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IRU commits to being universities of choice for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students and staff

The seven Innovative Research Universities (IRU) committed to being the universities of choice for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students and staff, today at Parliament House, Canberra.

The IRU Statement of Intent sets out how the IRU members will implement a whole of university approach to improving outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students and building understanding of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspectives and knowledge.

“Higher education is crucial to addressing areas of disadvantage and ensuring successful outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. The 2014 Bridging the Gap Report shows the challenge is very real” Professor Dewar, IRU Chair and Vice-Chancellor of La Trobe University said

“IRU members’ history of engagement is why we currently educate 25% of Australia’s Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Students and employ 24% of Australia’s Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff. We are well ahead of the national figures in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander enrolments and completions, but the challenges remain to match State and National benchmarks for participation and completion”, Professor Dewar said.

The 2012 *Review of Higher Education Access and Outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People* made clear that the way ahead requires all parts of the university to take responsibility for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders outcomes.

“Our Indigenous units are essential elements but they cannot be responsible for all actions across the university. Rather they offer an important source of advice and a place of particular support for students and staff. We will follow through the actions in the Statement, involving all parts of our universities” Professor Dewar concluded.

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Innovative Research Universities (IRU) Statement of Intent

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Higher Education

The universities of the IRU acknowledge that we teach, learn and research on the traditional lands and waters of Indigenous peoples. We pay our respects to the traditional owners and custodians of the lands upon which our campuses are located and celebrate the significant contribution Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people make to our institutions.

We recognise the legitimacy of Indigenous Knowledge.

This statement signifies our commitment to building a diverse nation in which all of its citizens take pride in engaging with the world's oldest living cultures.

IRU members are committed to becoming *universities of choice for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students and staff*. To do this, we must now focus our efforts beyond the important and institutionally transformative work we perform with students and in workforce recruitment.

Accordingly, IRU Member universities will:

- honour and pay respect to the unique scholarship of Elders, traditional Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander holders of knowledge and knowledge systems and ensure that they are intrinsically involved in the development of university programs, research and policies;
- advance a whole-of-university strategy recognising the significance of Indigenous Departments as places of expertise which;
 - contribute to the successful academic lifecycle of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students; *and*
 - build and ensure appreciation and understanding of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspective throughout the entire university community;
- develop staff and students' cultural integrity and core competencies and understanding through ongoing, positive engagement between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and non-Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander members of the university and wider community;
- appoint senior Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to positions that have influence on strategy, policy and advocacy across all core business of the University;
- focus efforts on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander student and staff retention and success;
- increase the number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples moving into and completing postgraduate study and research;
- create a study environment that encourages Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander post graduate students to engage in collaborative research with local communities that can provide evidence of impact, progression and change in their state of well-being and development;

- provide high quality, culturally safe and affirming landscape, office, study and support spaces for Indigenous staff, students and community to foster Indigenous intellectual leadership capacity and capability;
- increase Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander participation in co-curricular activities and campus communities, including participation in student mobility, work experience and placements, social and sporting activities and student representative bodies responsible for student policy formation and implementation;
- promote learning, teaching and research that incorporates and is directed towards the privileging of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander knowledge systems, knowledges, perspectives and issues; *and*
- encourage robust community engagement strategies that develop appreciation of the particular bodies of knowledge and needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, both those local to the university and those throughout Australia.

We will achieve these priorities by advancing a whole-of-university approach, underpinned by determined leadership from Vice-Chancellors and their Senior Executives, and with strategies developed in consultation with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff, students and local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.

24 February 2014

Professor John Dewar
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President
La Trobe University

Professor Michael Barber
Vice-Chancellor &
President
Flinders University

Professor Ian O'Connor
Vice-Chancellor &
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Griffith University

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