



Charles Sturt
University

Joint Standing Committee
on Aboriginal and Torres
Strait Islander Affairs
Inquiry into economic self-
determination and
opportunities for First
Nations Australians

24 June 2024

Office of the Vice-Chancellor
Office of First Nations Engagement
Charles Sturt University

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Senator Jana Stewart
Chair
Joint Standing Committee on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs
PO Box 6021
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

By email: JSCATSIA@aph.gov.au

Dear Senator

Thank you for the opportunity to contribute to the Committee's inquiry into economic self-determination and opportunities for First Nations Australians.

Despite significant progress in recent decades, many First Nations people still face a variety of barriers to full economic self-determination and the opportunities it brings. Education is essential to overcoming these barriers. Higher education in particular can provide First Nations people with entry into the professions and the opportunity to apply their knowledge and skills to national, regional and local challenges such as building more sustainable and equitable communities, improving health care and outcomes, or helping the next generation on to the road to success.

Charles Sturt University has a proud history of increasing First Nations participation and attainment in higher education, helping First Nations students achieve their education and career goals, and working with First Nations groups and communities to build aspiration, improve education and health care outcomes, celebrate their history and culture, and share their deep knowledge with all Australians. A greater understanding of and appreciation for Indigenous knowledge, languages, history and culture is essential not only for First Nations people to achieve self-determination and equality of opportunity, but for the unfinished business of reconciliation and the ongoing work toward closing the gap.

The attached submission provides some information on First Nations participation and attainment in higher education and at Charles Sturt University in particular; initiatives at the University to improve participation and attainment; some recent developments in higher education policy relevant to the work of the Committee; and some options for further action.

Attached to the submission is a report from the Office of Pro Vice-Chancellor First Nations Engagement at Charles Sturt. The report, *Education and Employment Profile of First Nations in Western NSW*, provides a snapshot of tertiary education and employment outcomes for First Nations peoples in western New South Wales, as measured against several key national 'Closing the Gap' targets. We hope it will prove useful to the Committee.

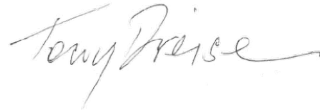
Later in 2024 the University will present a proposal to the Australian Government for a national demonstration project on building flexible pathways into the professions for First Nations students, using a combination of stackable microcredentials and other models. We would be happy to provide the Committee with more information on this proposal.

We would also welcome the opportunity to discuss any of the issues or ideas discussed in the submission at a public hearing. We would also like to invite the Committee to visit one of Charles Sturt University's six main regional campuses to see how we are working with First Nations peoples, communities and students.

Yours sincerely



**Professor Renée Leon PSM
Vice-Chancellor and President**



**Professor Tony Dreise
Pro Vice-Chancellor (First Nations
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Joint Standing Committee on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs Inquiry into economic self-determination and opportunities for First Nations Australians

About Charles Sturt University

Charles Sturt is Australia's largest regional university. We are a unique multi-campus institution with campuses in some of the most vibrant regional communities in New South Wales: Albury-Wodonga, Bathurst, Canberra, Dubbo, Goulburn, Orange, Port Macquarie, and Wagga Wagga. All have strong connections to surrounding communities.

Regional NSW is home to a significant proportion of Australia's First Nations peoples. Demographic data confirms that it will continue to be so in future, as will the region's significance in First Nations history and culture. The University works closely with First Nations peoples, groups, and communities to help more Indigenous students attain and succeed in higher education, and on projects such as First Nations entrepreneurship, constitutional reform, health care, and applying First Nations knowledge in land and water management.

Charles Sturt University's purpose and guiding principles are encapsulated in a Wiradjuri phrase, *yindyamarra winhanganha*, meaning 'the wisdom of respectfully knowing how to live well in a world worth living in'. It is about creating a world worth living in through quality teaching and learning, research with societal and economic impact, a vibrant and rewarding student experience, and community engagement, social responsibility, and sustainability initiatives.

In 2023 the University had around 35,000 students and more than 2,100 full time equivalent staff – significantly more, on both figures, than any other regional university. In fact Charles Sturt University is, by enrolment numbers, staff, and income, more comparable to mid-size metropolitan universities like Newcastle, La Trobe, Flinders, or the University of South Australia than other regional universities. What makes Charles Sturt different to other mid-size universities is that it is based in and conducts almost all of its operations in regional Australia – indeed, we are required to do so by our founding legislation. These basic characteristics – size, geography, and regional identity – make Charles Sturt University unique in the Australian higher education system.

Charles Sturt University is also one of Australia's largest providers of online education, meaning we have an essential role in boosting higher education participation and attainment not just in regional NSW but across the country. A high proportion of our on-campus and online students come from equity groups that have historically missed out on the opportunity of higher education: not just those from rural, regional and remote areas but students from First Nations (3.5 per cent of our students in 2023) and low socio-economic status (SES) backgrounds (18.3 per cent), and many who are the first in their family to attend university. Around half of the University's students belong to more than one of the equity groups identified by the Australian Government Department of Education.¹ Through award-winning student retention programs, we are making

¹ "Equity groups include students that: are from non-English speaking backgrounds (NESB); have a disability; are women in non-traditional areas; identify as First Nations; are from low SES (socioeconomic status) locations; and are from regional and remote locations." See [Department of Education Higher education student data collection: Section 11 Equity groups](#)

sure that more students from regional or disadvantaged backgrounds can succeed in their chosen field of study. And as a university with consistently high ratings for student satisfaction, employer satisfaction, graduate employment and graduate starting salaries, Charles Sturt has shown again and again that we can meet students' career aspirations and regional and national workforce needs, helping more Australians – and especially First Nations peoples – achieve a greater degree of economic self-determination than ever before.

First Nations students in Australian universities

Department of Education data² shows that the majority of the 3,671 First Nations student completions at Australian universities in 2022 were in four fields: Health (1,034), Society and Culture (1,170), Education (457) and Management and Commerce (420). Consistent with figures across the population as a whole, more First Nations women than men complete higher education award courses, though among First Nations people the difference is much higher: in 2022 women made up 68.2 per cent of all First Nations completions, compared to 61.5 per cent of all domestic student completions.

While these numbers are notably higher than was the case a decade ago, First Nations peoples are still under-represented in universities and in the professions. In higher education this situation has persisted despite multiple policy interventions.

For example, in 2012 the then Government introduced the Demand Driven System (DDS) for universities. DDS was intended to satisfy unmet demand among domestic students and improve access to higher education for First Nations people, students from poorer backgrounds, and those from rural and regional areas. First Nations people did benefit from DDS, with completions in most Fields of Education increasing twofold or more over 2012-22.³ During that period, though, higher education participation and attainment increased across the board, so while the number of First Nations students increased in some universities, they are still under-represented relative to the rest of the population. For more than a decade First Nations enrolments at Australian universities have remained at a constant level of about two per cent of all enrolments, well below the population parity level (3.7 per cent, according to the final report of the Australian Universities Accord).⁴

At Charles Sturt University, however, the proportion of First Nations students increased from 2.7 per cent to 4 per cent over the same time frame.⁵

One of the problems with DDS was that while it served to satisfy unmet demand it did not increase higher education aspiration among First Nations, low SES or regional and remote students. This was a key finding of a 2019 Productivity Commission analysis of DDS⁶, which also concluded that the under-representation of many equity groups in the higher education system was a consequence of their under-representation at the 'prestige' Group of Eight (Go8) universities.⁷ In the ten years after the introduction of DDS the proportion of First Nations students across Go8 universities barely increased (from 0.9 per cent to 1.3 per cent).⁸

² Department of Education Higher Education Statistics, [2022 Section 14 - Award course completions](#)

³ Department of Education, [Selected Higher Education Statistics – 2022 Student data Key Findings](#)

⁴ Australian Universities Accord – Final Report, p118

⁵ Department of Education Higher Education Statistics, [2022 Section 16 - Institutional Student Equity Performance Data, 2009 to 2022](#)

⁶ Productivity Commission, [The Demand Driven University System: A mixed report card](#), p10

⁷ Productivity Commission, p60

⁸ Department of Education Higher Education Statistics, [2022 Section 16 - Institutional Student Equity Performance Data, 2009 to 2022](#)

Poor policy design and lack of action by major universities means that there is still a long way to go in boosting higher education participation and attainment rates – and therefore participation in key sectors of the economy – for First Nations peoples. Unfortunately, there are even indications that the situation may be deteriorating: the Department of Education analysis underpinning this section notes that in 2022 First Nations student enrolments fell for the first time since 2006.⁹ Over 2021-22 enrolments dropped by three per cent and commencements by eight per cent. While this is consistent with a trend across all student cohorts, among First Nations people it will have a continuing impact on students' aspirations and on First Nations participation rates in many fields of employment.

The Department of Education's analysis also underscores the cumulative effect of disadvantage: 2002 commencements by First Nations students from regional and remote areas fell by 8.1 per cent compared to the previous year. For First Nations students from low SES backgrounds the figure is even higher: 11.7 per cent, more than almost any other equity group. The impact of cumulative disadvantage has also been highlighted in the reports produced by the Accord Panel.¹⁰

There are many factors driving the drop in higher education participation among First Nations and other domestic students. During the period covered by the data above the COVID-19 pandemic was still having a significant impact on Australia, on global and domestic economic activity, and on individual choices about study and work. Regardless of the drivers, however, the drop in First Nations commencements and completions reinforces the need to replace aspirational targets with carefully and collaboratively designed strategies to boost their participation and attainment.

First Nations students at Charles Sturt University

Charles Sturt University has a long and proud history of helping First Nations peoples succeed in higher education. Our current First Nations strategy¹¹ commits the University to continuing this success, with six strategic outcomes:

1. Increase First Nations people's success in higher education as students, graduates, researchers, and staff
2. Create a culturally safe university environment and implement measures to ensure continuous improvement
3. Commit to appropriate and diverse involvement of First Nations people in decision making
4. Promote university-wide understanding and engagement with First Nations ways of knowing, being and doing
5. Develop sustainable frameworks for First Nations research, engagement, and ethical conduct
6. Integrate Indigenous Australian studies and content into all courses

For each of these outcomes there are concrete actions and initiatives and a senior University staff member (including Deputy and Pro Vice-Chancellors, the Chief Financial Officer, directors of various organisational units, and Heads of Schools) accountable for reporting on progress. All six outcomes are consistent with many of the recommendations on First Nations higher education

⁹ Selected Higher Education Statistics, p6

¹⁰ Australian Universities Accord – Final Report, p123-124

¹¹ Charles Sturt university's First Nations Strategy 2023-25 can be found on the web pages of the [Office of First Nations Engagement](#)

participation and attainment put forward in the final report of the Australian Universities Accord, discussed below.

In 2022 First Nations peoples made up 4 per cent of all enrolments at Charles Sturt, compared to an average of 2.5 per cent across the whole higher education sector.¹²

In the same year, 202 First Nations students completed award courses (i.e. attained a degree or other qualification) at Charles Sturt, more than any other mainland university.¹³

The University's own data for 2024 shows that almost 88 per cent of First Nations students at Charles Sturt are enrolled in three Fields of Education (FOE):

- Health (342 students),
- Society and Culture (312 students) and
- Education (235 students).

By enrolment numbers, the most popular degree programs among First Nations students at Charles Sturt are:

- Bachelor of Nursing (154 students),
- Bachelor of Educational Studies (69),
- Bachelor of Health Science (Mental Health) (67),
- Bachelor of Social Work (56), and
- Associate Degree in Policing Practice (41).

These degrees are core requirements for entry into various professions (nursing, teaching, counselling, policing).

The University's data – and that from the Department of Education – show a strong preference among many First Nations students for degrees and careers with a strong impact on social and community welfare and well-being. These are careers subject to significant and persistent workforce shortages nation-wide and especially in regional areas. They are also projected to have strong employment growth in future.

Supporting and increasing First Nations people's participation and attainment in these FOEs and careers will be critical for meeting national and regional workforce shortages. Under current funding arrangements for universities, though, it is difficult for regional universities to educate people in the professions in numbers sufficient to meet regional needs. Some key programs, notably medicine, have a firm cap on the number of places available. In other disciplines the constraints are teaching space and equipment, the availability of clinical placements, and the amount of funding provided by the Commonwealth (generally well short of the actual cost of provision).

Infrastructure is also a significant challenge. Since 2012 there has been no dedicated public funding stream for university infrastructure. Large metropolitan universities can draw on cash reserves, donors or borrowings to upgrade or expand teaching spaces and other facilities. A few universities can obtain funding through the Northern Australia Infrastructure Facility. None of these options are viable for Charles Sturt, and without additional investment we will continue to operate under capacity constraints that mean we cannot educate new teachers, nurses, carers or other professionals in the numbers required.

¹² Department of Education Higher Education Statistics, [2022 Section 6 First Nations students](#)

¹³ Department of Education Higher Education Statistics, [2022 Section 14 Award course completions](#)

Charles Sturt University is nonetheless developing strategies and implementing programs to build more pathways into the professions for First Nations people. An important consideration is the differing needs and capabilities of First Nations students, discussed below. The design and delivery of the University's programs (and those that might be offered in future by state and federal governments) need to accommodate some important factors such as First Nations students' ages (equity students tend to be older than other students) and their family, carer, cultural, and career responsibilities. This means, for example, exploring options like stackable microcredentials in professional pathways degrees like nursing, to allow more students to access education as and when they can, or to continue working while they attain or upgrade their qualifications.

Another useful model is a combination of training/instruction and practical experience, the basis for Charles Sturt's highly successful Grow Your Own (GYO) and Collaborative Teacher's Aide Pathway (CTAP) programs. These programs help teacher's aides, Aboriginal Education Officers, and other classroom support personnel to become qualified teachers in a shorter time frame than a standard degree, all while continuing to work in their chosen profession. Both programs are available online, full time or part time; they provide learning support, professional development, and, importantly, some financial support. While these services are available to all students in the programs the University provides additional academic and financial support for First Nations students (who make up 10 per cent of the enrolments in GYO and 5.6 per cent of enrolments in CTAP), the latter possible in part because of a philanthropic donation that allows the University to provide small grants to rural First Nations students. Both programs have already proven to be an effective way to provide more teachers for regional schools.

The success of these and other programs at Charles Sturt offers an example and some important principles (especially around accessibility) for program and policy design and service delivery by governments, and for staff recruitment, retention, training and development by employers. Our experience shows that targeted support and flexible approaches to initial education, upskilling and professional development can help more First Nations students complete their studies, go on to rewarding careers in a range of fields, and build their professional skills and capabilities when they are in the workforce. On the basis of this experience the University is developing a proposal for stackable or modular microcredentials aimed at First Nations students and professionals and available online anywhere in the country.

Removing barriers to participation and attainment

Many of Charles Sturt University's students come from one or more of the equity groups identified by the Department of Education: rural, regional, and remote areas, certainly, but also low SES backgrounds, 'first in family', disabled, or non-English speaking backgrounds. The same can be said of our First Nations students, too. There is a measurable cumulative effect from different kinds of disadvantage on student progress, with those belonging to four or more equity categories progressing through their studies at around two-thirds the rate of those belonging to no equity category. In practical terms, students from disadvantaged backgrounds need more support to reach the same level of educational attainment as their peers. At Charles Sturt University we have had considerable success with our Embedded Tutors Program, an initiative which provides personal, timely, subject-specific feedback for students in selected first year undergraduate subjects. The embedded tutors are faculty-specific sessional staff with the capacity to enhance student learning and increase their understanding of subject-specific content. By providing direct support for students – especially those from disadvantaged backgrounds – the program increases students' confidence and helps them successfully complete their courses.

Efforts by the student retention team at Charles Sturt University have been recognised in the Australian Awards for University Teaching as providing a student experience that supports diversity and inclusive practices. These programs are an example of the University's commitment to boosting higher education participation and attainment, especially among First Nations peoples. They are, however, resource-intensive and expensive to run. External funding for this kind of program is limited, and the most recent federal Budget suggests that allocations for the Indigenous, Regional and Low-SES Attainment Fund (IRLSAF), one of the most important sources of funding for equity and participation programs, will fall in absolute and real terms over the next three financial years.

The Australian Universities Accord recommended a new funding model for, among other things, access and equity programs, including a loading factor to take account of the higher cost of delivery in regional areas. The Budget also confirmed, though, that this new model will not be introduced for at least another two years. In the short term, then, funding for initiatives like the Embedded Tutors program will remain limited, and the University will not be able to provide support to all the students who may need it.

The Australian Universities Accord

The Accord was the first comprehensive review of the Australian higher education system since 2008. Charles Sturt University was fully engaged with the Accord process from the outset, making submissions in response to the draft Terms of Reference, a discussion paper, and an interim report, and offering recommendations on key issues including First Nations participation and attainment. At a very early stage of the Accord process we advised the Panel that boosting participation and attainment would require deliberate and targeted investment in First Nations teaching and learning, research, career development and community engagement, especially as the purely aspirational approach arising from previous reviews had, as the data above shows, failed to result in any significant improvement in participation rates.

The final report of the Australian Universities Accord includes 29 findings and 47 recommendations, many directly related to boosting higher education participation and attainment among First Nations peoples and to their role in the higher education system.

Specifically, the Accord Panel found:

- greater participation in tertiary education learning, teaching and research “is an essential pathway to success for First Nations families and their communities, and is necessary for Closing the Gap”,
- a self-determination framework and First Nations leadership in policies, programs, funding and decision-making, within institutions and across the system as a whole, are essential to making First Nations peoples central to the higher education sector, and
- a strong tertiary education First Nations workforce in will help achieve these goals.

In response, the Panel recommended:

- a First Nations led review of higher education to provide proposals for national, system level changes, including, as a goal, greater self-determination for First Nations peoples in higher education teaching and research (Recommendation 34),
- a participation target for First Nations undergraduate students of 3.3 per cent by 2035 (Recommendation 10),

- a funding model for universities that includes “a per-student funding amount for under-represented students that recognises the cost of the additional support they need to succeed” (Recommendations 13 and 41),
- dedicated PhD scholarships and postdoctoral fellowships for First Nations researchers, to grow the pipeline of First Nations researchers in Australia (Recommendation 26),
- embedding First Nations knowledges in the National Science and Research Priorities to advance First Nations leadership, capacity building and self-determination (Recommendation 27),
- a First Nations Commissioner in the proposed Australian Tertiary Education Commission (ATEC) (Recommendation 30), as well as a First Nations advisory council for the body and an explicit expectation that the Commission would ‘strengthen First Nations representation and self-determination,
- improving the representation of First Nations people in university governance (Recommendation 35), and
- providing a Commonwealth Support Place for all First Nations students who apply to and meet the entry requirements for degrees in medicine (Recommendation 3).

There has been some action on a few of these recommendations. First Nations knowledges will underpin the revised National Science and Research Priorities. There are proposals in place on university governance and indications that ATEC will include First Nations representation. There are also promises of a new funding model – in time. Overall, though, on the key and in some instances very specific recommendations on boosting First Nations participation and attainment in higher education the Government has been largely silent. None of the Accord’s recommendations are addressed, for example, in the First Nations Education Policy fact sheet produced for the 2024-25 Budget.¹⁴

An analysis of the 2024 Budget by researchers at the University of Queensland and Queensland University of Technology found that much of the \$110 million pledged in the Budget for indigenous education “ignore[s] research that says we need to listen to Indigenous people when it comes to making policies that will have an impact on their lives.”¹⁵ They suggest that the pledge of \$18.2 million over four years to develop a new First Nations education policy “needs to result in a change in the way governments listen to Indigenous peoples when making funding allocations” and that “new announcements need to be backed by research and supported by the relevant peak bodies”, with provision for “independent, rigorous, Indigenous-led evaluation of new education programs” when the evidence isn’t available.

All of the recommendations put forward by the Accord Panel affect First Nations students to some extent. Charles Sturt University would like to draw the Committee’s attention to one of the broader recommendations in particular: to reduce student contributions to address the most significant impacts of the Job-ready Graduates (JRG) package (Recommendation 16). JRG increased student contributions for most courses in the Society and Culture FOE by 113 per cent, with students now responsible for paying 93 per cent of the putative cost of their degrees. As a result the costs of studying history, politics, anthropology, and, notably, Indigenous studies, as well as law, accounting business and economics have effectively been privatised.

As noted above, a high proportion of First Nations students at Charles Sturt and other universities are enrolled in courses in the Society and Culture FOE. These students will graduate with disproportionately high debts that do not, in fact, reflect the cost of their degree, and place them at

¹⁴ Department of Education, [2024-25 Budget: First Nations Education Policy fact sheet](#)

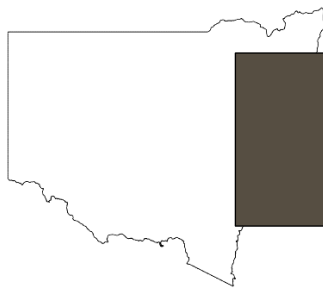
¹⁵ The Conversation, [There’s \\$110 million for Indigenous education in the budget. But where’s the evidence it will work?](#), 17 May 2024

a significant economic disadvantage compared to many of their peers. The Accord Final report confirms that JRG has failed to achieve its intended outcomes (other than increasing the financial burden on students). Its effects on the future economic self-sufficiency and opportunities for First Nations peoples are one of the many reasons why the JRG funding model should be scrapped immediately.

Some suggestions for the Committee

Drawing on all this information, Charles Sturt University suggests there are three things the Committee can do to enhance universities' ability, capability, and motivation to enrol more First Nations students and provide them with the support they need to complete their studies, reach their professional goals, and achieve greater levels of economic self-determination:

1. reinforce the need for First Nations people to be involved in the design, development, implementation and evaluation of policies and programs to improve education, employment and health outcomes,
2. express support for the First Nations recommendations in the final report of the Australian Universities Accord, and in particular urge the Government to adopt a needs-based funding model more quickly than they have proposed, and
3. recommend the development of an evidence base of successful initiatives, such as Charles Sturt University's CTAP and Embedded Tutor programs, that can help more First Nations people enter the professions.



Education and Employment Profile of First Nations in Western New South Wales (NSW)

This Research Brief has been developed by the Office of Pro Vice-Chancellor First Nations Engagement at Charles Sturt University. It provides a snapshot of tertiary education and employment outcomes for First Nations peoples in western New South Wales, as measured against several key national 'Closing the Gap' targets. The data are based on the National Census of 2021. Whilst the University's footprint is not limited to western NSW, the region represents the largest geographical part of the University.

According to the National Census of 2021, around 37,000 First Nations¹⁶ peoples lived in the region of western NSW, accounting for just over 10 per cent of the total population. The Indigenous share of the regional population is more than double the corresponding Indigenous share of the national population. More than half of the First Nations population of the western NSW region is under 25 years of age, which is consistent with the national picture. The following charts provide brief employment and tertiary education outcomes for the region's First Nations population in the context of three Closing the Gap targets, namely tertiary qualification, youth participation, and employment.

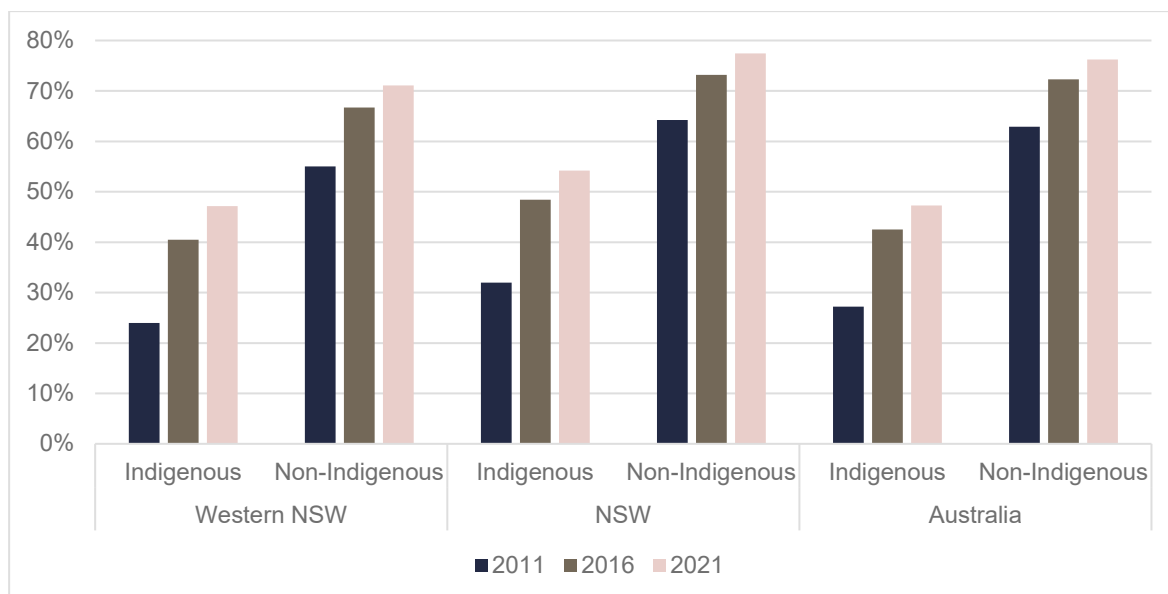
Tertiary qualifications

Closing the Gap target # 6: By 2031, increase the proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people aged 25–34 years who have completed a tertiary qualification (Certificate III and above) to 70%.

The proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people who have completed a tertiary qualification in Western NSW almost doubled over the decade to 2021, from 24% in 2011 to 47% in 2021 (Figure 1). However, the rate has remained much lower (by 24 percentage points) compared to the achievement rate for the non-Indigenous population in the region. It is also lower than the rate for the Indigenous population in NSW (by seven percentage points) but equivalent to the rate at the national level. Indigenous people aged 25-34 years in Western NSW have lower attainment rates than non-Indigenous persons at the regional, state and national levels.

¹⁶ Also defined as Indigenous or Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people

Figure 1 Percentage of 25–34-year-olds with tertiary qualifications

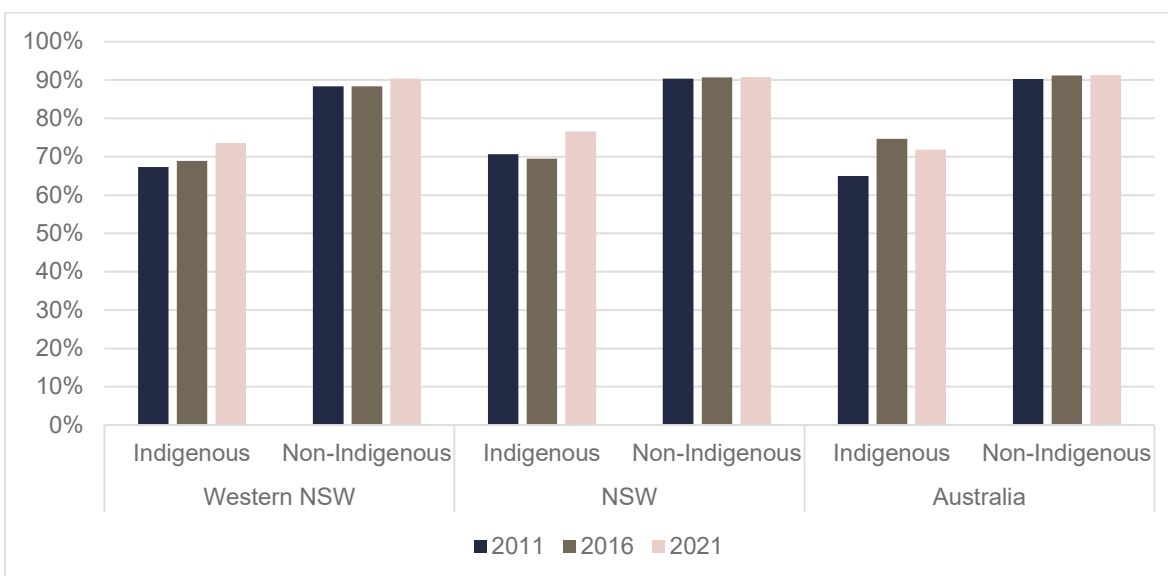


Youth participation rates

Closing the Gap target # 7: By 2031, increase the proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander youth (15-24 years) who are in employment, education or training to 67 per cent.

The share of the 15 to 25-year-old Indigenous population in Western NSW participating in employment, education or training increased by about eight percentage points between 2011 and 2021 whilst remaining much lower than the share for the non-Indigenous population (Figure 2). Almost 85-90 per cent of these young people are fully engaged, doing either full-time employment/full-time education/training, or combining part-time employment with part-time education/training. It is worth noting, however, that the participation rate is slightly lower than the NSW average but somewhat higher than the national average for the Indigenous population. First Nations youth aged 15-25 years participate at a much lower rate than their non-Indigenous counterparts at the regional, state and national levels.

Figure 2 Percentage of 15-24-year-olds engaged in employment, education or training

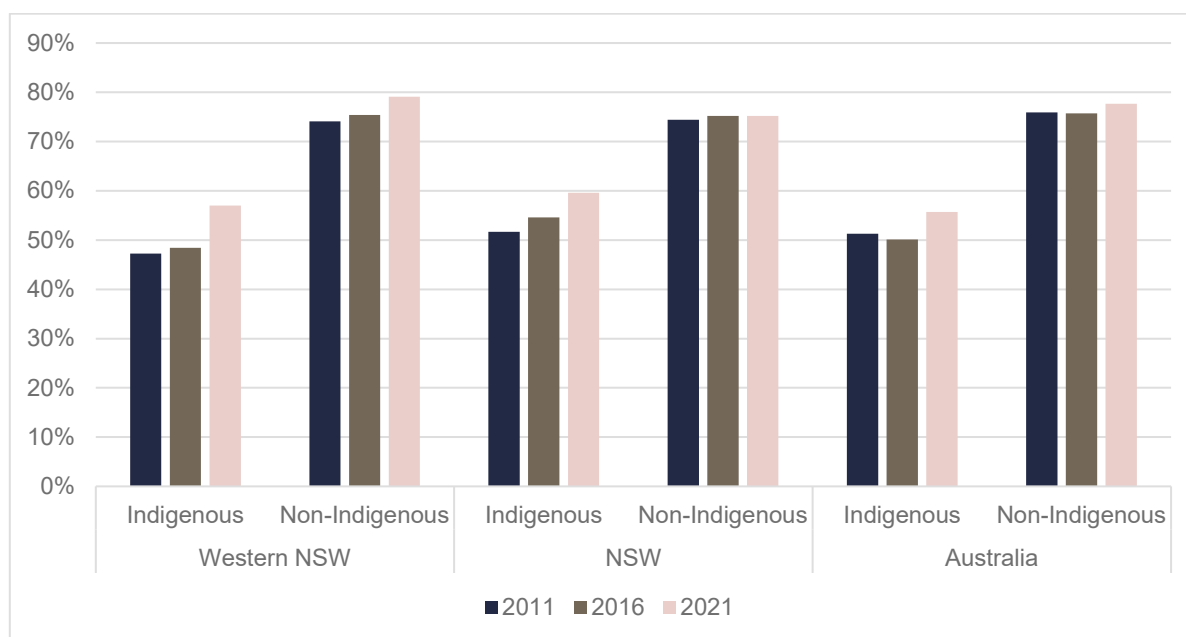


Employment rates

Closing the Gap target # 8: By 2031, increase the proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people aged 25-64 who are employed to 62 per cent.

For Indigenous persons aged 25-64 years in Western NSW, the population-to-employment rate increased by ten percentage points over the period 2011-2021 (Figure 3). However, the rate is lower compared with the rate for the Indigenous population in NSW (by four percentage points) and slightly higher than the rate for the population overall in Australia (by one percentage point). Compared with the non-Indigenous population in the same age group, Indigenous persons are only 0.7 times as likely to be in employment; this is equivalent to being twice as likely to be non-employed.

Figure 3 Percentage of 25-64-year-olds in employment



In summary

First Nations people in western NSW continue to encounter significant disparity in employment and education outcomes in comparison to those in urban areas and when compared to non-Indigenous peers. In short:

- First Nations people in the region are far less likely to hold a tertiary qualification (VET and/or higher education),
- First Nations youth participate in employment, training, and education at a much lower rate than their non-Indigenous counterparts at regional, state and national levels, and
- Compared with the non-Indigenous population, First Nations persons are twice as likely to be non-employed.

On a more positive note, there have been sizeable gains in education and employment for First Nations communities in western NSW over the past decade.