yet we have sustained. We have sustained or increased levels of Indigenous higher education participation over that time without a national priority focus on it. So imagine what we could do if there was one? (Amber Collins, Indigenous scholar)

My work is written off because my Indigeneity trumps my scholarship, every time. Not that it's always written off, but that's what I frequently come up against, where people will just dismiss my work and rather than engage within the arguments within it, want to argue about Indigenous stuff and whether the work is political or not. As if all social sciences aren't political, of course they are … we've been taught that non-Indigenous interpretation is neutral and Aboriginal interpretation is political. (Maggie Walter, Indigenous scholar)

[Evaluation], it's a political domain, there are political responses, you know. The Minister wants certain things because of things that are outside the gambit of what evaluation does, and they're fair enough. That's the nature of government. So you know, yes sure, it's a problem for evaluation, but it may not be insurmountable. (Gina, policymaker)

Political tempers are short. Demands are high. And so in environments like that, you fall back to engrained habits. (Nathan, policymaker)

There's a whole sort of stakeholder relationship management that goes with monitoring evaluation projects because they are often quite political and it's the nature of the evaluation. (Priscilla, policymaker)

Enabler/driver: PROMOTING CULTURAL STANDARDS AND ACCREDITATION

Indicative examples from participant interviews

The World Indigenous Nations University, the International Board of Accreditation, when you see those people stand up at those meetings and get their full accreditation, if anyone thinks that it's an easy process, it's not at all, it's very, very intensive. They don't just tick and flick, they expect people to well and truly evidence what they believe cultural competencies might look like and how do they evidence that? … Batchelor [Institute] just got its full accreditation through the International Board of Accreditation and there were tears everywhere, everywhere, everyone was crying because it was such a cathartic moment for Australia. We've now got an institution that's got its full accreditation. (Grace, Indigenous scholar)

In terms of the WINHEC evaluation and accreditation, it goes — one of the things that stands out to me around when they do the evaluations is actual presence. That Indigenous business and people are present everywhere. So it could be in, you know, like we're talking about policy. There's policy curriculum. I know that they also look at the presence around campus. That could be signage. So they did these sorts of things … And it involves site visits by three academics, from — they usually get one from the Pacific, North America, one from Europe, and one from your home nomination. So you get three different perspectives in terms of the evaluation. It's quite rigorous in what they do … I think BIITE and the Wollotuka [Institute] at the University of Newcastle are the only two. (Zac, Indigenous scholar)

One of the things I went to at WIPCE this year was about employment standards. What would [be expected of] an employee in an Aboriginal education unit? What are the standards you would want around their employment and their job? What work would they be doing? ... I guess I quite like the idea of having workforce fit into that? (Stephanie Gilbert, Indigenous scholar)

The thing that probably drove a lot of our evaluation in the past four years was our accreditation through WINHEC and so that was a cultural accreditation. (Leanne Holt, Indigenous scholar)

My predecessor was really into the work that WINHEC is doing around accreditation and stuff but that's not really evaluation and I don't know enough about it to say anything with any confidence. (Isabelle, policymaker)

Enabler/driver: REFRAMING CURRICULA TO EXPLICITLY INCORPORATE INDIGENOUS KNOWLEDGES AND PRACTICES

Indicative examples from participant interviews

As a teacher, in developing curriculum, in higher education we're notorious for having what I call 'the mad', 'the bad' and 'the sad' of Indigenous people in curriculum … if we're not making the learning environment safe for them [students], in terms of seeing themselves reflected positively in the curriculum … we're not actually going to change very much. (Zac, Indigenous scholar)

If we're looking at higher ed., one of the best examples would be when I was chair of the Indigenisation Committee, we did a university-wide audit to try and find out where there was Indigenous content in courses and what people were doing. And I think one of the most interesting things about that is just the incredible diversity in how people interpret that. Because … the Faculty of Education and Arts we got back a nearly 1oo-page document, but from the Faculty of Engineering and Built Environment, we got half a page. (Cindy, Indigenous scholar)

With this degree that I'm rewriting, I'm saying alright, if we think that our major sort of academic pursuits in our degree is to really fundamentally centralise Indigenous studies again … then how do we do that? If we say that that's our core business, then how do we do that? (Stephanie Gilbert, Indigenous scholar)

If you just look at those universities who run units around Indigenous-related issues, some of them can look quite good. But it depends what sort of rubbish, or not rubbish, they're teaching. The evaluation of those, which has traditionally never been done by Aboriginal people, so some of the courses, we know, are very, very poor quality because Aboriginal students all over Australia, complain about them; and the Indigenous content is very poor. (Maggie Walter, Indigenous scholar)

We also have been working with the STEM program, so science, technology, maths and engineering. We've been working with the Deans to be able to — so these are Deans, I think, in Victoria and across Australia, to be able to see what we can do to engage more Indigenous students into their fields. And not only that, to see exactly how they can get the Indigenous knowledges into the curriculum and how to better support them and prepare them for work afterwards. (John, policymaker)

Enabler/driver: INVESTING IN AN INDIGENOUS HIGHER EDUCATION WORKFORCE

Indicative examples from participant interviews

So you can't just look at student performance; you've got to look at all the input factors that you need in order to get a good, positive outcome. That includes staffing … So if you've got good staff, you should have good outcomes. (Eric, Indigenous scholar)

Aboriginal people, when they go into a university, they want Indigenous courses about health and education to be laden with content about Aboriginal peoples, they want university services to be Indigenised, they want to see Aboriginal staff inside universities. (Lester-Irabinna Rigney, Indigenous scholar)

We want to increase employment statistics within the university and not just increase the actual numbers [of Indigenous staff] but retention of employees, retention and progression of employees up the employment path, career pathway. (Kathy, Indigenous scholar)

We're starting to flip it back to the faculties … through our employment strategy where we fund or part-fund positions to create more Aboriginal employment, we put that numeric figure on there as well and we're actually contributing this to your faculty's progress against your targets. Now let's have a conversation about how we can work together better. (Leslie, Indigenous scholar)

What happens is, and I'll use workforce as an example, what happens is they [senior management] see the increase in Aboriginal employment as an equity initiative instead of recognising the stronger contributions the Aboriginal people would make to the institution and to the spaces across the University, but if they just see it [as part of] an equity agenda then that creates a whole lot of other issues. (Leanne Holt, Indigenous scholar)

Enabler/driver: RECOGNISING SOVEREIGN RIGHTS

Indicative examples from participant interviews

This isn't about equity. This is about the rights of Indigenous peoples under the UN Declaration. Simple as that. The danger always was, and will again emerge if that's going to continue, that Indigenous people are competing with a whole range of other people on an equal basis as opposed to being able to exert our rights as First Nations people. There's a really strong philosophical and moral agenda that needs to be pursued. Because I think that the arguments around supporting an equity agenda are quite different to the arguments that are put up to support Indigenous people being treated as a standalone group based on the fact of being First Nations people … all of us that have been around for 50 million years remember going through all of this argument and argy-bargy 35 years ago, 30 years ago. (Ursula, Indigenous scholar)

As a First Nations person, as a sovereign person, it should be at the centre rather than within equity … the simple locating of Aboriginal business in equity means we're not equal … [yet] it's a fundamental human right. And if we can get people to think like this, I think a lot of things will change. Because it's not about equity, it's about a human right. And I think it's got — I think it's on the first page of the Universities Australia document, it sort of unpacks that quite well around the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. Something as simple as that is quite powerful in terms of somebody's thinking. In terms of how they engage with an education system. (Zac, Indigenous scholar)

Lumping Indigenous matters into the equity basket completely ignores the very special nature of our reality in this country, and the very special position that we hold in this country. We're not a part of the equity community, our rights and freedoms stem on our sovereignty, which is something totally different than the notion of trying to create a more equitable society. (David, Indigenous scholar)

I just think philosophically that there is a great difference between being equity and being First Nations. And I think that we need to very actively fight to have that distinction recognised that in fact rights that we have are of course we all have general human rights but we also, as Indigenous people, as First Nations people in our own land have a different set of rights as well. (Cindy, Indigenous scholar)

Having provided the evidence above to substantiate the identification of 14 key enablers and drivers that can strengthen evaluation in Indigenous higher education, we now explain how each of the enablers and drivers predominantly relate to one of three 'control' domains. These domains have been colour-coded in above and include:

- **Indigenous control** (growing Indigenous leadership; addressing white privilege and power; valuing Indigenous knowledges and prioritising Indigenous epistemologies; incentivising cultural competence; embracing political challenges as opportunities; and recognising sovereign rights).
- **Government control** (increasing funding and resources; and leading innovative policy development, implementation and reform).
- **University control** (investing in strategy development; investing in cultural transformation, change, and quality improvement; improving Indigenous student outcomes; promoting cultural standards and accreditation; reframing curricula to explicitly incorporate Indigenous knowledges and practices; investing in an Indigenous workforce).

Three Domains of Control

The way in which these three domains of control interact has a profound impact on the way evaluation can be strengthened (or weakened) within Indigenous higher education contexts in Australia. A key finding from this research is that there is currently an uneasy nexus between these three domains of control. That is, each domain competes with the other. Developing strategies for these domains of control to work synergistically is an important priority to improve Indigenous higher education outcomes in Australia. The discussion below aims to highlight ways that these domains could operate more cohesively.

**Figure 5: Intersecting domains of control impacting evaluation
in Indigenous higher education contexts in Australia**

Indigenous control was expressed as a fundamental consideration by Indigenous scholars when undertaking culturally relevant evaluation in Indigenous higher education in Australia. This was seldom discussed by the policymakers interviewed. To Indigenous scholars, it was perceived as political endeavour tied to Indigenous leadership, addressing white privilege and power; valuing Indigenous knowledges; promoting cultural competence; and recognising sovereign rights. These concepts underpin recent data sovereignty discussions (Walter, 2010; 2016; Drew, Wilks, & Wilson, 2015, 2016), as outlined earlier in the report. In particular, participants spoke about analysing and interpreting data from an Indigenous viewpoint. For example:

> At what point do Aboriginal people actually get to analyse the data? They might see what you [Anglo] think this data says, in quite a different way. So we've still got a long way to go … I mentioned [this] in terms of the interpretation of data because the story that we read might well be different. That stuff is critical … it is more likely that you will get to answer that question of 'what is the story?' when you've got Aboriginal people involved because not only do we view things differently often, but we are then also able to tease out other bits that might be related. (Colleen Hayward AM, Indigenous scholar)

Other participants claimed:

> I think it's crucial that Aboriginal people are part of those evaluation processes and, more importantly, part of the sense making of the data. And you know, a lot of the information that gets sort of pulled together … the sense-making stuff is crucial … it's important for Aboriginal people to be a part of any evaluative sort of process because we're the only ones that really know our business well. (Brad, Indigenous scholar)

> So look I have no issue with non-Indigenous researchers looking at it, but I think that sometimes there's difference between looking through a non-Indigenous lens and looking through an Indigenous lens and actually understanding some of the other considerations, particularly the cultural considerations of our communities and our students while they're looking at it. (Leanne Holt, Indigenous scholar)

In talking about data sovereignty, Indigenous scholar, Professor Maggie Walter, convincingly argued:

> It's about Indigenous data governance … which means that there is Indigenous leadership and Indigenous involvement with all levels of: what is collected; why it's collected; when it's collected; who it's collected from; and how it's collected … we use the term, 'Indigenous data functionality', and that means it has to be functional for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, so it has to meet our needs, as well as the needs of institutions and government, and departmental reporting frameworks. At the moment it only meets those.

Similarly, another participant noted:

> When Indigenous people are in control of their lives we perform better than any externally developed and applied policy or method. (David, Indigenous scholar).

Unfortunately, the collective narratives presented in the indicative examples of enablers and drivers of evaluation in Indigenous higher education contexts demonstrate that Indigenous control is seldom a feature of the way in which evaluation is currently approached in higher education. That is, Indigenous control was often discussed as an aspirational goal. Yet, there were repeated requests that this needed to be prioritised over other domains of control currently occupied by universities and government. This is consistent with very recent academic commentary about people of colour resisting white supremacy in higher

education in Australia (Pechenkina & Liu, 2018). A simple solution would be for universities and government departments to relinquish some aspects of control, particularly those relating to funding and resources; policy development, implementation, and reform; and strategy development. However, this may be politically unpalatable in some instances. If these enablers and drivers of change could systematically shift towards a model of genuine Indigenous control, at a point when Indigenous leadership and governance has an increasing prominence in relation to university accountability measures, this would help to strengthen evaluation in Indigenous higher education. This does not mean that Indigenous scholars should wear the burden of planning, implementation and evaluation of all facets of Indigenous higher education. Rather, they should be afforded the ability to make decisions about these things. This concept related to both senior positions and high-level governing structures. As Indigenous Scholar, Dr Leanne Holt commented:

> *I think that what we really need in the end is Associate Deans ... Deans or Associate Deans Indigenous in each of the faculties. So you need a senior pool, you can't just rely on one person to be able to have the effect that nationally we're looking at. It needs to be a senior pool of people … I think that's an interesting evaluation discussion, like influence of community, influence of the senior positions, influence of Indigenous voice and leadership.* (Leanne Holt, Indigenous scholar)

Other participants asserted:

> *I think employing the Indigenous people at that higher level, the manager level, the executive level. That's a huge thing that we find.* (AK, Indigenous scholar)

> *I'm a great believer in Indigenous people colonising the rest of universities. To my knowledge, there is no senior—there are very few senior Indigenous people in universities—there are very few Indigenous people in senior positions outside of what I call designated areas [Indigenous centres]. Isn't that funny? The irony of that.* (Eric, Indigenous scholar)

A few participants spoke specifically about using the Indigenous Governance Group, which is a legislated reporting requirement of ISSP funding, to drive this discussion at a national level:

> *We can always fall back and say, well, it's under the Act. So we're instructed by the Commonwealth to do this. And that's why I mentioned earlier on to say, well, there is scope for a change, a model of change here, in that PM and C funds are managed by the Indigenous Governance Group … that would be an interesting model because then that gives more control to the Indigenous Governance Group, and then sets the measurement and performance as distributed and not just responsibility for the Indigenous Dean, PVC or DVC. But more of a distributed target around what can be achieved.* (Paul, Indigenous scholar)

Another participant commented:

> *Prime Minister and Cabinet have altered that scheme [ISSP] with the advice of lots of senior Aboriginal academics, and now it is a much tighter program, that actually calls for universities to do all sorts of things, including having senior Aboriginal and Indigenous appointments.* (Maggie Walter, Indigenous scholar)

There was also a general sentiment that an increased commitment to capacity building in Indigenous leadership and governance would ultimately strengthen evaluation outcomes. As one participant claimed:

I think there is the potential there for some kind of formal capacity building for this higher tier of leadership because a lot of people, for instance, may not have had to work … in the university. (Cindy, Indigenous scholar)

A key aspect of building Indigenous leadership capacity relates to shifting the balance of power and control. As one participant explained:

People need to be nurtured into leadership … we're seeing that happening in universities now and we're seeing the difference it's making as well, because it's not 'business as usual', things are changing … so we're in 2017 and I think everybody else, all the public service etcetera, are in 1997. Twenty years behind and my advice is, look, we can't wait for you to catch up. It's time to do just one big leap and ignore all the rubbish that goes on in between 1997 and 2017. And that means handing over some power. (Maggie Walter, Indigenous scholar)

In addition to building Indigenous control through enhanced Indigenous leadership and governance opportunities within universities, some participants have also argued that a parallel commitment to Indigenous capacity building in evaluation and research skill development, ideally from an Indigenous standpoint, would benefit evaluation outcomes in Indigenous higher education. For example:

I think the capacity building stuff in terms of HDRs [Higher Degree Research] and getting more Aboriginal people trained up as researchers, I think that's a crucial part of all of this. I think that we're never really going to have the types of evaluation programs and processes that we need, and the evidence base I guess — until we have the academics to produce it. So yeah, I think there'll be a tipping point. (Brad, Indigenous scholar)

Noteworthy, is a general acknowledgment that non-Indigenous people can bring content expertise and support capacity building activities in relation to evaluation. As Amber Collins (Indigenous scholar), noted:

There's some really good, intelligent, collaborative, non-Indigenous staff wanting to do better in this space and we have good relationships and collegial relationships with them.

Another participant acknowledged:

If you're trying to transform a whole of an institution, wouldn't you expand your sample to include non-Indigenous people? Because they're usually the people that have their hands on the levers of change. (Paul, Indigenous scholar)

Indigenous Scholar, Professor Steve Larkin, also reinforced:

I think the main thing is that if we're evaluating a particular set of realities then we have to understand that there's different ways of seeing that and understanding it. It's not that one's right or wrong. Clearly that is useful as well. It's that complementarity across different knowledge systems. Not just the complementarity but the difference is a positive thing. To get a third space where we've got a new epistemology or a new knowledge that comes from drawing these together.

The notion of a 'third space', mentioned above, resonates with the concept of developing strategies to bring the three domains of control in closer alignment and may well support a process towards greater Indigenous control over the longer term. We suggest a useful starting point would be to develop a clear set of evaluation principles and/or protocols that are specific to Indigenous higher education contexts. Rather than 'reinventing the wheel' participants indicated that work already undertaken in areas relating to Indigenous research, ethics, and community engagement, particularly that in the health sector, could act as a

useful starting point (see for example NHMRC, 2003; Fredericks, 2008; IATSIS, 2011; Hunt, 2013; AMSANT, 2014; Fred Hollows Foundation, 2015). Within this research project, concepts such as Indigenous leadership; genuine community engagement; working collaboratively; Indigenous capacity building, community-centredness; deep listening; acting ethically and honestly; and actions with purpose, all emerged as potential principles for guiding evaluation in Indigenous higher education contexts.

For the three domains of control to work cohesively, a frank and open nationwide strategic discussion with all relevant stakeholders needs to occur, as per Fellowship Recommendation 2. Ideally, this should be led by Indigenous scholars with high-level input from key stakeholders within government, universities, and other relevant peak bodies. It needs to draw on expertise from within Indigenous research, policy, and practice spheres. The best mechanism to commence this process would be a commitment from the Australian Government to fund the development of a National Indigenous Higher Education Performance and Evaluation Strategy, as per fellowship Recommendation 1. This would:

- respond to previous recommendations outlined in the Behrendt Review and by ATSIHEAC
- complement the intent of the *Universities Australia Indigenous Strategy 2017-2020*
- complement the intent of the recent released *Indigenous Advancement Strategy Evaluation Framework*
- respond to recommendations of the Productivity Commission and the Australian National Audit Office about improving the evaluation of Indigenous affairs programs in Australia.

It is envisaged that the development of the National Indigenous Higher Education Performance and Evaluation Strategy could involve a co-design model which considers all three domains of control, and the respective enablers and drivers identified above. It is also suggested that the 'conceptual model of potential performance parameters for strengthening evaluation in Indigenous higher education', which is outlined in the following section of this report, be used as a baseline for developing strategies and actions associated with the National Indigenous Higher Education Performance and Evaluation Strategy. At the time of writing this report, an Indigenous Advancement Strategy community-led grant proposal was submitted to the PMC for its consideration. This is a collaboration between multiple national stakeholders (see Appendix D). The Indigenous higher education sector will be disappointed if action on this important issue is stalled any further.

13. The Australian Government make a dual and parallel **investment in Indigenous capacity building focused on (a) evaluation knowledge and skill development; and (b) Indigenous leadership and governance**, to increase Indigenous control in Australian higher education contexts.

14. The NATSIHEC, Australian Government, universities, Universities Australia and other key stakeholders work collaboratively and strategically to **invest in the 14 enablers and drivers identified in this report, with preference given to those associated with Indigenous control**.

15. The Australian Government recognises the sovereign rights of Indigenous peoples, as espoused in the UN Declaration of the Rights of Indigenous Peoples and the Coolangatta Statement on Indigenous Peoples' Rights in Education by ensuring there are **dedicated and appropriately resourced Indigenous education policy and program units in government departments, separate to those associated with equity funding**.

6. Discussion 3: A Conceptual Baseline

A Conceptual Model of Potential Performance Parameters to Strengthen Indigenous Higher Education Monitoring and Evaluation in Australia

During the course of the Equity Fellowship, research participants regularly spoke about the need for a model to help strengthen evaluation in higher education. For example:

> So there needs to be a model that's developed … with the right performance measurement framework. It needs to be conceptually based … this will then start to give us a description around what are the indicators for a measurement framework. (Paul, Indigenous scholar)

Similarly, another participant stated:

> It'd be excellent if the universities kind of were developing evaluation models that applied to our space a little bit more. (Brad, Indigenous scholar)

While the concept of a 'model' was frequently mentioned, participant discussion was often vague and seldom described what they thought a 'model' might actually look and feel like. In an effort to works towards facilitating a national discussion on this topic, we developed a conceptual model of potential performance parameters to strengthen Indigenous higher education monitoring and evaluation in Australia (see Figure 6). This is not the same as a performance or evaluation framework. Rather, the model developed reflects a combination of variables that can easily be measured, more subjective qualitative parameters, and the proposed inclusion of a longitudinal methodology. It is a hybrid model of sorts. Its intent was to act as a conversation starter. The model was always designed to be iterative, where potential performance parameters could be added, changed, or removed as the sector matures over time. The concept of 'potential' performance parameters emanated from the need to remain fluid and less static, in concert with the views of research participants. It also aimed to respond to emerging innovation and strategy development in Indigenous higher education; and the increasing need to incorporate Indigenous knowledges and ways of knowing into Indigenous-focused monitoring and evaluation discussions. The primary reasons for developing the model were to:

- provide an initial benchmark to examine what is currently being collected and used to monitor progress in Indigenous higher education in Australia
- to identify current gaps in monitoring and evaluation in Indigenous higher education in Australia, to ensure these are captured in future national monitoring, performance and evaluation discussions
- to visually represent potential performance parameters in a format that is easily understood by key stakeholders
- to demonstrate that potential performance parameters in Indigenous higher education contexts span multiple micro and macro levels, with a view of supporting further national strategic discussions in this space
- to provide baseline information to inform the development of a National Indigenous Higher Education Performance and Evaluation Strategy.

Draft iterations of the model were shared with key national and international stakeholders for feedback during subsequent refinement processes (July–December 2017). This included seeking feedback from the NATSIHEC Executive, staff at the Centre of Excellence for Equity in Higher Education, members of the Canadian Consortium of Universities for Evaluation Education and key staff within DET. In addition, conference presentations at the Australasian Evaluation Society International Conference, 2017 NCSEHE National Equity Fellows Forum,

Australian Association for Research in Education, and DET were useful feedback mechanisms to refine the model. The model was also used, in part, to inform the development of the *Universities Australia Indigenous Strategy 2017-2020* Reporting Framework throughout the latter part of 2017.
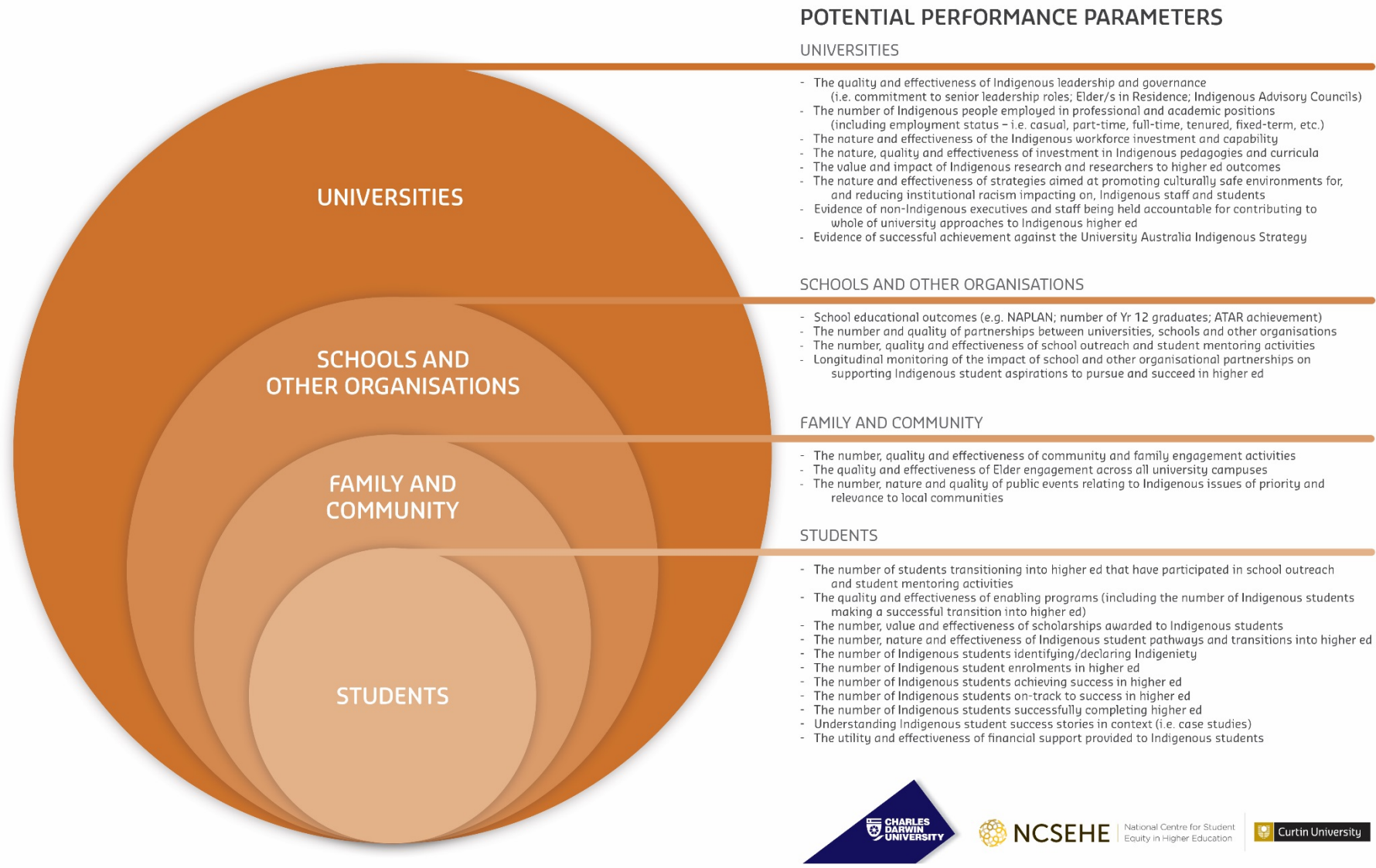
Figure 6: Conceptual model of potential performance parameters to strengthen Indigenous higher education in Australia

There are some notable elements of the conceptual model that provide additional context that needs describing in greater detail.

The use of concentric circles was deliberate. Both visually and metaphorically, this represents a shift away from columns and tables traditionally used in evaluation discussions (such as program logic designs), including those relating to equity-focused performance, monitoring, and evaluation discussions such as the *Equity Initiatives Framework* (Bennett et al., 2015). As Professor Tracey Bunda, one of the participating Indigenous research scholars, commented:

> *I think about the university as an organisation and the processes that it uses and I think about sharp, hard lines that go up and down and sideways. But what I — and when I think about Indigenous practice, I think of much more softer edges. So flowing lines and circles and concentric circles and weaving.*

The use of circles was incorporated as a means to acknowledge and respond to Indigenous worldviews, as described above. It was also perceived to be a useful way to acknowledge the broader social and environmental influences that impact on Indigenous student participation in higher education. More specifically, family and communities; schools and other organisations; and universities. This framing is consistent with other socio-ecological models used to understand equity and Indigenous higher education contexts (Smith et al., 2015). These elements, and the intersection between them, were considered to be important considerations to strengthen the way in which evaluation in Indigenous higher education contexts in Australia is understood.

A significant feature of the conceptual model is the inclusion of *potential* performance parameters that have an explicit qualitative focus. In addition to numerical measures, many of the qualitative performance parameters point towards measuring the nature, quality and effectiveness of various factors perceived to influence Indigenous higher education access and outcomes. As discussed earlier, the narratives and stories were deemed to be critically important by the Indigenous scholars interviewed. This was expressed in two distinct, but often interconnected, ways. Firstly, narratives were perceived to be a culturally relevant form of knowledge that needed to be afforded greater legitimacy in monitoring and evaluation contexts. This included the use of metaphors to describe processes, impacts and outcomes and aligned to a parallel discourse about data sovereignty. It was recognised that most current national reporting and monitoring processes provided limited scope for these narratives and stories to be communicated effectively to decision-makers. Participants were clear this needed to change. Secondly, narratives were perceived to provide greater contextual information about the social, environmental and political factors influencing Indigenous participation in higher education. Narratives and stories were perceived to complement quantitative data and subsequently increase the utility and reliability of the data available to inform quality improvement in policy and program contexts. In this sense, a model that could be easily adapted at an institutional level was deemed to be important. In addition, using quantitative data in the absence of these narratives and stories was perceived to be negligent and misleading. Again, this strand of discussion was also linked to data sovereignty, particularly the way in which data can be inadvertently (mis)used.

Each of the elements are now described in greater detail below.

Sphere 1 — students

The conceptual model was deliberately designed to position Indigenous students at the centre of monitoring and evaluation discussions. This was deemed to be important by the majority of research participants and key stakeholders engaged throughout the project. Positioning students at the centre of the conceptual model is a metaphorical representation of the need for student-centred approaches to be the primary focal point in Indigenous higher education work.

It was widely acknowledged that data collection and reporting about student enrolments, success and completions is now a standard expectation among Australian universities. In particular, this has been reinforced through the reporting guidelines associated with the ISSP:

> *University data collection in relation to Indigenous students is often as a result of the need to report and acquit on Commonwealth funds rather than necessarily as a mechanism for accurate reporting and evaluation for our own purposes.*
> (Amber Collins, Indigenous scholar)

It was generally acknowledged that there are well-developed systems in place to collect and examine this quantitative data at institutional, state and national levels. It was also evident that Australia is considered to be a global leader in this space. There are, however, multiple challenges in relation to data sovereignty in higher education that still require further attention (Drew, Wilks, & Wilson, 2015, 2016). One of these concerns relates to the (lack of) self-identification of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander status among students and staff. There is potential to learn from efforts in Canada and New Zealand in this regard, such as the recent 'I Declare' initiative at the University of Saskatchewan in Saskatoon, Canada.

As previously discussed, there was a preference among participants for contextual narratives and case studies to accompany the numerical data, such as that reported through ISSP:

> *Closing the distance between what the challenges of the students present at an institutional level, and the data that the Commonwealth want around completions and so on, closing that distance and using more comprehensive evaluation techniques is what is needed in this country.* (Lester-Irabinna Rigney, Indigenous scholar)

In addition, there was strong agreement about using qualitative evidence, particularly stories and narratives, to provide a more complete and culturally legitimate picture of what we *know* about Indigenous students in higher education. More importantly, it was suggested that this information can help guide what we *do* to strengthen Indigenous access and outcomes in higher education. This is usually referred to as closing the 'know-do gap' (Bacchi, 2008):

> *One of the pieces of information that's really missing is the student view, at the moment … a lot of the stuff that we rely on in terms of student experience and stuff is very anecdotal … but I think that there'd be a lot of strength in capturing that sort of stuff in a more formal way … I think the student experience stuff is definitely an under-surveyed or under kind of evidenced space.* (Brad, Indigenous scholar)

Some participants claimed their universities had undertaken student feedback surveys with Indigenous student cohorts, using standard pre/post designs. Yet, they also divulged that most of this data was regarded as internal information — as such, it was only used for institutional strategy development and quality improvement. This type of data was seldom shared with external stakeholders.

In addition, there has been a growing number of qualitative and mixed-methods research studies examining Indigenous student and staff perspectives about the pathways, transitions, participation, success, and achievement in higher education settings (Frawley et al., 2017a, 2017b). We suggest that efforts to continue to collect evaluation evidence about these experiences provides useful information to develop new and innovative policy and program responses. Indeed, there is a need for a meta-analysis of Australian evidence to be undertaken in this space.

STUDENTS

- The number of students transitioning into higher ed that have participated in school outreach and student mentoring activities
- The quality and effectiveness of enabling programs (including the number of Indigenous students making a successful transition into higher ed)
- The number, value and effectiveness of scholarships awarded to Indigenous students
- The number, nature and effectiveness of Indigenous student pathways and transitions into higher ed
- The number of Indigenous students identifying/ declaring Indigeniety
- The number of Indigenous student enrolments in higher ed
- The number of Indigenous students achieving success in higher ed
- The number of Indigenous students on-track to success in higher ed
- The number of Indigenous students successfully completing higher ed
- Understanding Indigenous student success stories in context (i.e. case studies)
- The utility and effectiveness of financial support provided to Indigenous students

Figure 7: Potential performance parameters relating to higher education students

Sphere 2 — family and community

It is well documented that family and community play a critical role in supporting Indigenous students to participate in higher education (Behrendt et al., 2012; Wilks & Wilson, 2014; Fredericks et al., 2015; Irwin, Callahan, & Durox, 2015; Smith et al., 2017b). Such support is particularly important for building the resilience and self-efficacy of Indigenous students (Veldman & Guilfoyle, 2013, 2014; Milne, Creedy, & West, 2016; Frawley et al., 2017c). This has resulted in the development of a broad range of targeted family and community engagement initiatives within the higher education sector (Smith et al., 2017b; Street, Smith, & Stewart, 2017). These activities span one-off and annual public events that relate to contemporary Indigenous issues; on-campus tours and residential programs; community visits and discussion forums; and well-established and contextualised student and family engagement programs that have been in operation for decades. Clearly, keeping community as a focal point is important in evaluation discussions:

Evaluation and monitoring should not be as a result of having to justify the money that has been given to Indigenous higher education [sector]. Evaluation and monitoring should be a process — should be a tool to strengthen our communities; ultimately as a result of our community being engaged in higher education. (Tracey Bunda, Indigenous scholar)

Another participant claimed:

For me I think it's clear that if we're really seriously going to be looking at the role of higher education and its influence in shaping the social, political, economic realities of our people, then the community voice is absolutely critical. This isn't just about academics, this isn't just about research; this is about transforming the life experience of people that have been on the margins of society for way too long. (David, Indigenous scholar)

However, very few family and community engagement activities are formally evaluated, which has limited the evidence base about what works and why:

I don't think we're good at doing things like what are the implications in terms of that person, their family, their extended family and potentially their community. Once again, perhaps we've not had the data to be able to collect those stories but maybe it's time we started collecting that data. (Colleen Hayward AM, Indigenous scholar)

Previous scholars have also argued that redefining community engagement from Indigenous standpoints and continuing to build an evidence base to learn from recent Indigenous community engagement investments, is critical from improving Indigenous pathways and transitions into university (Smith et al., 2017b). Some participants spoke about the important role that Indigenous staff play in brokering relationships with Indigenous families and community on behalf of universities. This was succinctly explained by one participant:

You know, everyone works for their own institutions but we all work for our community. (Brad, Indigenous scholar)

Another participant elaborated:

In terms of Indigenous affairs of whatever kind, but specifically in the education field … making sure that whatever is being done is reflective of the needs and directions coming out of the community. Those needs and directions and aspirations may be expressed in a whole range of different ways. That's part of the role, I guess, of Indigenous people working in the higher education area is to perform that function of translating and interpreting what community … are saying and then being able to put it into a format and in a way that meets all of the requirements of a tertiary institution. (Ursula, Indigenous scholar)

One strategy that some universities have used to facilitate this process has been the establishment of Councils of Elders and the establishment of Elder-in-Residence roles. In fact, there is now a National Indigenous Elders Alliance in Australia. The important role Elders play was emphasised strongly by Grace who commented:

The reason why I pushed to set up the First Council of Elders … was that we met as a group with NATSIHEC and a group with Vice-Chancellors in Alice Springs, at a workshop, and it was quite clear that even though a lot of these people had incredibly good hearts, unfortunately a lot were bereft of a real cultural understanding of what the issues were for our people … and so I thought, well, one way of honouring both Reconciliation Action Plans that most universities have, and the commitment to the cultural competencies, and the commitment to the Declaration of the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, and the commitment to the

Aboriginal Education Strategy was to have our knowledge holders as an integral part of the scholarship of the university … the development of the Council of Elders not only impacted on the way Elders and the scholarship of Elders was perceived within the sector but it also had an impact on the Commonwealth Government because we've now got a National Council of Elders which has been established … they've now been endorsed by WINHEC to set up the Global Indigenous Elders Alliance and it's all about not only profiling the scholarship of Indigenous knowledge and Elder knowledge but it's also about putting in place a process of cultural heritage, protection and preservation. (Grace, Indigenous scholar)

FAMILY AND COMMUNITY

- The number, quality and effectiveness of community and family engagement activities
- The quality and effectiveness of Elder engagement across all university campuses
- The number, nature and quality of public events relating to Indigenous issues of priority and relevance to local communities

Figure 8: Potential performance parameters relating to family and community

Sphere 3 — schools and organisations

The majority of participants acknowledged there was considerable partnership work happening across Australia linking schools and universities:

We have a connection with high schools. A lot of universities take that particular tactic, you know, to nurture the next generation of students that are going to come into the university … the other thing that we've done, too, is building a Year 11 and 12 residential program so that — I mean, we're lucky in the sense that we've got residences on campus. We bring the students on campus for a couple of days. We actually engage in real situations that occur within the university. (Tracey Bunda, Indigenous scholar)

It was evident that universities were taking a significant lead in developing and delivering outreach programs, residential programs, mentoring programs, and student recruitment activities that were specifically targeted towards Indigenous students. Many programs and activities were planned and implemented collaboratively, often with multiple partners. This resonated well with Indigenous ways of knowing and doing. As one participant stated:

Having our own people getting out into schools … the outreach that we're doing into schools for Indigenous students, that only comes because we know and understand our local context. (Cindy, Indigenous scholar)

In recent years, much of this outreach work has been funded through the HEPPP (Frawley et el., 2015; Smith et al., 2015). However, some participants also reported that philanthropic funds had been used to deliver these type of activities. In some instances, third party organisations, brokered and fostered these relationships. For example:

We sponsor the AIME program, the Australian Indigenous Mentoring Experience program, and we have 750 Indigenous school children on that program. The goal of that is to finish Year 12 and to seek employment, training or higher education. (Deirdre, Indigenous scholar)

Whilst there has been a notable increase in partnership work with schools in the Indigenous higher education space, there are relatively few publicly available examples of process, impact or outcome evaluations of such work. At present, programs funded under the HEPPP and ISSP are not necessarily required to undertake evaluations. When they do occur, there is not a requirement to share these publicly.

However, some participants indicated that there is a lack of data sharing happening between schools and universities to inform future policy and practice. It was recognised this could be improved and, if so, would provide useful evidence to reform the way in which Indigenous students engage with and through the Australian education system. For example, some participants argued that an exploration of data linkage opportunities and longitudinal study opportunities would be beneficial. Linking NAPLAN scores; information about boarding school participation; Year 12 graduation outcomes; ATAR scores; participation in enabling programs; and enrolment, success and completion data in VET and higher education, are plausible examples. As one participant noted:

Both sectors, the university system and the schooling system, don't really talk to each other even though Behrendt is intimating that both of them need to get in the same room and talk and share data. (Lester-Irabinna Rigney, Indigenous scholar)

This concept reinforces the importance, and potential advantages, of a universal student indicator within the context of improving Indigenous education outcomes in Australia.

Akin to partnerships with schools, some participants also mentioned they had developed relationships with other organisations. A similar pattern emerged, whereby very few partnership activities with other organisations (for example, Career Trackers) had been formally evaluated. Equally, this was perceived as an area where further investment was required.

SCHOOLS AND OTHER ORGANISATIONS

- School educational outcomes (e.g. NAPLAN; number of Yr 12 graduates; ATAR achievement)
- The number and quality of partnerships between universities, schools and other organisations
- The number, quality and effectiveness of school outreach and student mentoring activities
- Longitudinal monitoring of the impact of school and other organisational partnerships on supporting Indigenous student aspirations to pursue and succeed in higher ed

Figure 9: Potential performance parameters relating to schools and other organisations

Sphere 4 — universities

Universities are frequently criticised as being Western domains that alienate Indigenous people through racism and cultural incompetence (Larkin 2015; Frawley et al., 2017b; Pechenkina & Liu, 2018). This subsequently impacts Indigenous student and staff recruitment, participation, and retention in higher education. As one participant explained:

If we are true to our reconciliation commitments, you would want to see a shift of awareness and a shift of attitudes across the whole university … this is not about students' change, it's about the organisation and the employees within the organisation … if you want to measure the impacts of our own cultural competency across the university. (Kathy, Indigenous scholar)

There are multiple strategies and systems that need to be put in place by universities to provide more culturally safe and responsive environments that support Indigenous students and staff to grow and flourish. This requires a more critical examination of what is (or is not) working, and why:

There is no evaluation of the universities by blackfellas. I did a keynote address — I did the Ngunnawal lecture at University of Canberra about two years ago … but in that particular lecture, I developed a good guide to universities from a black point of view. There is no — not in any sort of critical way, is there an opportunity for us to be able to honestly critique the universities. You know, the process that's given to us is ultimately a nice process. Isn't it? I mean, you think about, okay, I've got to report back to the Commonwealth on an Indigenous education strategy. It's going to be signed off by senior management within the university. So you can't actually do any critique of the university. So what then? In the absence of that particular critique, evaluative critique, what then does that say about the relationship between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people? Who holds the power in that relationship when you have to report in that particular way? (Tracey Bunda, Indigenous scholar)

The importance of Indigenous control was emphasised earlier in the report, particularly that relating to senior Indigenous positions such as Vice-Chancellors, Pro Vice-Chancellors and Deans of Indigenous Leadership, Engagement, Research and/or Education. The establishment of Indigenous governance bodies with decision-making authority has also been a focus in recent times, something which has been reinforced through the ISSP guidelines and *Universities Australia Indigenous Strategy*. These mechanisms are seen as critical elements for driving WOU agendas to positively change the Indigenous higher education landscape. However, they are not necessarily easy to navigate:

That whole-of-government and whole-of-university [approach] — it just doesn't work unless you're able to establish relationships upfront and deal with responsibility, accountability, departmentalisation, and the human factor ... so each faculty believes they're their own university in their own right. And to implement a whole-of-university approach, sometimes it seems like [it is] beyond reach. (Paul, Indigenous scholar)

While there have been calls for more concerted efforts to adopt WOU approaches to Indigenous education (Behrendt et al., 2012; NATSIHEC, 2017), there is parallel need to acknowledge the role that Indigenous scholars and staff have played in achieving incremental gains in Indigenous higher education over the past few decades. However, participants considered this was difficult to measure:

How do you measure influence? I think it's something that is really important to measure in terms of — if you're requiring a governance framework or government structure within an organisation that has Aboriginal Torres Strait Islander voices, then what is the expected impact on the university? (Kathy, Indigenous scholar)

Unfortunately, these achievements have often been ignored. It is time to formally recognise and celebrate the influence they have had, both individually and collectively. As one participant asserted:

And to the university, I say 'don't speak negatively about our people because it is our people that made the sector what it is today'. The Government supplied the funds, absolutely, and the universities opened their doors, but it would have been a massive failure if it wasn't for our people rolling up their sleeves … [there are] a lot of people that have given their heart and soul and their cultural knowledge to those [university] systems. (Grace, Indigenous scholar)

There is clearly a need to think innovatively about ways to measure the influence and impact of Indigenous staff within higher education in Australia. This will undoubtedly assist in developing Indigenous workforce strategies consistent with the recent NATISHEC (2017) report about accelerating Indigenous higher education and the enabler about the need to invest in the Indigenous workforce already outlined in this report.

UNIVERSITIES

- The quality and effectiveness of Indigenous leadership and governance (i.e. commitment to senior leadership roles; Elder/s in Residence; Indigenous Advisory Councils)
- The number of Indigenous people employed in professional and academic positions (including employment status – i.e. casual, part-time, full-time, tenured, fixed-term, etc.)
- The nature and effectiveness of the Indigenous workforce investment and capability
- The nature, quality and effectiveness of investment in Indigenous pedagogies and curricula
- The value and impact of Indigenous research and researchers to higher ed outcomes
- The nature and effectiveness of strategies aimed at promoting culturally safe environments for, and reducing institutional racism impacting on, Indigenous staff and students
- Evidence of non-Indigenous executives and staff being held accountable for contributing to whole of university approaches to Indigenous higher ed
- Evidence of successful achievement against the University Australia Indigenous Strategy

Figure 10: Potential performance parameters relating to universities

RECOMMENDATIONS

16. **Use the conceptual model as a baseline for developing strategies and actions associated with the development of the NIHEPES**.

17. Conduct a **meta-analysis of Australian research studies and evaluation reports examining Indigenous student and staff perspectives about pathways, transitions, participation, success, and achievement in higher education**.

7. Conclusion

This report has outlined ways to strengthen evaluation in Indigenous higher education in Australia. This has been achieved by explaining what is currently known about evaluation in this context. We have acknowledged that there are very few high quality, robust, and comprehensive evaluations of program and policy effectiveness in this space and we argue that this needs to change. We have also shown that there has been a lack of action by government and universities in responding to recurrent expert recommendations associated with improving performance, monitoring and evaluation practices in Indigenous higher education in Australia. This needs to be addressed as a matter of urgency if Indigenous participation and outcomes in higher education are to continue to improve. The development of a National Indigenous Higher Education Performance and Evaluation Strategy is now long overdue. Immediate action is required. Ideally, this should include Indigenous higher education specific targets that are incorporated into the refresh of the Australian Government Closing the Gap initiative.

Importantly, this report has built an evidence base about the perspectives of Indigenous scholars and policymakers, in relation to evaluation in Indigenous higher education. Research of this nature, with both groups, has not previously occurred. This marks an original contribution to scholarship in this space at both national and global levels. The findings of this research identified key issues, such as the way evaluation is conceptualised; a greater appreciation of the role and function of qualitative evidence; and the need for greater accountability *of* governments and universities, and accountability *to* community. These findings have high relevance to equity and Indigenous higher education policy and practice settings. A commitment by the Australian Government to develop a National Indigenous Higher Education Performance and Evaluation Strategy would provide a useful mechanism to address these issues in a pragmatic sense. Investment in a meta-analysis of Australian research studies and evaluation reports, alongside the co-development of a glossary of evaluation terms, would also help to bolster movement towards a National Indigenous Higher Education Performance and Evaluation Strategy. A national summit about evaluation in Indigenous higher education contexts would be the logical next step of action for progressing strategic discussions about future directions. Similarly, university and government responses to these issues, such as embedding narratives and stories into mandated reporting and evaluation processes, and a greater acceptance of emerging Indigenous methods and methodologies, will instil a greater sense of cultural legitimacy from an Indigenous perspective. Embedding cultural standards into TEQSA accreditation processes would be another mechanism to increase confidence among Indigenous stakeholders that universities are equipped to provide culturally safe and supportive environments.

The findings also identified 14 different enablers and drivers that, if harnessed appropriately, can help to enhance evaluation in Indigenous higher education over the longer term. Recognising that these enablers and drivers relate to different domains of control mediated through Indigenous stakeholders, government and universities, is important. Strategies that support these domains of control to work more cohesively, or in some instances privilege Indigenous forms of control, are most likely to reap success. This will require increased capacity building across the higher education sector (among both Indigenous and non-Indigenous stakeholders) in areas relating to evaluation; and Indigenous governance and leadership. In addition, dedicated and appropriately resourced Indigenous policy and program units with Australian Government departments, specifically the DET, and the Department of PMC, were considered to be critical for facilitating timely and accurate communication within and between Indigenous scholars, government and universities. Changes to structures within DET and PMC had regularly occurred in recent times, with a reported loss of corporate knowledge. This was perceived to be to the detriment of progress in Indigenous higher education nationally. More frequent formal communication is

encouraged between DET and PMC, with more transparent evidence of such communication with the Indigenous higher education sector.

The research findings presented in this report have also influenced the development of a conceptual model of potential performance parameters for strengthening evaluation in Indigenous higher education in Australia. This model is designed to be adapted over time and aims to provide a baseline to inform the development of a National Indigenous Higher Education Performance and Evaluation Strategy, once funded. We trust this is a useful contribution to the sector and will be used widely as a reference point for policymakers and practitioners.

There is a clear call to action for strengthening evaluation in Indigenous higher education contexts in Australia. This will require a unified response between Indigenous scholars, government and universities. We have confidence this can be achieved for the benefit of all current and future Indigenous higher education students, and the families and communities to which they belong.

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Appendix A: Expert Project Advisory Group Terms of Reference

Strengthening Evaluation in Indigenous Higher Education Contexts in Australia

Purpose

To provide strategic advice and support aligned with the aims and objectives of a 2017 Equity Fellowship funded by the National Centre for Student Equity in Higher Education with respect to strengthening evaluation in Indigenous higher education contexts in Australia.

The key role of the group is to:

- Provide strategic and technical advice and oversight about the parameters of the project, including stakeholder engagement and communication; research methodology/approach; and resource development and dissemination.
- Provide general advice about relevant Indigenous and/or equity higher education issues that relate to the project.
- Provide technical advice about evaluation practices in higher education contexts.
- Provide practical advice about how to ensure work is conducted in a culturally sensitive and competent manner.
- Support relationship development with individuals and organisations with an interest in Indigenous higher education and/or evaluation.
- Provide support in relation to identifying relevant data sets.
- Review project progress and milestones.

Chairperson

The primary role of the Chair person is to ensure that the meetings of the EPAG are conducted in accordance with the agreed Terms of Reference.

Time Commitment

The EPAG will meet four times throughout 2017. Meetings will be conducted via teleconference/video conference. Each meeting will be a maximum of one hour. There may be more meetings between the agreed timeframes if the necessity arises. There will be out of session correspondence and actions, at times.

Membership

The EPAG will consist of the following members:

- Professor Adrian Miller/Dr Wendy Ludwig, Pro Vice Chancellor – Indigenous Leadership, Charles Darwin University (Chair)
- Professor Martin Carroll, Pro Vice Chancellor – Education and Student Success, Charles Darwin University
- Ms Kim Robertson, Senior Policy Analyst, Office of Pro Vice Chancellor – Indigenous Leadership, Charles Darwin University
- Professor Sue Trinidad, Director, National Centre for Student Equity in Higher Education
- Professor Steve Larkin, Pro Vice Chancellor – Indigenous Education and Research, University of Newcastle
- Professor Penny Jane Burke, Director, Centre of Excellence for Equity in Higher Education, University of Newcastle

- Ms Deborah Goodwin (represented by Mr Michael Bullot), Director, National Centre for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Statistics, Australian Bureau of Statistics
- Ms Elouise Arch, Assistant Director, Indigenous Higher Education Policy, Department of Education and Training
- Dr Mark Diamond, Assistant Director, Equity Policy and Programs, Department of Education and Training
- Professor Sur Shore, Chair, Community of Associate Deans of Research in Education
- Mr Glen Hansen, Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet
- Ms Cheryl Godwell (nominated representative), National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Higher Education Consortium
- Professor James Smith, 2017 Equity Fellow (ex-officio)
- Ms Kellie Pollard, Indigenous Research Fellow (ex-officio).

Quorum

A Quorum will be met at 50% plus 1 of the membership. A member, representing an organisation, may send a proxy. It is the responsibility of the sitting member to fully brief the proxy prior to the meeting.

Meeting Records

Wherever possible the meeting will be recorded with the understanding that all discussions held during the meeting are private and confidential and the purpose of the recording is to document accurate minutes. The minutes will be prepared by the 2017 Equity Fellow and reviewed by the Chair and circulated within 2 weeks of the meeting.

The agenda for each meeting and any required additional reading will be provided to EPAG members at least one week before the scheduled meeting. A brief project report will be tabled at each meeting by the 2017 Equity Fellow. Additional meetings may be requested, if the necessity arises.

Appendix B: Brief Report on Institutional Visits

As per the original Equity Fellowship proposal, Professor Smith planned and participated in an overseas study tour involving institutional visits to Finland, Norway and Canada throughout 10 July – 3 August 2017. These visits involved discussion about quality in higher education; Indigenous higher education; and/or evaluation in higher education. He also attended the World Indigenous Peoples Conference on Education. This provided useful insights into the World Indigenous Nations Higher Education Consortium (WINHEC) higher education accreditation process (http://winhec.org/accreditation/); and to global institutional efforts relating to evaluation and monitoring.

A separate institutional visit to the Centre of Excellence for Equity in higher Education and the Wollotuka Institute at the University of Newcastle also took place from 28 August – 1 September 2017.

A brief overview of each of these visits is provided below.

Finnish Education Evaluation Centre (FINEEC) – Helsinki, Finland

Finland is well recognised globally for achieving the highest world ranking in the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA). FINEEC started its operations on 1 May 2014. It was formed by combining the evaluation activities of the Finnish Higher Education Evaluation Council, the Finnish Education Evaluation Council and the Finnish National Board of Education. The aim was to consolidate evaluation activities crossing educational level boundaries. The aim of FINEEC is to implement evaluations related to education, education providers and higher education institutions. In addition, FINEEC implements assessment of learning outcomes for basic and upper secondary education. Its worked is underpinned by a national plan for education evaluations (https://karvi.fi/app/uploads/2016/06/National-Plan-for-Education-Evaluations-2016-2019.pdf).

Professor Smith visited FINEEC on 12th July 2017. This involved intensive discussion with Karl Holm, Counsellor of Evaluation. FINEEC plays a pivotal role in auditing Finnish universities with an explicit strengths-based approach. That is, the audit process is seen to be iterative. Each university is supported to improve the quality of its delivery across a determined timeframe if deficits are identified. There is no failing the audit. Similarly, there are no internal country rankings between each of the universities. This is perceived to provide a more equitable playing field. FINEEC also undertakes themed projects, such as those relating to VET to higher education pathways. It appears that FINEEC plays a similar role to that of the Tertiary Education Quality Standards Authority (TEQSA) in Australia, but with an explicit capacity building ethos.

Nordic Institute for Studies in Innovation, Research and Education (NIFU) – Oslo, Norway

NIFU is an independent social science research institute, organized as a non-profit foundation. It aims to be a leading European research organization for studies of innovation, research and education at all levels. It has four specific research groups, one of which is the Higher Education Research Group. **Key research themes are focused on universities and university colleges, their core activities, organisation and leadership, as well as students and staff in higher education.** Professor Smith visited NIFU on 13th July 2017. This involved face-to-face dialogue with Dr Mari Elken, Deputy Head Research and Senior Researcher of the Higher Education Group. They discussed a significant research project about the quality of higher education in Norway, which places a strong emphasis on

translating key learnings into policy and practice contexts. NIFU also plays a key role in undertaking national higher education student surveys.

University of Oslo – Oslo, Norway

Professor Smith had planned to meet Professor Peter Maassen, Deputy Head, Department for Educational Research at the University of Oslo on 14th July 2017. Unfortunately Professor Maassen was unable meet at the last minute due to a flight delay in returning to Norway from the United States.

Western Norway University of Applied Sciences – Bergen, Norway

Professor Smith visited Associate Professor Kjellrun Hils Hauge at the Western Norway University of Applied Sciences on 18th July 2017. She is the Director of the Centre for Educational Research, which primarily focuses on research relating to teacher education in Norway. He learned about the 'lived democracy' research group within the Centre for Educational Research, and the perceived importance of achieving equity in higher education for minority groups.

University of Saskatchewan – Saskatoon, Canada

University of Saskatchewan has a global reputation for delivering high quality Indigenous higher education. It also has a strong reputation in leading high quality Indigenous education research. It is also a founding member of the Canadian Consortium of Universities for Evaluation Education (CUEE).

Professor Smith visited University of Saskatchewan from 20th-21st July. The visit was a highlight of his study tour. The visit was hosted by Associate Professor Lois Berry, Interim Assistant Pro Vost Health (who had visited CDU on sabbatical in 2015). The visit coincided with multiple other Australian scholars visiting University of Saskatchewan at the same time. This included Professor Steven Larkin and Professor Bob Morgan (University of Newcastle/NATSIHEC), Professor Peter Buckskin (UniSA/NATSIHEC) and Professor Peter Radoll (University of Canberra). Some of the meetings occurred collaboratively. During Professor Smith's two day visit to the University of Saskatchewan he met with a range of key stakeholders from across the university including:

- Associate Professor Patti MacDougall, Vice Provost Teaching & Learning
- Dr Nancy Turner, Director, Teaching & learning Enhancement
- Dr Stryker Calvez, Educational Development Specialist, Aboriginal Engagement & Education
- Heather Exner-Pirot, Strategist for Outreach & Indigenous Engagement, College of Nursing
- Ms Leina Liao, International Research and Partnerships Office
- Ms Candace Wasacse- Lafferty, Director, Aboriginal Initiatives
- Associate Professor Maggie Kovach, Educational Foundations Department;
- Alex Wilson, Educational Foundations;
- Caroline Tait, Department of Psychiatry, College of Medicine;
- Dr Kristina Bidwell, Associate Dean Aboriginal Affairs, College of Arts and Science;
- Alison Pickrell, Director of Enrolment & Student Affairs
- Val Arnault Pelletier, College of Medicine Aboriginal Coordinator
- Professor Jacqueline Ottmann, incoming Pro Vost Indigenous Engagement.

Associate Professor MacDougall hosted a lunch for all visitors on 20th July 2017, which provided an opportunity to network with key stakeholders from across the University. This

included an opportunity to meet with notable Canadian Indigenous scholars such as Jacqui Ottman and Maggie Kovach.

The visit also involved a tour of the Gordon Oakes Red Bear Center – a relatively new Indigenous student hub at University of Saskatchewan; and a meeting with Dr Kristina Bidwell and her team within the College of Arts and Science. This involved a discussion about current evaluation practices in Indigenous outreach programs; and internal evaluation partnerships within University of Saskatchewan.

Professor Smith also had the opportunity to present about the Equity Fellowship work to University of Saskatchewan and CUEE stakeholders. Approximately 25 people attended the presentation. This opportunity was facilitated by Professor Karen Lawson Deputy Head of Psychology and immediate Past President of CUEE. Professor Smith has since been awarded Adjunct Professorial status with the Department of Psychology at University of Saskatchewan. It is envisaged this will assist with further international collaborations relating to Indigenous higher education. Professor Lawson is also planning to visit CDU as part of a sabbatical planned for 2018.

World Indigenous Peoples Conference in Education – Toronto, Canada

The World Indigenous Peoples Conference on Education was held in Toronto from 24-28th July. This provided an opportunity for Professor Smith to hear about the work of WINHEC, the World Indigenous Research Association (WIRA), the World Indigenous Nations University (WINU) and other activities relating to Indigenous education across the globe. A presentation by Candace Brunette-Debassige and Rick Ezekiel from Western University (WU) was particularly relevant, which involved a participatory evaluation of student experiences at WU. Professor Smith also had the opportunity to meet Laura Horton, Executive Co-Chair of WINHEC (Canadian Representative); and Associate Professor Keiki Kawai 'Ae 'A from the University of Hawaii who spoke about the WINHEC accreditation process as a global Indigenous-driven evaluation mechanism for higher education institutions.

Ryerson University – Toronto, Canada

Whilst attending WIPCE, Professor Smith also participated in an institutional visit to Ryerson University. This visit also involved Tracy Woodroffe from CDU. We met with Joanne Dallaire Elder and Traditional Counsellor from the Aboriginal Education Council and Diane Simone and Cheryl Trudeau from within the Aboriginal Student Services and Office of Aboriginal Initiatives. We had the opportunity to speak openly and frankly about the challenges facing Indigenous higher education systems in both Australia and Canada. We were provided a short tour of the Indigenous Student Centre at Ryerson University.

Simon Fraser University – Vancouver, Canada

Professor Smith visited Simon Fraser University (SFU) on 31 July 2017. This included meetings with:

- Professor Joy Johnson, Vice President – Research
- Professor Malcolm King – Former Chair – Institute of Aboriginal Peoples' Health, Canadian Institute of Health Research
- Gary George, Officer of Community Relations, Office of Aboriginal Peoples
- Marcia Guno, Director, Indigenous Student Centre

Professor Johnson and Professor King both spoke about the research culture at SFU and the recent investments into Indigenous research. Gary George discussed key priorities outlined in SFU's Aboriginal Strategic Plan. Marcia Guno provided a tour of the Indigenous

Student Centre and discussed key programs and activities being implemented to support Indigenous students across all SFU campuses. Based on recommendations during this visit, Professor Smith has since made contact with Associate Professor Michelle Pidgeon who has been undertaking research relating to Indigenous higher education experiences within SFU.

University of Newcastle – Newcastle, Australia

During 28th August – 1st September 2017, Professor Smith visited both the Centre of Excellence for Equity in Higher Education (CEEHE) and the Wollutuka institute at the University of Newcastle (UoN). The visit was hosted by CEEHE. He met with a range of key stakeholders at UoN including:

- Professor Penny Jane Burke, Director, CEEHE
- Professor Bob Morgan, International Engagement Officer, Wollotuka Institute
- Associate Professor Maree Grupetta, Research and Research Engagement Co-ordinator
- Associate Professor Stephanie Gilbert, Acting Co-ordinator Teaching Quality and Development, Wollotuka Institute
- Associate Professor Kathleen Butler, Research Fellow, Office of Pro Vice Chancellor Indigenous Research and Education
- Ms Leah Armstrong, Director, Wollotuka Institute
- Dr Anna Bennett, Head of Research Engagement and Development, English Language and Foundation Studies Centre; and Editor-in-Chief of *International Studies in Widening Participation*
- Dr Joanne Hanley, Journal Manager, *International Studies in Widening Participation*
- Mr Matt Lumb, Praxis Fellow, CEEHE
- Kate Mellor, PhD Candidate, CEEHE.

Professor Smith had a fulsome discussion about evaluation in equity and higher education contexts with Professor Burke and Matt Lumb. Many synergies were identified in relation to the principles that underpin (or could underpin) evaluation in Indigenous and equity contexts in higher education, particularly in relation to what constitutes 'evidence'. A book chapter written by Burke and Lumb about evaluation in equity higher education contexts was shared:

Burke, PJ. & Lumb, M. (2018). Researching and evaluating equity and widening participation: praxis-based frameworks in Burke, PJ, Hayton, A and Stevenson, J (Eds) *Evaluating Equity and Widening Participation in Higher Education*. London: UCL Institute of Education Press.

During the visit to UoN, Professor Smith had the opportunity to attend a presentation delivered by Dr Stephanie Gilbert about her upcoming Fulbright Fellowship. The visit also acted as an opportunity to conduct face-to-face research interviews with key Indigenous informants based at UoN.

Professor Smith also had the opportunity to present to the CEEHE team about the Equity Fellowship. The presentation was entitled *"You're not going to capture that in a Likert scale": Strengthening evaluation in Indigenous higher education contexts in Australia.* Approximately 25 people attended. The preliminary outcomes of the fellowship were discussed using the praxis methodology adopted by CEEHE staff. This provided a useful mechanism to get quality feedback about key aspects of the project, including the conceptual model about potential performance parameters.

Appendix C: Publication & Presentation Outputs

Publications:

Smith, J., Pollard, K., Robertson, K. & Trinidad, S. (2017). What do we know about evaluation in Indigenous higher education contexts in Australia? *International Studies in Widening Participation*. 4 (2), 18-31.

Presentations:

1. Smith, J. *Strengthening evaluation within Indigenous higher education contexts in Australia.* Bite-sized seminar hosted by the Australian Government Department of Education and Training. Canberra, 29th November 2017.

2. Smith, J., Pollard, K., Robertson, K., Shalley, F. & Trinidad, S. *Strengthening evaluation within Indigenous higher education contexts in Australia*. Australian Association for Research in Education Conference 2017. Canberra, 26-30th November 2017.

3. Smith, J., Pollard, K., Robertson, K., Shalley, F. & Trinidad, S. *Towards and Indigenous higher education monitoring and evaluation framework in Australia: What could this look like?* Australian Association for Research in Education Conference 2017. Canberra, 26-30th November 2017.

4. Smith, J., Pollard, K., Robertson, K. & Shalley, F. Towards a better understanding of evaluation in Indigenous higher education (invited keynote speaker). 2017 National Equity Fellows Forum hosted by the National Centre for Student Equity in Higher Education. Brisbane, 20th November 2017.

5. Smith, J., Pollard, L. & Brett, M. *Shaping the future of Australian Higher Education Equity Policy* (invited panellist). 2017 National Equity Fellows Forum hosted by the National Centre for Student Equity in Higher Education. Brisbane, 20th November 2017.

6. Smith, J., Laban, W., Motlap, S. & Procak, J. *Shifting gears: Moving from an activity to outcome focused evaluation and reporting model for equity target groups engagement in higher education* (invited panellist). Australian Association for Institutional Research National Conference. Alice Springs, 2 November 2017.

7. Smith, K., Pollard, K., Robertson, K. & Trinidad, S. What do we know about evaluation in Indigenous higher education contexts? Australasian Evaluation Society International Conference. Canberra, 3rd-7th September 2017.

8. Smith, J. *"You're not going to capture that in a Likert scale": Strengthening evaluation in Indigenous higher education contexts in Australia* (invited lecture). Centre of Excellence for Equity in Higher Education, University of Newcastle. Newcastle, 31st August 2017.

9. Smith, J. What do we know about evaluation in Indigenous higher education contexts in Australia? Northern Institute Seminar Series. Darwin, 15th August 2017. (https://vimeo.com/231333556)

10. Smith, J. *What do we know about evaluation in Indigenous higher education contexts in Australia?* (invited lecture). Canadian Consortium of Universities for Evaluation Education and the University of Saskatchewan, Saskatoon, Canada, 21 July 2017.

11. Smith, J. *What do we know about evaluation in Indigenous higher education contexts in Australia?* National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Higher Education Consortium caucus meeting. Batchelor, 16th June 2017.

12. Smith, J., Zacharias, N. & Bennett, A. *Exploring what we know about the relationship between equity and evaluation in higher education contexts in Australia* (invited panellist). Hosted by the National Centre for Student Equity in Higher Education in collaboration with Central Queensland University. Brisbane, 21st April 2017.

Appendix D: Letters of Support

Australian Government

Department of Education and Training

Associate Professor James Smith
Equity Fellow
Office of the Indigenous Leadership
Casuarina Campus Charles Darwin University
PO Box 40146
Casuarina NT 0811

Dear Associate Professor Smith

Re: National Indigenous Higher Education Performance and Evaluation Strategy

The Department of Education and Training (DET) has shown a long and sustained policy commitment to improving Indigenous higher education outcomes in Australia. As such, DET commends your proposal to develop a National Indigenous Higher Education Performance and Evaluation Strategy through the Indigenous Advancement Strategy (IAS). This is both important and timely.

DET acknowledges that recent recommendations from the Indigenous higher education sector have consistently highlighted the need to strengthen evaluation in Indigenous higher education. Your recent 2017 Equity Fellowship through the National Centre for Student Equity in Higher Education (NCSEHE) has generated a platform for progressing work in this space. DET values the efforts you have made to share your preliminary findings, and considers that your IAS proposal is a logical next step.

We are supportive of a whole of government approach to performance and evaluation in Indigenous education and training. This means developing a strategy that links Indigenous policy and program work occurring across multiple Australian Government departments. DET welcomes the opportunity to provide in-kind support for this project. It is anticipated this will include representation on a Project Steering Committee from both the Governance, Quality and Access Branch and the Student Participation Branch.

The Department looks forward to working with you and other key national stakeholders to support this proposed project.

Yours Sincerely

Robert Latta
Branch Manager
Governance, Access and Quality Branch
Higher Education Group

Dr Lyndal Groom
Branch Manager
Student Participation Branch
Schools and Youth Cluster

12 December 2017

Dear Associate Professor Smith,

Re: Indigenous Higher Education Performance and Evaluation Action Framework

The Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) Centre of Excellence for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Statistics (CoEATSIS) is committed to informing important decisions for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people by collaborating with our data users to deliver relevant, trusted and objective data and insights.

CoEATSIS leads the ABS' Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Statistical program – a specialised program focussed on data for the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population from the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Survey, the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Survey and the Census of Population and Housing. These data sets provide a rich picture of change and progress within the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population and contain detailed statistical information that can help drive the measurement approach for the proposed framework.

CoEATSIS is committed to strengthening its partnership with Charles Darwin University and other key data users such as the Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet to improve the reporting and measurement of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander higher education outcomes across Australia. This will build on successful partnership outcomes from 2017, including novel approaches to combine qualitative and quantitative data sources about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander aspirations for further education; and your recent Equity Fellowship about strengthening evaluation approaches in higher education for the benefit of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students.

Your proposal to collaborate on the development of a national Indigenous higher education performance and evaluation action framework appears to be an extremely worthwhile project. CoEATSIS looks forward to being involved in this project and commits to providing assistance in accessing and analysing relevant data to inform the development of the action framework. CoEATSIS will ensure a representative is nominated to sit on the Project Steering Group.

CoEATSIS looks forward to working with you and other key stakeholders to bring this project to fruition. The potential benefits for improving Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander engagement in higher education as a result of this project are of significant interest.

Kind regards,

Debbie Goodwin
Director, Centre of Excellence for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Statistics, Australian Bureau of Statistics

Date: 15/12/17

12 December 2017

Associate Professor James Smith
Charles Darwin University
Darwin, NT, 0909

Dear Associate Professor Smith

Re: National Indigenous Higher Education Performance and Evaluation Strategy

The National Centre for Student Equity in Higher Education (NCSEHE) aims to inform equity policy design, implementation, and institutional practice in Australia to improve higher education participation and success for marginalised and disadvantaged people. NCSEHE recognises that Indigenous people are currently considered one of the six priority equity groups in Australia. As such, NCSEHE has commissioned a range of projects relating to enhancing Indigenous higher education participation in Australia over the past five years. One of the major projects funded throughout 2017 has been Associate Professor James Smith's 2017 NCSEHE Equity Fellowship. His fellowship has involved exploring ways to strengthen evaluation in Indigenous higher education contexts across Australia.

A key aspect of his fellowship has been three short secondments to the Department of Education and Training, where he has been working at the research-policy-practice nexus in Indigenous and equity higher education spaces. His fellowship has also involved close consultation with other key stakeholders such as the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Higher Education Consortium, Universities of Australia and the Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet. Preliminary outcomes from his fellowship have been presented at key national forums and conferences, including those facilitated by the Australasian Evaluation Society, Australian Association for Research in Education, Australasian Association for Institutional Research and the NCSEHE Equity Fellows Forum. A key focus of these presentations has been the need for key stakeholders to work together to develop a National Indigenous Higher Education Performance and Evaluation Strategy. His work has highlighted that a project of this nature is long overdue.

Building on previous work commenced by NCSEHE in relation to an equity and Indigenous performance framework, we are excited to be partnering with the Office of Pro Vice Chancellor – Indigenous Leadership at Charles Darwin University (CDU) on this proposal. NCSEHE recognises that this was a high level recommendation with the Behrendt Review, and subsequently reinforced by the former Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Higher Education Advisory Council. NCSEHE also recognises the commitment the Minister for Indigenous Affairs has made to improving evaluation through the Indigenous Advancement Strategy, in response to recent calls from the Productivity Commission and Australian National Audit Office to do so. This proposal responds to these calls.

NCSEHE will provide in-kind leadership support by ensuring its Director is involved in relevant advisory committees and working groups; and will also provide marketing and communication support during the implementation of the project.

NCSEHE looks forward to furthering our highly productive research partnership with CDU on this important project of national significance. We are confident it will assist in supporting more equitable outcomes for Indigenous participation and achievement in higher education in Australia.

Kind Regards

Professor Sue Trinidad
Director
National Centre for Student Equity in Higher Education

National Centre for Student Equity in Higher Education

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Web: ncsehe.edu.au

James Smith

From:	Leanne Holt <leanne.holt@mq.edu.au>
Sent:	Wednesday, 13 December 2017 2:22 PM
To:	James Smith
Cc:	Peter Buckskin; Susan Page; Prof Aileen Moreton-Robinson; Darlene Oxenham; Boni Robertson; Peter Anderson; steven.larkin@newcastle.edu.au; mark.mcmillan@rmit.edu.au; jason.brailey@monash.edu.au
Subject:	Strengthening evaluation in Indigenous higher education

Dear James

NATSIHEC have carefully considered the project advice you have provided and support the application with some considerations. Comments and considerations from the NATSIHEC executive include:

- We broadly believe that this is an important project and that NATSIHEC should be involved.
- We propose a role as lead partners and primary stakeholders in relation to the priority given to our voices.
- We acknowledge the current involvement of the senior Aboriginal members of the project team.
- We reinforce that the project be prefaced on a strength based approach.
- We emphasise that the project is based on collaborative authorship.
- We believe that funding from IAS or similar funding should demonstrate Indigenous leadership and that the project reflects this.
- Given the timeframes ensure further conversations regarding the terms of the partnership from all parties perspectives to ensure we are on the same page.
- Finally, that we are able to withdraw from the project at any time if the agreed obligations or values are not being honoured.

Thank you James for your respectful engagement with NATSIHEC and we look forward to an ongoing positive and reciprocal relationship.

Warm regards
Leanne
On behalf of NATSIHEC

Leanne Holt, PhD
Director,
Walanga Muru, Office of Indigenous Strategy
T: +61 2 9850 8634 |
E: leanne.holt@mq.edu.au

Walanga Muru is a Darug language name meaning Follow your Path.
MACQUARIE UNIVERSITY NSW 2109

MACQUARIE University

The Office of Indigenous Strategy acknowledges the traditional custodians of the Macquarie University Land, the Wattamattagal clan of the Darug nation, whose cultures and customs have nurtured, and continue to nurture, this land, since the Dreamtime. We pay our respects to Elders past, present and future.

Appendix E: Ethics Approval

Office of Research and Innovation, Ethics

T: 08 8946 6063 E: ethics@cdu.edu.au

CHARLES DARWIN UNIVERSITY

13 February 2017

A/Prof James Smith
Office of Indigenous Leadership
Via email

james.smith3@cdu.edu.au

Dear James,

RE: H17005 – Strengthening evaluation in Indigenous higher education contexts in Australia

Human Research Ethics Committee – Proposal Approval

Thank you for submitting the above proposal for ethical review. The proposal has been considered under the auspices of the Charles Darwin University Human Research Ethics Committee (CDU-HREC) and is **approved from the date of this letter to the expiry date listed below.**

EXPIRY DATE: 31/01/2018

An annual progress report must be provided to the Ethics Office before each anniversary of the commencement date. This approval is contingent on submission of a satisfactory annual progress report

APPROVAL IS SUBJECT TO the following:

1. The safe and ethical conduct of this project is entirely the responsibility of the investigators and their institution(s).

2. The Principal Investigator must **report immediately any event or circumstance that might affect the ethical acceptability** of the project, including:
   - Adverse effects of the project on participants and the steps taken to deal with these;
   - All other unforeseen events that influence the protocol or participants; and
   - New information that may invalidate the ethical integrity of the study.

3. The Principal Investigator must obtain approval for any **variation to the protocol** (including the addition of new investigators) prior to implementation the proposed variations. Requests for approval of variations must be submitted in accordance with the procedures of the Ethics Office.

4. The Principal Investigator must advise the University immediately of **unapproved protocol deviations or protocol violations.**

Ellengowan Drive, Darwin, Northern Territory, Australia 0909
PO Box 40146, Casuarina, Northern Territory, Australia 0811

CRICOS Provider No. 00300K (NT/VIC) | 03286A (NSW) | RTO Provider No. 0373 | ABN 54 093 513 649

5. The Principal Investigator may request an **extension of the project past the expiry date listed above**. An extension may be requested at any time, however, the preferred time and method of requesting an extension of ethical approval is in the **annual progress report**.

6. The Principal Investigator must notify the Ethics Office of his or her **inability to continue as Principal Investigator**, including the name of and contact information for their replacement. The research may not proceed without an approved Principal Investigator.

7. Confidentiality of personal information of research participants should be maintained at all times as required by law.

8. You must forward a copy of this letter to all investigators and to any associated organisations.

This letter constitutes ethical approval from the CDU Human Research Ethics Committee only.

Should you wish to discuss the above research project further, please contact the Ethics team via email: ethics@cdu.edu.au or telephone: (08) 8946 6923.

Best wishes for the success of your project.

Yours sincerely

Dr Bev Turnbull
Chair, Human Research Ethics Committee
Charles Darwin University, NHMRC Registration No. EC00154
http://www.cdu.edu.au/research/ori/human-ethics

This HREC is constituted and operates in accordance with the National Health and Medical Research Council's (NHMRC) National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research (2007).

Appendix F: Interview Schedule (Policy)

1. Tell me a little about your background and length of service in the public service

2. Tell me a little about your experience in the public service

3. Tell me a little about your experiences in higher education policy and program development, implementation and/or review

4. Tell me a little about your experiences in equity and/or Indigenous policy and program development, implementation and/or review

5. Tell me a little about your experiences in commissioning, monitoring and/or using evaluation evidence in your work?

6. To what extent do you use evaluation information, findings and recommendations from existing programs and policies aimed at improving Indigenous higher education outcomes?

7. In these contexts, what type of evaluation evidence is most useful and why?

8. Within the context of (Indigenous) higher education, what are some of the main enablers and barriers you face when using evaluation evidence? Why do you think this is the case?

9. In your view, how important is the quality and comprehensiveness of evaluation evidence generated through higher education contexts?

10. The Minister for Indigenous Affairs has recently announced a significant investment to strengthen evaluation and monitoring in Indigenous programs funded through the Indigenous Advancement Strategy. If you had the opportunity, what strategies would you use to strengthen evaluation in Indigenous higher education contexts in Australia and why?

11. Evaluation literature talks about the importance of Indigenous people playing an active role in the evaluation of Indigenous programs and policies. What could this look like within an Indigenous higher education context in Australia?

12. Have you heard of the Behrendt Review? If so, do you know what was said about the development of a monitoring and evaluation framework?

13. In recent times, Indigenous higher education policy and program responsibility was split between Department of Education and Training, and the Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet. Has this impacted upon your work and in what ways? What implications does this have for using evaluation findings to inform the development and reform of Indigenous higher education policy and programs (or broader equity programs that also involve Indigenous students/learners)?

14. Is there anything else you would like to add in relation to evaluation in Indigenous higher education contexts in Australia?

Appendix G: Interview Schedule (Indigenous Scholar)

1. Tell me a little about your background and experience working in the higher education sector

2. Tell me a little about your experiences working in Indigenous (higher) education field, including any advisory roles you may hold

3. Tell me a little about your experiences in undertaking, monitoring and/or using evaluation evidence in your work?

4. Do you use any particular evaluation frameworks in your work? If so, why?

5. In what ways do you use evaluation information, findings and recommendations from existing programs and policies to improve Indigenous higher education outcomes at the *institutional* level?

6. In what ways do you use evaluation information, findings and recommendations from existing programs and policies to improve Indigenous higher education outcomes at the *state or national* level?

7. In these contexts, what type of evaluation evidence is most useful and why?

8. In these contexts, what type of evaluation evidence is missing? Please explain how you think this could change.

9. Within the context of Indigenous higher education, what are some of the main enablers and barriers you face when using evaluation evidence? Why do you think this is the case?

10. In your view, how important is the quality and comprehensiveness of evaluation evidence generated through Indigenous higher education contexts?

11. The Minister for Indigenous Affairs has recently announced a significant investment to strengthen evaluation and monitoring in Indigenous programs funded through the Indigenous Advancement Strategy. If you had the opportunity, what strategies would you use to strengthen evaluation in Indigenous higher education contexts in Australia and why?

12. Evaluation literature talks about the importance of Indigenous people playing an active role in the evaluation of Indigenous programs and policies. What does (or could) this look like within an Indigenous higher education context in Australia?

13. Have you heard of the Behrendt Review? If so, do you know what was said about the development of a monitoring and evaluation framework?

14. In recent times, Indigenous higher education policy and program responsibility was split between Department of Education and Training, and the Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet. Has this impacted upon your work and in what ways? What implications do you think this has for undertaking evaluation, and using evaluation evidence in Indigenous higher education contexts?

15. In recent times, Indigenous higher education policy has been merged with Equity Policy and Programs within DET. What impact do you think this might have in relation to the generation and/or use of evaluation evidence in higher education?

16. Is there anything else you would like to add in relation to evaluation in Indigenous higher education contexts in Australia?