

Indigenous Student Success Program

2021 Performance Report

Organisation	Charles Darwin University		
Contact Person	Professor Reuben Bolt		
Phone	(08) 89466 060	E-mail	reuben.bolt@cdu.edu.au

Background and Context

Charles Darwin University (CDU) is the university *of* and *for* the Northern Territory. It has a history of deep engagement with First Nations peoples and is immensely proud of its efforts that result in positive impacts on First Nations outcomes. This has continued over the reporting period however, we have experienced some key challenges related to the COVID-19 pandemic and the transition to a new management structure under the leadership of the incoming CDU Vice-Chancellor and President, Professor Scott Bowman. Under Professor Bowman's leadership several key milestones were achieved/delivered including the development of the *CDU Strategic Plan 2021-2026* (henceforth *The Strategic Plan*) which was launched at the CDU Waterfront Campus in September 2021. At this launch, the Vice-Chancellor confirmed his commitment to First Nations issues by announcing that the PVC Indigenous Leadership role would be elevated to Deputy Vice-Chancellor First Nations Leadership on the 1st of October 2021. CDU was the third university in the history of the Tertiary Education sector in Australia to make such an appointment.

Whilst we have continued to experience the challenges associated with the COVID-19 pandemic over the reporting period, we have successfully pivoted to The Strategic Plan which consists of a refreshed focus on First Nations initiatives culminating in the development of the First Nations Leadership Core Plan. This plan is one of six stated Core Plans that forms the substance of The Strategic Plan. Thus, we successfully consolidated the Indigenous Leadership Strategy (launched in November of 2020) into the First Nations Leadership Core Plan retaining key initiatives and targets, whilst aligning goals with new University structures in governance and staffing.

1. Enrolments (Access)

1.1. Existing Strategies/Programs to Improve Access

Over the course of the reporting period CDU continued to deliver a range of existing embedded programs designed to improve access for First Nations students. This included: 1) the Preparation for Tertiary Success program (PTS); 2) the Tertiary Enabling Program (TEP); 3) the First Nations Pre-Program in Law; and 4) ISSP Scholarships.

1.1.1 Preparation for Tertiary Success (PTS) program

The PTS program was delivered in partnership with Batchelor Institute of Indigenous Tertiary Education (BIITE). Whilst the program is owned by the College of Indigenous Futures, Education and the Arts, it is delivered by BIITE Lecturers on the Casuarina campus. PTS enrolment data for Semesters 1 and 2, 2021, remained predominantly stable with only a slight increase (see table 1 below). Trend data shows that PTS enrolment for Semester 1 is significantly higher than for Semester 2. This is due to Semester 1 students requiring additional support. As part of the enrolment process students are assessed to determine which program they should enrol in, with many of our students not having the requisite literacy and numeracy skills to complete the shorter version of the program, and therefore require additional support to complete. As part of the 2021 PTS orientation, students visited CDU's First Nations Students Services (FNSS) Centre, *Gurinbey* at the Casuarina Campus, Darwin.

Table 1: 2019-2021 Preparation Tertiary Success Enrolment Data

PTS SUCCESS PROGRAM 2019			PTS SUCCESS PROGRAM 2020			PTS SUCCESS PROGRAM 2021		
SEMESTER	COURS E	No. of STUDENTS	SEMESTER	COURS E	No. of STUDENTS	SEMESTER	COURSE	No. of STUDENTS
1	PTS 1	35	1	PTS 1	42	1	PTS 1	35
	PTS 2	14		PTS 2	6		PTS 2	9
Total Sem1		49	Total Sem1		48	Total Sem1		44
2	PTS 1	24	2	PTS 1	18	2	PTS 1	27
	PTS 2	18		PTS 2	9		PTS 2	5
Total		42	Total		27	Total		32
Total		91	Total		75	Grand Total		76

1.1.2 Tertiary Enabling Program (TEP)

The Tertiary Enabling Program (TEP) is designed to support and improve access for all students i.e., not only First Nations students. However, the aim of TEP is similar to PTS, in that, it lays the foundation for tertiary studies, and upon successful completion students have the opportunity to transition to degree education at CDU (see table below). There are significant numbers of First Nations students enrolled in TEP. In 2020, there was a significant increase in enrolments during the COVID-19 pandemic compared to pre COVID-19 enrolment numbers in 2019. However, in 2021, we did experience a decrease in enrolment numbers when compared to 2020 figures. Those 2021 figures were reflective of 2019 figures.

Table 2: 2019-2021 Tertiary Enabling Program (TEP) Enrolment Data

TERTIARY ENABLING PROGRAM 2019			TERTIARY ENABLING PROGRAM 2020			TERTIARY ENABLING PROGRAM 2021		
SEMESTER	COURSE	No. of STUDENTS	SEMESTER	COURSE	No. of STUDENTS	SEMESTER	COURSE	No. of STUDENTS
1	TEP	75	1	TEP	107	1	TEP	75
2	TEP	60	2	TEP	89	2	TEP	72
Total		135	Total		196	Total		147

1.1.3 First Nations Pre-Law Program

Consistent with 2020 delivery, CDU's Asia Pacific College of Business and Law (APCBL) delivered the Pre-Law Program. It commenced with 22 students, making it the most significant intake since it was re-established in 2018. The age-range of the students was 17 to mid-60s. The students travelled from various locations including Alice Springs, Ramingining, Gove, Katherine, Weipa, Kalkarindji, Townsville, Fitzroy, Wyndham and the Greater Darwin area. Only one student withdrew from the program (due personal reasons) equating to a total of 21 students successfully completed the program. At the completion of the program 91% of the students (n=20) applied for HE and VET qualifications within the College. 82% students (n=18) applied to the Bachelor of Law degree whilst the other 2 applied outside the law discipline area: i.e. in Certificate IV in Leadership and Management and Certificate III in Accounting Administration. Only one of the students that successfully complete the Pre-Law Program, did not continue with study. This is a great outcome of the program given that increasing First Nations Lawyers in the Northern Territory is crucial to ensure diversity within the legal profession, and to reflect the Northern Territory community (where Indigenous people make up 30% of the population). First Nations peoples are also grossly over-represented in the Northern Territory justice system.

Table 3: CDU Pre-Law Program Completion Rates

Year	Students Commencing	Students completed	Percentage (%)
2019	17	14	82%
2020	12	9	75%
2021	22	21	95%

In 2019 (i.e., pre COVID-19) 17 students commenced the program. However, in 2020, this number declined due to the COVID-19 pandemic (n=12). Completion rates were down for both years with only 75% of students completing for the 2020 cohort compared to 82% for 2019. In 2021, we experienced a significant increase in students enrolling in the program (n=22), with 95% completing the program. This is a significant completion rate.

Unfortunately, the APCBL did not deliver the Pre-Accounting Program it had initially scheduled for delivery in December 2021. Instead, it opted to hold off on the 'December' delivery, in favour of delivering one month later which was at the same time as the Pre-Law Program - i.e., in January 2022. The APCBL had also planned to deliver the inaugural Pre-Business Program in 2021. However, it was deemed beneficial to deliver this Pre-Program at the same time as the other two First Nations Pre-Programs so that students could have a cohort experience, and opportunity to network with peers across disciplines. As a result of this the APCBL had delivered the Pre-Law program for 2021, and not any other pre-program.

1.1.4 ISSP Scholarships

The CDU Scholarships Office has worked in collaboration with the First Nations Student Success Team to administer the ISSP scholarships to CDU First Nations Students. In 2021, a total of 137 scholarships were processed for a total spend of \$240,000.00 (see table 4 below). Scholarships are integral to the costs of living and investment in education related expenses, and thus, continue to make a positive impact on the success of our students regardless of their level of study, location, gender or age.

Table 4: ISSP Scholarships - breakdown of 2021 payments¹

	Education Costs		Accommodation		Reward		Total ²	
	\$	No.	\$	No.	\$	No.	\$	No.
Enabling ³	24,000	12	3,000	1	1,000	1	28,000	14
Undergraduate ⁴	170,000	85	24,000	8	8,000	24	202,000	117
Post-graduate ⁵	10,000	5	-	-	400	1	10,400	6
Other	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	0
Total	204,000	102	27,000	9	9,400	26	240,400	137

1.2. New Strategies/Programs to Improve Access

1.2.1 Bidjipidji School Program for NT-Based First Nations Senior High School Students

CDU developed and delivered the inaugural Bidjipidji School Camp in 2021, attracting 35 First Nations students from seven high schools across the NT. The camp provided a culturally safe university-taster experience for year 10, 11 and 12 First Nations students to build higher education aspirations through the First Nations Leadership portfolio in partnership with CDU Colleges and Student Engagement staff. Students attended the CDU Open Day event, toured CDU's Indigenous-led facilities and participated in engagement activities provided by experienced facilitators, and professional and academic staff over a comprehensive five-day program. The name 'Bidjipidji' is a Larrakia word for dragonfly which is a symbol of enlightenment and illumination. We believe that students will experience this when they attend the program for the first time.

The Bidjipidji School Camp supported First Nations students who participated from across the NT, including East Arnhem, Galiwin'ku (Elcho Island), Tiwi Islands, Katherine, and Central Australia. The reach of this program enabled CDU to develop important stakeholder partnerships in building aspirations and pathways to higher education. Evaluation outcomes confirmed students perceived a marked increase in their own abilities to pursue further education and felt that they 'belonged' at university. Changing student perception and access are key objectives of this HEPPP-funded program. Bidjipidji School Camp supports CDU's commitment to prioritising and growing our reach and impact across the NT and making a difference to First Nations students, ensuring we create an experience where they can connect and succeed.

1.2.2 The Remote Aboriginal Teacher Education Program (RATE)

The Remote Aboriginal Teacher Education (RATE) program builds the capacity of existing Aboriginal educators in remote and very remote educational settings, creating opportunities for Aboriginal educators to become qualified teachers. It was trialled successfully in second semester of the reporting year across five locations. Our Tutorial Support program provided qualified tutors for 18 RATE students in their home communities. 12 students successfully completed and graduated from the Undergraduate Certificate Remote Educators course, in 2021.

1.3. Other Broad Strategies/Programs to Improve Access

We have implemented a range of broad strategies that are aimed at improving access.

1.3.1 Partnering with Aspire to visit NT Schools

CDU's Team Aspire delivered a Year 12 Kickstarter Program at the beginning of Term 1, 2021 to help students get into the mindset for year 12. The students were offered coaching by Team Aspire using the Coaching Young People for Success model. The Year 11 Camp took place in the October school holidays with students travelling from Alice Springs, Tennant Creek, Katherine, Nhulunbuy and the greater Darwin area (including Palmerston and Humpty Doo) and were accommodated at International House Darwin (IHD) at our Casuarina Campus. Students learnt about different study disciplines, including Nursing, Horticulture, Health Science, Visual Arts and Creative Writing. They also visited Parliament House and Menzies School of Health and spent time with the student recruitment team to learn about the range of pathways to study. In October, Team Aspire staff travelled to schools in Katherine, Alice Springs, and the local area to promote Aspire applications for 2022.

The Aspire Year 12 Graduation was held online in November due to COVID-19 travel restrictions. By the end of the year, Team Aspire had created information packs and distributed them to local schools and politicians to raise awareness about the program. For the 2021 reporting year Team Aspire engaged 58 students, of which 36% were First Nations students (n=21). 21 is a significant increase from the 13 First Nations students that Team Aspire engaged in 2020.

Table 5: Team Aspire Program – number of Indigenous students engaged

Year	Number of students engaged	Number of Indigenous students	Percentage of Indigenous students	Year level	Number of high schools partnered with across the NT
2019	60	14	23%	10,11 & 12	19
2020	46	13	28%	11 & 12	19
2021	58	21 ¹	36%	11 & 12 ²	17 ³

1.3.2 Engagement with First Nations Communities

The Office of the Deputy Vice-Chancellor First Nations Leadership embarked on a series of engagements with communities across the NT, including the Wuyagiba Study Hub, Anindilyakwa Land Council, Tangentyere Council, Northern Territory Indigenous Business Network and Larrakia Nation Aboriginal Corporation. CDU Research Institutes and Colleges continue to engage with First Nations communities in the Northern Territory, to build CDU's reputation as an institution with a track record of quality engagement with First Nations communities, and thus further enhances our reputation as the University for First Nations education, training and research.

¹ At the start of 2021, the Aspire Program had 21 Indigenous students. Due to various reasons some students exited the program as they left the Northern Territory education system.

² Students were mostly in Year 11 and 12 with one Year 10 student in Tennant Creek. The Program covers extensive distances to promote and recruit new students. Schools visited were Alice Springs; Tennant Creek; Katherine; Nhulunbuy; Laynhapuy Homelands School; Darwin; and Palmerston.

³ During this period, Aspire Team partnered with several high schools from various remote and regional areas. These are: Alice Springs – Centralian College; St Phillips and Our Lady of the Sacred Heart College; Tennant Creek – Tennant Creek High; Katherine – Katherine High School and St Josephs; Nhulunbuy – Nhulunbuy High School and Laynhapuy Homelands School; Darwin – Darwin High School; Palmerston High School; Casuarina Senior College; Taminmin College; Haileybury Rendall School; Good Shepherd Lutheran College; Northern Territory School of Distance Education; St John's Catholic Senior College and Glossop High School South Australia.

This will nurture an environment that makes CDU more accessible to First Nations peoples, particularly in the Northern Territory.

Significantly, the Deputy Vice-Chancellor First Nations Leadership is the Executive Owner of two of the six named Core Plans within the CDU Strategic Plan 2021-2026. These are the 'First Nations Leadership Core Plan' and the 'Engagement and Partnerships Core Plan'. The latter provides a framework for nurturing an engagement culture across CDU as we embark on engaging with our key stakeholders including First Nations communities, NGOs and businesses.

1.3.3 Online videos translated into Aboriginal Languages

The College of Indigenous Futures, Education and the Arts implemented a HEPPP funded program over the course of the reporting period, to ensure First Nations student access to university is much easier. The project featured the development of videos in English, Yolngu Matha and Walpiri and provided information about how to access Learnline, the CDU calendar, Learning Materials, Discussion Board, Online Classroom (collaborate), Assessment and Support Services.

1.3.4 Expanding the First Nations Pre-Discipline Offerings

Discussions have begun across CDU regarding the expansion of pre-discipline programs. As discussed earlier in this report, the Asia Pacific College of Business and Law delivered the Pre-Law Program at the beginning of 2021 and made the decision to expand their pre-discipline program offerings to include Accounting and Business. The Deputy Vice-Chancellor First Nations Leadership has had discussions with CDU College Deans about developing more First Nations focused Pre-Programs. This includes Pre-Programs within:

- The College of Indigenous Futures, Education and the Arts;
- The College of Human Health Sciences;
- The College of Nursing and Midwifery; and
- The College of Information Technology and Engineering.

Expanding the number of First Nations Pre-Programs across all Colleges (where applicable) at CDU will ensure First Nations students have a range of options to consider prior to enrolling in specific degree programs. And significantly, more options will allow First Nations students to think more broadly about their future career trajectories.

1.3.5 Reinvigorating the Regions of the NT

Soon after the Vice-Chancellor commenced in the role in April 2021, he clearly articulated his vision that CDU was the university 'of' and 'for' the Northern Territory. He focussed on a goal to expand the CDU footprint and to ensure there is positive impact on the Northern Territory, and importantly on the lives of Territorians. This is critically important given that First Nations peoples consist of around 30% of the total population of the Northern Territory, and in some areas, 100%. To achieve the goal of reinvigorating the regions, the Vice-Chancellor announced a range of new roles that would lead regional development. These were the Associate Vice-Chancellor Central Australia Region (based in Alice Springs) and the Associate Vice-Chancellor Big Rivers Region (based in Katherine). By the end of 2021, the Vice-Chancellor announced that CDU would invest in the establishment of the Associate Vice-Chancellor East Arnhem Region (based in Nhulunbuy). This commitment to regional development ensures that CDU has a leadership presence in the regions to support local delivery that meets local needs; and given that some of these regions have significant First Nations populations, CDU will be well placed to serve the needs of First Nations communities.

2. Progression (Outcomes)

2.1. Existing Strategies/Programs to Improve Progression

CDU's strategies, activities and programs to improve progressions of First Nations students builds on the current program to-date. This can be traced back to a significant Gillard Government investment in the Blue 2 precinct in 2012. This investment included a dedicated Student Support Centre for First Nations Students, Ceremonial Spaces, offices, teaching spaces and tutorial rooms. The investment also included residential accommodation for students that travel for compulsory course-related activities, and the production of bespoke off-road semi-

trailers known as Mobile Adult Learning Units (MALUs) to deliver training and education in remote and very remote locations. All of these facilities are still in use and continue to be critical to the success of First Nations students studying at CDU.

2.1.1 Dedicated First Nations Student Centres

Perhaps the most critical strategy for First Nations progression is the establishment of dedicated First Nations Student Support Centres. At CDU there are two such Centres: one is located on the Alice Springs campus (*the Akaltje Centre*); and the other is located on the Casuarina Campus in Darwin (*Gurimbey*). Each Centre offers a culturally enriched and safe environment, where students have access to many educational resources and support staff. Our First Nations Student Services team consist of 13 employees, with 12 of those employees identifying as a First Nations person. Under our relatively new management team, emphasis has been placed on providing a culturally appropriate recruitment process, to increase a higher representation and presence of Indigenous employees within the Centres.

Each Semester, existing and prospective students are regularly provided with an overview of CDU’s student support amenities and the two Centres. Students are introduced to the facilities, staff, and shown how they can access supplementary assistance through mentoring, pastoral care, academic guidance and critical programs such as the Away From Base program, Tutorial Support program and ISSP Scholarships Program.

2.1.2 Indigenous Academic Skills Workshop

The First Nations Student Support (FNSS) team delivered the Indigenous Academic Skills Workshop (IASW) at the beginning of both Semesters 1 and 2, during the reporting year. Whilst the 2021 sessions were similar to the 2020 sessions, the evaluations were quite different. For 2020, the participants rated the ‘Q&A with Indigenous Student Ambassadors’ as the ‘most useful’ session, followed by ‘Learnline’ and the ‘Academic Language and Learning sessions – Peer Assisted Study Sessions (PASS)’. For 2021 the students still considered the ‘Q&A with Indigenous Student Ambassadors’ as the most useful session, however, the second and third most useful sessions were quite different with a majority of the participants rating the ‘Critical Thinking, Reading and Writing’ session and ‘Essay Writing and Analysis Tasks’ as the next highest rank. The latter 2 sessions were not considered in previous years (see table below).

In addition to the surveys, anecdotal evidence indicates that new students are very appreciative of the workshop including the introduction to First Nations Leadership staff, and information about other parts of the University they can access including learning support they may need on their academic journeys.

Table 6: 2020 and 2021 Indigenous Academic Skills Workshop* ranking

Ranking	2020	2021
First	Q&A with Indigenous Student Ambassadors (95%)	Q&A with Indigenous Student Ambassadors (73%)
Second	Learnline 101 (81%)	Critical Thinking Reading & Writing (57%)
Third	Academic Language and Learning Session – ‘Peer Assisted Study Sessions (PASS)’ (79%)	Essay Writing & Analysing tasks / Navigating Library Resources / Mindfulness (52%)

* From 2022 the program was renamed First Nations Skills Workshop (FNSW) in line with the current portfolio name.

2.2. New Strategies/Programs to Improve Progression of First Nations Students

2.2.1 Getting Back on Track Grant

In 2021 FNSS implemented for the first time the ‘Getting Back on Track’ grant. This initiative was developed to address what had been a particularly difficult period for students undertaking study during the COVID-19 pandemic. In many cases, this hindered their ability to successfully complete their course of study. To assist

students to get back on track, FNSS offered students who were formally on the under-progression list for 2020 an opportunity to be awarded \$200 for each unit of study they successfully completed in Semester 1, 2021. In total, 29 students accessed the grant. 12 students passed one unit, 10 passed two units, two passed three units, and one had passed four units. Unfortunately, four students did not respond, and therefore did not pass any of their unit/s (see table below).

Table 7: Getting Back on Track Grant – number of students who passed units

Number of students who passed	Number of units passed
12	1
10	2
2	3
1	4
4	0

2.2.3 First Nations Student Community Learnline

The FNSS team delivered for the first time in 2021, a Learnline platform dedicated to the First Nations Student community. Learnline is the CDU online learning platform used as a formal communication tool for Higher Education students. The main objective of the FNSS Learnline site was to share important updates, job opportunities, scholarships and community and student engagement events. It was accessed 82 times in its inaugural delivery year (see table below).

Table 8: Number of student interactions with information posted to CDU's First Nations Student Community Learnline site.

Year	Announcements	Content	Discussion Board	Total
2021	12	52	18	82

2.2.4 Tutor Support

The Tutor Support Program has again proven to be an invaluable program that plays a pivotal role in increasing student learning and progression.

Table 9: Tutor Support provided in 2021

Level of study	Number of unique students assisted ⁶	Total number of tutorial sessions attended ⁷	Total hours of assistance ⁸	Expenditure ⁹ (\$)
Enabling	36	355	874	\$55,496
Undergraduate	149	4423	8482	\$520,950
Postgraduate	11	200	325	\$20,340
Other	44	896	1973	\$126,232
Total	240	5,874	11,654	\$723,016

In 2021, the program was accessed by 240 Higher Education Students and casually employed 156 qualified tutors, of which 23 identified as First Nations. The Tutor Support team implemented a reporting mechanism for each semester to better understand student/tutor satisfaction, performance quality and early identification of at-risk students. The team then developed supportive practices and made the necessary adjustments to the program. Students that accessed the Tutor Support Program over the reporting period, rated on average 8 or higher for the quality of their tutors, with 66.3% rating their tutor the maximum score of 10.

The FNSS team worked in partnership with the College of Nursing and Midwifery to develop a model designed to increase the progression and success rates of 1st year First Nations Midwifery students. A pool of tutors were identified specifically for this cohort to deliver structured group and individual tutoring and weekly group zoom

sessions based on subject matter. The College of Nursing and Midwifery worked closely with the tutors to provide a holistic approach to student support. As a result of this, the students thrived on group dynamics.

2.3. Other Broad Strategies/Programs to Improve Progression of First Nation Students

2.3.1 Ongoing Evaluations

CDU adopts several approaches to measure program performance and sustainability and its relationship to student retention and success, such as program evaluation, student surveys designed for student experience feedback, and administrative and quantitative data sets to calculate and determine retention and grading outcomes. A key measure we use is the Net Promoter Score which we implemented for the first time in 2021. The data captured is more broadly focussed, however data specifically related to First Nations students and staff can be tracked. In 2021, our Management Team reviewed the staffing profile of our First Nations Leadership portfolio and the nuanced needs of our First Nations Student cohorts to better inform our recruitment processes and targets into 2022. We routinely survey First Nations students and community who attend and participate in our various engagement events and activities across the calendar year.

2.3.2 Development of the Intercultural Program

CDU developed and piloted a refreshed Intercultural program during the 2021 reporting year. This program will replace the existing online cultural competence program and includes several modules that are micro-credentialled. This program of work, in conjunction with the refreshed Reconciliation Action Plan (RAP), will make a significant contribution to our future development of an Anti-Racism and Cultural Safety framework.

3. Completions (Outcomes)

3.1. Existing Strategies/Programs to Increase Award Course Completions

3.1.1 Internal Partnerships

A key strategy FNSS implemented to improve award course completions in 2021, is strengthening partnerships with internal stakeholders. FNSS attended numerous meetings with colleges and other business areas from across the university to build upon existing partnerships and create new partnerships, to ensure there is visibility of FNSS across the university. As a regional university, the transitional nature of our staffing profile across CDU impacts the need to continue with these dedicated approaches.

3.1.2 Consistent Student Engagement

The First Nations Student Services team continued with the strategy of engaging with Indigenous students on a regular basis at least twice each semester for each student. Further strategies to improve the existing student engagement model are under consideration. In the reporting period, FNSS commenced development of a Pre-Under Progression – Colleges Engagement Process Flowchart to assist in early intervention to prevent students falling under progression and a consistent approach across colleges.

Table 10: CDU First Nations HE Course Completions, including Enabling Course Completions

By Narrow Course Type	Completions				
	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
Enabling	35	39	47	55	56
UG Short Course					13
Sub-bachelor	6	9	9	12	12
Undergraduate	20	38	28	40	40
Postgraduate CW	4	4	6	13	12
Research		2	2	1	1

3.1.3 Indigenous Valedictory Ceremonies: Celebrating Indigenous Completions and Success

During 2021, CDU's in-person graduation ceremonies returned to Darwin and Alice Springs. The celebration of First Nations student success and completion of awards is a focus of our portfolio and we again hosted specific Indigenous Valedictory Ceremonies in 2021. First Nations Student Services coordinate intimate, semi-formal gatherings where First Nations students brought their families (and extended families) to witness them receiving an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander-inspired stoles to wear at their upcoming formal CDU graduation ceremonies. The numbers of students electing to attend the Indigenous Valedictory Ceremonies is steadily increasing.

3.2. New Strategies/Programs to Increase Award Course Completions

3.2.1 A Focus on Quality of the Tutor Support Program

Throughout 2021 the FNSS team focused on improving the quality of the Tutorial Support Program and identified key focus areas for improvement. This includes:

- Securing a more culturally competent tutor pool. We require tutors to demonstrate (in writing) their understanding and experience working with First Nations learners and communities. We developed and delivered a tutor workshop to on-board tutors with a particular focus on operational rules and cultural competency training;
- Developing a more robust tutor database to improve efficiencies in delivery and administration.
- System enhancement to increase productivity demonstrated by faster turnaround times per student application;
- Ongoing and increased engagement with stakeholders in rural and remote regions of the Northern Territory, and working in collaboration with CDU Colleges, remote education initiatives and remote community councils and organisations to strengthen the service delivery and ability of the Tutorial Support Team to meet the aspirations of remote First Nations students and their communities.

The Tutor Support program introduced a strategy to increase the success rates of Indigenous students undertaking LANTITE testing in Literacy and Numeracy. LANTITE testing is a compulsory requirement for students enrolled in the Bachelor of Education to graduate as a practicing teacher in the public school system. This can be particularly challenging for First Nations students, especially for students where English is not their first language. The College of Indigenous Futures, Education and the Arts, identified four tutors who successfully undertook seven LANTITE preparatory workshops to equip them with the tools and skills necessary to prepare students for the test. In 2021 there were five First Nations undergraduate students that utilised the trained tutors to successfully passed the LANTITE testing in both Literacy & Numeracy. This is a great outcome.

The Tutor Support Program was also expanded to have a much broader impact. For the 2021 reporting year Tutor support was offered to First Nations Students:

- Enrolled in undergraduate courses;
- Enrolled in the Tertiary Enabling Program (TEP);
- Enrolled in the Preparation for Tertiary Success (PTS);
- Undertaking the Remote Aboriginal Teacher Education (RATE) program; and
- Undertaking LANTITE testing.

In 2021 we experienced an *increase* in the volume of students participating in the Tutor Support Program. Students reported heightened concerns about study due to the challenges associated with interstate border restrictions, travel to and from campus, and the transitions to online course delivery. This increased the demand for Tutor Support, either online or face-to-face in their own communities. We have seen an interesting shift to students preferring to utilize online tutoring, as opposed to face-to-face.

3.3. Other Broad Strategies/Programs to Increase Award Course Completions

CDU continues to deliver a diverse range of approaches to increase completions by our First Nations Students. In 2021 the Student Engagement and Success team established a Student Sensory Room which students (including, but not limited to Indigenous students) can retreat for some time to unwind in a relaxed environment, without being disturbed. First Nations students access the room and FNSS are considering a similar facility specifically for our students, given the discernable increase in student stress over the last couple of years.

The culturally safe spaces provided at our Campuses include the two dedicated First Nations Student Centres as well as an Elders Meeting Rooms operated by our Larrakia Academic-In-Residence. Regular visits to Campus by local Aboriginal Elders provide open and explicit support to our First Nations students and deliver enhanced intercultural understandings for students and CDU staff.

For the first time in 2021, First Nations Leadership offered casual employment opportunities for First Nations higher education students to assist with the delivery of the Bidjipidji School Camp. This provided opportunity for First Nations students to gain experience in role modeling and supervising students. We also began a more targeted approach to including Indigenous Alumni in our programs and have expanded local community networks to further promote First Nations student successes.

4. Regional and remote students

The University, through the FNSS in collaboration with CDU's Team Aspire, offered support to First Nations regional and remote students. The most significant challenge included government restrictions placed on access to regional and remote areas due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Another key challenge was the turn-over of Student Support Officer positions. This was significant because First Nations Student Support Officers are the first point of contact for First Nations students in both HE and VET. However, by the end of 2021 recruitment to three roles was complete to begin 2022 with a full team complement.

Despite these challenges, FNSS staff continued to deliver student support services to regional and remote students, particularly in Semester 2:

- Two staff travelled to Katherine High School and St Joseph's Catholic School, to provide information sessions to Indigenous school students;
- Two staff presented to high-school students who participated in the Aspire Camp in Darwin (5 of the 20 Aspire Camp school students were Indigenous); and
- One staff member visited the Clontarf Foundation within Centralian Senior College (Alice Springs).

FNSS staff also attended the Community Services Expo in Katherine which was organised by Wurli-Wurlinjang Health Service. Our Team visited the Katherine Town and Rural Campuses to meet with CDU academic staff who work with and support Indigenous students in HE and VET courses at CDU. The purpose of these visits is to build positive and sustainable relationships with staff in the Katherine region, to maximise educational outcomes amongst First Nations students. First Nations Student Services staff at the Akaltje Centre in Alice Springs also led and/or participated in over 14 events:

- Meet and Greet Lunch for HE and VET students on the Alice Springs campus;
- Morning Tea with Ngaanyatjarra Pitjanjatjara Yankuntjatjara (NPY) Women's Council with provision of course and study information to staff from NYC and prospective students;
- CDU Orientation for HE students on Alice Springs Campus and Student Services Panel;
- CDU NAIDOC Event Program including Welcome to Country, music by First Nations Cert III Music Students, clapstick workshop and cultural conversation for staff and students;
- VET secondary schools' information 2021 sessions – provision of course and study information;
- First Nations Leadership Valedictory Ceremony (Sem 1) Alice Springs and Darwin (Sem 2);
- Provided a guided tour for students from Tennant Creek High School visiting the Alice Springs Campus through Music, Automotive and Business facilities and course and interactive information sessions;
- 'R U OK' Event and 'Steps to a Safer Community' Event and provision of information to CDU students;
- Participation at Team Aspire/Centralian Senior College event; and
- Participated in the Centralian Senior College Stars Foundation Year 11 & 12 Vet courses and celebration.

Team Aspire: The activities of Team Aspire have also made a significant contribution to engaging with our regional and remote students (see 1.3.1)

Table 11: CDU First Nations student EFTSL by Remoteness of Home Location, 2017-2021

First Nations Students By Remoteness of Home Location		2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
Enrol	Major Cities of Australia	107	124	145	176	197
Enrol	Inner Regional Australia	75	64	80	82	113
Enrol	Outer Regional Australia	346	412	424	487	500
Enrol	Remote Australia	99	97	84	105	104
Enrol	Very Remote Australia	105	95	91	86	114
Enrol	Unknown		1			
Enrol	Total	732	793	824	936	1,028
Eftsl	Major Cities of Australia	50.875	53.5	62.75	81.25	84.75
Eftsl	Inner Regional Australia	30.875	30.5	40.125	36.375	49.75
Eftsl	Outer Regional Australia	181	194	208.125	221.5	246
Eftsl	Remote Australia	41.25	37.125	38.5	42.75	44.375
Eftsl	Very Remote Australia	44.75	45.875	36.75	32.625	41.5
Eftsl	Unknown		0.5			
EFTSL	TOTAL	348.75	361.5	386.25	414.5	466.375

During the reporting period staff within the DVCFNL portfolio processed 339 remote and regional scholarships and spent a total of \$567,000 (see table below).

Table 12: ISSP Scholarship data for remote and regional students¹⁰

	Education Costs		Accommodation		Reward		Total	
	\$	No.	\$	No.	\$	No.	\$	No.
A. 2020 Payments	294,500	148	17,500	7	71,000	71	383,000	226
B. 2021 Offers ¹¹	154,000	77	21,000	7	9,400	29	184,400	113
C. Percentage ¹² (C=B/A*100)								
2021 Payments	448,500	225	38,500	14	80,400	100	567,400	339

5. Eligibility criteria

5.1. Indigenous Education Strategy

5.1.1 Reporting against our targets in the IES

CDU does not have a specified Indigenous Education Strategy. However, the key elements of an IES (as articulated in the ISSP Guidelines) is embedded in our overarching strategy titled the *Charles Darwin University Strategic Plan 2021-2026*. It identifies 10 high level KPIs with two of those focussed on First Nations outcomes which are reported to Council regularly. These are:

- ‘Improvement in unit success rate for First Nations HE Students’ and
- ‘Improvement in unit success rate for First Nations VET Students’.

The First Nations Leadership Core Plan is one of six Core Plans that form the substance of The Strategic Plan and identifies a range of First Nations KPIs (see Table 14). These KPIs were developed during 2021.

[Charles Darwin University Strategic Plan \(cdu.edu.au\)](https://www.cdu.edu.au/strategic-plan)

Table 13: CDU FNL Core Plan KPI⁴

Indicator	2020 Actual	2026 Target
Australian First Nations Student Participation		
Student Enrolments in VET (percentage of all VET enrolments who live in NT);	26.8%	30%
Student Enrolments in HE (percentage of all HE enrolments who live in NT);	9.3%	15%
Student Enrolments in HE (percentage of all HE enrolments who live outside NT);	4.7%	5%
Australian First Nations Student Enrolments in HDR (percentage of all HDR enrolments);	6.1%	10%
Australian First Nations Student Success (FN students are successful in passing:)		
Units undertaken in VET courses	77%	80%
Units undertaken in Enabling and HE Sub-bachelor course Units	41%	60%
All Units undertaken in the HE courses	70%	75%
All Units undertaken in Postgraduate courses	87%	87%
Australian First Nations Student Access to Bachelor Courses;		
Students enter a Bachelors course from high school	10%	11%
Students enter a Bachelors course from VET	22%	28%
Students enter a Bachelors course from Enabling program	10%	15%
Australian First Nations Student Course Retention Rates		
% Retained year on year in Enabling and HE Sub-bachelor courses	31.8%	50%
% Retained year on year in HE Bachelor courses	67.5%	70%
% Retained year on year in HE Postgraduate courses	54.8%	60%
Australian First Nations Student Cohort Completion		
Australian First Nations Student Cohort Completion Rate after 4 and 6 years. HE	11% within 4yrs 20% within 6yrs	17% within 4yrs 25% within 6yrs
Australian First Nations Student Cohort Completion Rate after 4 and 6 years. Post-Grad	17% within 4yrs 35% within 6yrs	26% within 4yrs 41% within 6 yrs
Australian First Nations Student Cohort Completion Rate within 4 years HDR	TBC	30% within 4 yrs
Australian First Nations Employment	TBC	TBC

5.1.2 Indigenous Knowledges in Curricula, Graduate Attributes, Teaching Practice

As a member of the University’s Higher Education Learning and Teaching Committee (HELTC) and VET Learning and Teaching Committee (VETLTC), the DVC First Nations Leadership contributes to the ongoing review of the L&T plan as an important and ongoing element of CDU’s approach. Further embedding of Indigenous Knowledges in curricula across all areas of the University through the L&T plans contributes to improved learning and teaching outcomes for Indigenous students and culturally competent staff. During the 2021 refresh of the University’s Strategic Plan, we refined the Graduate Attributes to include the following:

‘Our students will be culturally responsive in their engagement with First Nations communities and issues’ (Graduate Attributes Policy, Section 4.7)

We have met the requirements of the ISSP guidelines to facilitate, monitor and improve upon the inclusion of the Indigenous knowledge in curricula, graduate attributes and teaching practices.

⁴ KPIs are to be confirmed.

5.1.3 Cultural Competence of Staff and Students

In 2021, the University provided cross-cultural awareness training online to 300 employees. This training introduces staff to First Nations culture and practices by exploring the impact of history on current issues in Indigenous communities, outlining models for cultural comparison and establishing key principles for cross cultural work. It examines the ways of organising family, networks and relationships and the implications for those engaging with Indigenous communities.

In addition, an across-university Working Group with membership from the First Nations Leadership, People and Culture, and Academic staff from the College of Indigenous Futures, Education and Arts, met regularly throughout 2021 to develop and pilot an enhanced Intercultural Program for new CDU staff. The program builds on the existing online awareness training to support staff in further developing cultural competencies and offers targeted learning outcomes for teaching staff and research staff.

5.1.4 Reconciliation Action Plan

The development of the Reconciliation Action Plan (RAP) was planned for 2021, however it was delayed due to staff turnover within the Office of the People and Culture. Contact with Reconciliation Australia was made initially, and it was agreed that CDU would work closely with RA to further develop the RAP. This work is ongoing with a view to finalising the RAP in 2022.

5.2. Indigenous Workforce Strategy

In 2021, 3.76% of the University workforce were First Nation employees. Whilst this is above national parity, it is well below parity with the Northern Territory population which is closer to 30%. CDU currently has a First Nations Leadership Core Plan outlining the priorities for CDU which informs the overall CDU Strategic Plan. This aims to ensure CDU will be the most connected university by making a difference in the NT, Australia and beyond, and it has the goal of being Australia's most recognised university for First Nations training, education and research.

A First Nations Workforce Plan was being redrafted during 2021 as part of this broader strategy to increase attraction and retention of First Nations staff to ensure CDU is an employer of choice for First Nations people.

Table 14: Indigenous Workforce Data (2021 breakdown) ¹³

Level/Position	Permanent		Casual/contract/fixed term	
	Academic	Non-academic	Academic	Non-academic
Casual Teaching Academic			30	
Executive/Snr Management			2	
HEW 01				1
HEW 02				3
HEW 03				9
HEW 04		3		10
HEW 05		8		5
HEW 06		2		6
HEW 07		3		3
HEW 08		2		2
HEW 10		2		1
Level A	6		4	
Level B	7		8	
Level C	3			
Level D			2	
Level E				
Totals	16	20	46	40

5.3 Indigenous Governance Mechanism

The Indigenous Governance Mechanism for 2021 consisted of the following key staff:

Name	Duration of Service as at 31 December 2021
*Professor Reuben Bolt – Pro Vice-Chancellor Indigenous Leadership/Deputy Vice Chancellor First Nations Leadership	2 years
* Kim Robertson – Senior Analyst (to October 2022, then Director First Nations Leadership)	7 years
* Ms Natalie Chapman- Indigenous Policy and Programs Analyst	6 months
Ann Macabuhay – A/Manager Business Operations (OPVCILRO)	12 years
Despina Kaltourimidis - CDU Management Accountants (Finance)	2.5 years

**First Nations Staff*

Professor Reuben Bolt was appointed to the role of Pro Vice-Chancellor Indigenous Leadership and Regional Outreach in mid-January 2020. For the 2021 reporting year he directly reported to the Interim Vice-Chancellor, Professor Mike Wilson until March, and subsequently to Professor Scott Bowman from April. He continued to serve on a range of governance committees including the Executive Leadership Group (which was subsequently replaced by the Senior Executive Team under Professor Bowman). Other governance committees on which Professor Bolt is a member, include:

- Academic Board
- HREC (Human Research Ethics Committee)
- Higher Education Learning and Teaching Committee (HELTC)
- VET Learning and Teaching Committee (VETLTC)
- Board of Graduate Studies / Research Training Committee
- Vice-Chancellor’s Advisory Committee (VCAC).

In the last quarter of 2021, Prof. Bolt’s position was elevated to Deputy Vice-Chancellor First Nations Leadership – only the third such appointment in the history of Higher Education in Australia. Shortly afterwards, Ms Kim Robertson was appointed to the role of Director First Nations Leadership. This increased First Nations representation at Executive level at CDU, including membership of the VCAC. Ms Robertson is also a member of the HREC, and guest member at other working groups and strategic meetings as required. The First Nations Leadership Management Team meet monthly to discuss and make decisions on a range of services and budgets including the expenditure and tracking of the ISSP funding program. Risk management, strategy, workforce and finance issues that impact First Nations students and staff are discussed at this meeting.

During the last quarter of 2021, DVCFNL also seconded an Indigenous staff member to undertake policy and governance work related to the revision of the CDU Strategic Planning process and refresh of our governance policies and systems. This position joined the management team of DVCFNL and met with Prof. Bolt and/or the Director weekly to track, review and revise components of the (superseded) 2020 Indigenous Leadership Strategy in light of the newly released CDU Strategic Plan 2021-2026. Key governance components of the new Strategic Plan include the re-establishment (and re-naming) of the University’s external First Nations Advisory Committee to be founded in 2022 as the *VC’s First Nations Engagement Committee*, and the establishment of an internal governance committee (i.e., *First Nations Leadership Steering Committee*) to focus on First Nations student and staff success.

5.3.1 Statement by the Indigenous Governance Mechanism

2021 was a challenging year for CDU, and like most Australian universities the impact of COVID-19 remained significant. We responded by making adjustments to the way we deliver and plan for our core activities. Whilst

the ongoing potential impacts of COVID-19 on Aboriginal communities in the Northern Territory keeps us on alert, we have been fortunate that the swift and decisive action taken by the Australian Government, the Northern Territory Government, our Aboriginal community leaders and University Executive, have continued to avert much of the expected spread of the virus and impact on our staff, students and operations over the course of the reporting year.

2021 is the year we began afresh as we said goodbye the previous year to outgoing Vice-Chancellor and President Professor Simon Maddocks after 7 years of service at CDU. We welcomed the incoming Vice-Chancellor and President Prof. Scott Bowman who sought to swiftly and collaboratively refresh the University's Strategic Plan and refocus our aspirations for First Nations Leadership. This enhanced our commitment to First Nations Australians and became enshrined in the Charles Darwin University Strategic Plan 2021-2026 i.e., a key goal is for CDU to be:

‘...the most recognised university for Australian First Nations training, education and research’.

This Strategy is the blueprint for the medium-term future for CDU and will lead us to make a positive impact on all Territorians, especially First Nations Territorians. The Strategy's explicit focus on improving the student success rates for First Nations enrolled students will allow us to yield improved results for all our First Nations students.

During late 2021 CDU demonstrated a renewed commitment to increased First Nations leadership and workforce development with the elevation of my role to Deputy Vice-Chancellor level and the re-establishment of the Director role (identified for a First Nations professional) in my portfolio. We have also turned our attention to the recruitment policies required to continue to attract and retain First Nations staff, including the provision of mentoring, professional development and career planning for our First Nations staff.

Our investment in engaging more deeply with our First Nations communities was expanded in 2021 with additional regional leadership roles put in place across the Northern Territory, the delivery of our inaugural Bidjipidji School Camp for prospective NT high school students, and an increase in outreach by our First Nations Student Services staff to schools and communities. We anticipate that, as we continue to align our strategic aspirations with our delivery capacity and strengthen our values-lead approaches, we will see even more improvements for our First Nations students, staff and our communities.

*Professor Reuben Bolt
Deputy Vice-Chancellor First Nations Leadership
Larrakia Country
Charles Darwin University*

Additional information for completing the template

¹ This information provides for the number of students and cost of the scholarships expended in 2021. The figures for students should include the actual number (head count, not the EFTSL). Scholarship figures (head count and costs) should include the university award scholarships from the flexible finding pool as well as any preserved scholarships. Only payments made during 2021 should be included in this table. For multi-year scholarship agreements, payments to be made in future grant years will be recorded in the performance reporting for the relevant future grant year.

² This figures provide for the total number of students receiving scholarships and expenditure for those scholarships. For the student count, in cases where a student receives more than one scholarship, the student would only be counted once in the total (consequently the total figure may not be the sum of the preceding columns). For the expenditure, the total should be the total of the preceding expenditure columns.

³ Include payments to all enabling students, including remote and regional students.

⁴ Include payments to all undergraduate students, including remote and regional students.

⁵ Include payments to all postgraduate students, including remote and regional students.

⁶Total number of unique students supported by tutorial assistance (if students have attended multiple tutorial sessions, still count them as 1 student).

⁷ Record total number of tutorial sessions attended by students (each class a student attends counts as 1, the same student may attend multiple tutorial sessions throughout the year).

⁸ Record only hours of instruction received by the students (do not include staff planning or organising time).

⁹ Include any costs associated with providing tutorial assistance, including staffing costs, materials, facilities etc.

¹⁰ Only record amounts which required payment during the 2021 calendar year. For multi-year scholarship offers, payments to be made in future grant years will be recorded against the reporting for the relevant future grant year. Note the data in this table is a subset of the scholarship data provided in Table 1.

¹¹ Record all verbal and written scholarship offers for the 2021 calendar year, including those offers that were not accepted by the student. Record the 2021 component of new scholarship offers and the planned 2021 value of previously awarded scholarships (including continuing scholarships and preserved scholarships).

¹² This data confirms the university's compliance with Section 21(3) of the Guidelines.

¹³ While universities report on the number of Indigenous staff through mainstream reporting requirements, the additional information provided in this section provides enhanced monitoring of the university's efforts in building its Indigenous workforce. Record all Indigenous staff employed by the university, including those not working on ISSP-related activities. The numbers recorded here should be a headcount of staff and not the full-time equivalent. Insert additional lines as needed