



Charles Sturt  
University  
—  
First Nations

First Nations Strategy  
2026–2028





## “Gathering Wisdom Together”

by Lani Balzan

## About the artist

Lani Balzan is a proud Aboriginal woman from the Wiradjuri people of the three-river tribe. Her family originates from Mudgee but she grew up all over Australia. Lani has been creating Aboriginal art since 2013. One of her biggest goals and inspirations with creating Aboriginal art is to develop a better connection to her culture and to continue to work towards reconciliation, bringing people and communities together to learn about the amazing culture we have here in Australia.

To find out more about the story of this artwork, please visit

→ [about.csu.edu.au/our-strategy](https://about.csu.edu.au/our-strategy)

## Acknowledgement of Country

We respectfully acknowledge the Traditional Owners and Custodians of the lands on which we live and work together. Charles Sturt University and its staff pay respect to Elders within First Nations communities and acknowledge the continuity of cultures, languages, leadership and knowledge systems. We acknowledge First Nations peoples' continuous connection to Country, recognising the unique, diverse identities and cultures of peoples in our communities, regions and nation. As such, we value the collaboration to strongly position First Nations peoples in our university, through languages, leadership, cultures, knowledges, research and ceremonies.

# Statement of Reconciliation

As Australia's leading regional university, we recognise the unique responsibility we hold in advancing true reconciliation in Australia. We believe the path to reconciliation must be walked together and woven into everything we do – not treated as an accessory. Our contributions to truth telling, social justice, and expanding educational opportunities – both regionally and nationally – are most meaningful and powerful when they are *built-in*, not *bolted-on*. That's why we have chosen to place reconciliation at the heart of our strategy.

We understand the path to reconciliation in Australia is ongoing and only partially travelled. In 2000, the Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation unveiled the *Australian Declaration Towards Reconciliation*. A quarter of a century later, its words continue to inspire us and remain deeply relevant:

*“We, the peoples of Australia, of many origins as we are, make a commitment to go on together in a spirit of reconciliation... Our nation must have the courage to own the truth, to heal the wounds of its past so that we can move on together at peace with ourselves... Reconciliation must live in the hearts and minds of all Australians. Many steps have been taken, many steps remain as we learn our shared histories.”*

This statement is a reminder that reconciliation is best understood as a journey, not as a destination. Meaningful change takes time and persistence. As a nation and as a university, we have taken steps in the right direction, but there are still many ahead of us on this journey – and education must lead the way. We know the importance of all Australians learning about cultural exchange, contested histories, and shared achievements, and to explore how each of us can contribute to achieving reconciliation in Australia.



At Charles Sturt, we're proud of our strong partnerships with First Nations communities across our regions, which have enabled us to be involved in the changes we want to see. From embedding First Nations knowledges across our curriculum, and providing a language course in Wiradjuri, to being gifted an ethos – *Yindyamarra Winhanganha* – that provides a North Star for our work, and evolving into one of the nation's biggest providers of university education to First Nations peoples.

This *First Nations Strategy 2026–2028* articulates our deep and enduring dedication to reconciliation. We strive to improve our relationships with First Nations peoples by embracing First Nations Ways of knowing, by building culturally safe places for learning and research, by bringing more First Nations talent into our university, and by co-designing and co-producing better outcomes for First Nations communities, especially in regional, rural and remote Australia.

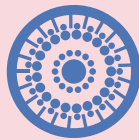
While frameworks and strategies provide important direction for our university, we know that ultimately it is our day-to-day interactions and decisions that have the greatest impact. This is where reconciliation truly happens. Reconciliation belongs to us all. It's a responsibility we all share. We all need to learn, listen, and work together as we still have a long journey ahead as a university and a nation.

Professor Renée Leon PSM  
Vice-Chancellor and President

# Executive summary

Charles Sturt University's *First Nations Strategy 2026–2028* builds on a longstanding commitment to reconciliation, cultural integrity and supporting First Nations self-determination, as well as being a regional anchor institution committed to social justice and community impact. This plan reflects the university's dedication to embedding First Nations perspectives, leadership and knowledge systems across all aspects of its operations from education and research to governance, community engagement and workforce development.

This strategy is structured around four key objectives:



## Students

To increase First Nations student success in higher education at all course levels, and prioritise cultural capability of all Charles Sturt students and graduates.



## Research

To invest in our First Nations Researchers across disciplines, and enable excellence in First Nations research throughout the university.



## Engagement

To strengthen our community relationships through respect and reciprocity.



## People and enablers

To build a culturally intelligent institution that respects First Nations peoples, cultures and knowledges.

Our aim is to empower First Nations peoples by fostering a culturally intelligent institution that provides an environment where First Nations students, staff and communities will thrive, lead and shape the future.

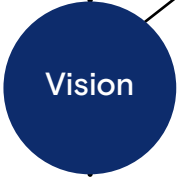
# Strategic plan

Australia's leading regional university advancing the careers of our students, inspiring research excellence, and driving regional outcomes with global impact.



*Yindyamarra winhanganha.*  
The wisdom of respectfully knowing how to live well in a world worth living in.

First Nations outcomes are everyone's business.



## Students

To empower students to thrive in their careers and communities, by delivering flexible, inclusive and industry-informed education that meets learners where they are.

## Research

To lead regionally focused research with global impact, by partnering with industry and communities to solve real-world problems, and nurture the next generation of scholars.

## Social responsibility

To enrich the social, cultural, and economic fabric of our regions, by walking alongside First Nations peoples, developing partnerships and engaging key stakeholders to drive regional progress.

## People and enablers

To enable our people and systems to deliver on our purpose, by fostering a safe, inclusive, and innovative environment that supports staff success, student outcomes and vibrant campuses.

## First Nations Students

To increase First Nations student success in higher education at all course levels, and prioritise cultural capability of all Charles Sturt students and graduates.

## First Nations Research

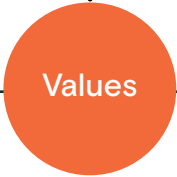
To invest in our First Nations researchers and enable excellence in First Nations research.

## First Nations Engagement

To strengthen our community relationships through respect and reciprocity.

## First Nations People and enablers

To build a culturally intelligent institution that respects First Nations peoples, cultures and knowledges.



### Insightful

Understanding people and the world



### Impactful

Outcome driven



### Inclusive

Stronger together

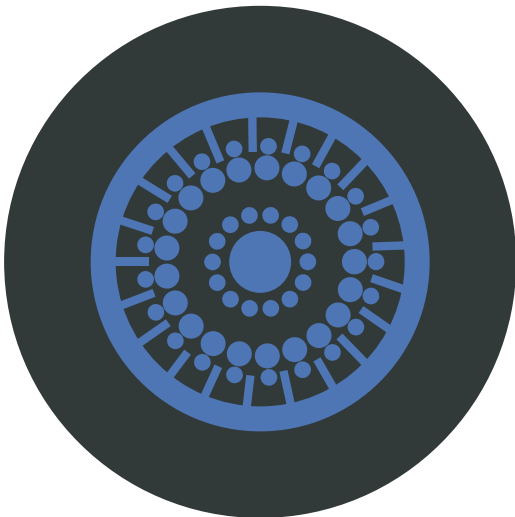


### Inspiring

Leading for the future



# Students



To increase First Nations student success in higher education at all course levels, and prioritise cultural capability of all Charles Sturt students and graduates.

We will increase First Nations student success across all levels of higher education, with a particular focus on participation in entry programs, supporting transitions into higher degrees by research and career and industry readiness. This includes improving transparency and access to scholarship funding, supporting First Nations HDR candidates and promoting inclusive teaching and learning environments that reflect and respect First Nations cultures, knowledges and perspectives.

To strengthen long-term outcomes, we will embed First Nations knowledges, perspectives and pedagogical approaches into curriculum design and delivery. This will enhance graduate capabilities, foster cultural capability, and ensure that First Nations students are supported throughout their educational journey, from entry to completion, within a culturally safe, inclusive and empowering university community.

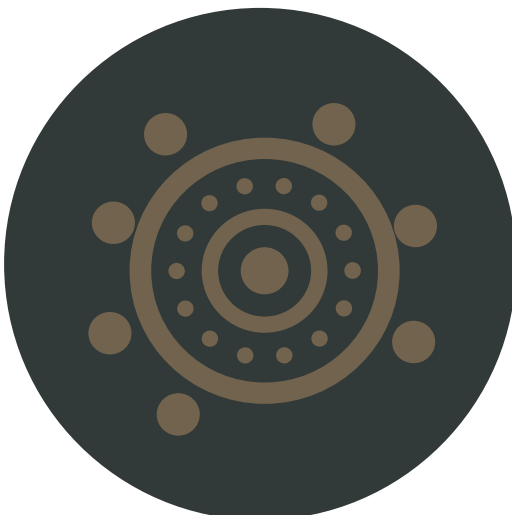
#### Benefits include:

- Overall improved enrolment, retention and completion rates.
- Career aspiration building and employment networking opportunities.
- Raising awareness of research career opportunities with undergraduate First Nations students.
- Improve completion rates of First Nations PhD's.
- Strengthen culturally appropriate research for community impact.
- Improved communication of scholarships to First Nations students.
- Clear approaches to embedding First Nations knowledge and perspectives in teaching and learning.
- Culturally capable graduates.



# Research

To invest in our First Nations Researchers across disciplines, and enable excellence in First Nations research throughout the university.



We will foster a research ecosystem that supports First Nations researchers across all disciplines to thrive across all stages of their career, with a particular focus on increasing progression from doctoral studies into research-focused careers. We are committed to retaining and developing First Nations researchers by enabling pathways to senior research leadership, and to growing First Nations-led research projects that enhance both leadership and scholarly engagement.

First Nations-led governance mechanisms will be embedded into institutional research processes to uphold ethical integrity and cultural capability. These mechanisms will align with the *AIATSIS Code of Ethics*, the *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP)*, and local First Nations protocols.

Central to this approach is our commitment to Indigenous Data Sovereignty and the protection of Indigenous Cultural and Intellectual Property (ICIP). These principles will guide how data and knowledge are collected, stored, shared and used, ensuring that First Nations peoples retain control over their cultural information and that research is conducted with transparency, respect and accountability.

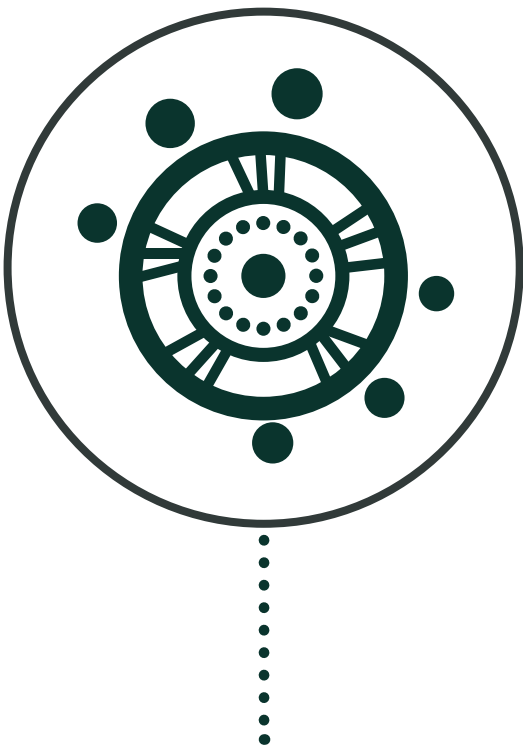
Through these processes, we will strengthen the capability of all researchers, both First Nations and non-First Nations, undertaking First Nations research, including those in supervisory roles with First Nations researchers, by fostering a culturally safe and methodologically rigorous research environments. We will also enhance the impact of First Nations research through its translation into policy, industry and community contexts, supporting self-determination, innovation and regional relevance.

### **Benefits include:**

- Engaging First Nations people in Early Career Research positions to develop their research acumen.
- Strengthening First Nations researchers' leadership capability.
- Increased visibility of First Nations researchers.
- Embedded First Nations research governance.
- Improved cultural integrity and ethical consideration in research.
- Improved researcher capability.
- A culturally safe research environment.
- First Nations research delivers impact for First Nations peoples and communities.



# Engagement



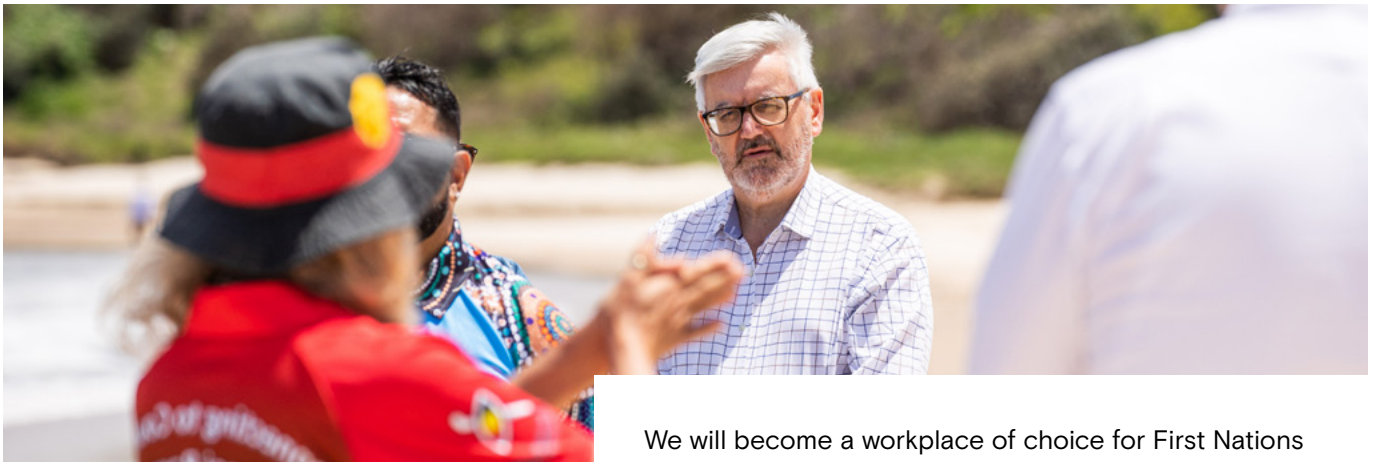
To strengthen our community relationships through respect and reciprocity.

We are committed to fostering a culturally safe and inviting institution that honours and respects First Nations cultures and knowledges, by strengthening and embedding cultural protocols and representation across all environments. Through this work, we will ensure First Nations perspectives are visibly and meaningfully reflected in the spaces we occupy and the systems we use, contributing to a more inclusive and respectful experience for students, staff, and community members.

We will strengthen respectful and reciprocal relationships with First Nations businesses, organisations, and community-controlled sectors, positioning the university as a visible and ethical ally within our regional footprint. This includes advancing respectful engagement and co-designing initiatives to ensure our partnerships are culturally appropriate and mutually beneficial. These efforts will support long-term partnerships to strengthen community trust, and reinforce our role as a committed partner in advancing First Nations priorities across education, research and regional development.

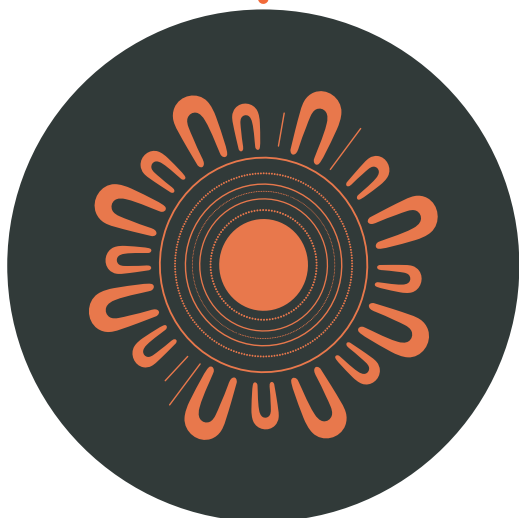
### Benefits include:

- Increased understanding and awareness of culturally significant landmarks on each campus.
- Increased visibility of First Nations culture and history on our physical and virtual environments.
- Increased partnership agreements with First Nations organisations and institutions.
- Social and economic uplift and development for First Nations businesses.
- Increased understanding of First Nations engagement protocols.
- Increased awareness and observance of dates of significance for First Nations people.
- Increase the university's external engagement with communities and First Nations organisations.



# People and enablers

To build a culturally intelligent institution that respects First Nations peoples, cultures and knowledges.



We will become a workplace of choice for First Nations peoples by strengthening our recruitment and development strategies, increasing opportunities for career development, developing internal processes to support growth for academics, enabling appropriate representation of First Nations peoples in decision-making, and improving the organisation's cultural capability and confidence.

To advance equity and inclusion for First Nations peoples, we are committed to achieving a minimum four per cent First Nations employment rate across all staff by 2030. This target reflects a broader strategic intent to embed First Nations representation meaningfully across the university. Key actions include enhancing recruitment mechanisms to attract and retain First Nations academics, with a particular focus on achieving national population parity at academic Levels C and D by 2030. Focus will be given to strengthening recruitment strategies at campuses where First Nations representation currently falls below population parity.

We will also invest in career development pathways that support First Nations staff to grow and thrive professionally, including the establishment of internal academic processes to nurture and promote talent. This will be enabled by First Nations voices being involved in decision-making processes, ensuring their perspectives are represented and influential in governance and strategic planning.

#### Benefits include:

- Improvement in First Nations staff retention and satisfaction.
- Inclusive decision making.
- Greater visibility and influence of First Nations leadership.
- Enhanced trust and engagement.
- Progress towards reconciliation.
- Progress towards a culturally intelligent institution.
- A more inclusive and respectful workplace culture.
- A culturally safe working environment.





First Nations outcomes are everyone's business.



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