

# Indigenous Student Success Program

## 2023 Performance Report

|                       |                       |               |                   |
|-----------------------|-----------------------|---------------|-------------------|
| <b>Organisation</b>   | James Cook University |               |                   |
| <b>Contact Person</b> | Prof N M Nakata       |               |                   |
| <b>Phone</b>          | 0747815212            | <b>E-mail</b> | dvcies@jcu.edu.au |

### 1. Declaration

In providing this Performance Report, it is acknowledged that it is an offence under the *Criminal Code Act 1995* to provide false or misleading information.

### 2. Enrolments (Access)

**What embedded Indigenous Student Success Program (ISSP) strategies, activities and programs has the university implemented to support and improve access for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students in 2023? [if these strategies have been reported in previous years, please just note in summary]**

As noted in previous years, the Indigenous Education and Research Centre (IERC) at James Cook University has several ongoing strategies and activities funded by the ISSP to support and improve Indigenous students' access to university studies. These include on-campus intensive programs, such as the Winter School program (for Yrs. 10-12), Summer Program (for Year 12 and post-school leavers), and the Try-your-hand-at-Uni program for post-school leavers (a focus on building capacities in academic literacy, mathematics, and chemistry–study areas known to give Indigenous students grief in their undergraduate studies). There is also a range of organised visits from schools to the university (e.g., School tours, ATSIAP, QATSIF, Young Indigenous leaders' program, Solid Pathways Indigenous STEM program) as well as breakfast meetings with school principals to ensure they too have clear information on Indigenous entry issues and pathway programs. These, along with other JCU programs, constitute the general approach to recruiting Indigenous school leavers and post-school leavers.

**What new strategies, activities and programs has the university implemented to support and improve access for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students in 2023? What have been the outcomes or success?**

New work has evolved with regional and remote schools on a Learner Identity model devised by IERC to build the capabilities of Indigenous learners. This model is based on world research knowledge on ways to improve the academic performance of students and the research work on Indigenous academic persistence by Prof. Nakata and his team at the IERC (2007-2022). The approach has been trialled successfully with Indigenous undergraduate students in a 5-year case study (2017-2022) and published by Routledge in 2022. The model has been reworked for students in the school sector (2021-2023), and State Education and Catholic Education in Queensland have expressed keen interest in adopting this approach for students in their schools. This model is also unique because it addresses the capacities Indigenous learners need to engage the teaching and learning opportunities and is an area of work that is not well understood by the education sector anywhere.

**How does the university utilise scholarships, bridging and enabling support and outreach services to improve access? What impact did this support have in 2023?**

The University has substantially grown its scholarship based on contributions from the industry and philanthropic sectors, and the IERC has maintained its ISSP funds to support the access and participation of Indigenous students in university studies. All funds are strategically aligned to ensure that students maintain the highest commitment to their studies, and the disbursement of the funds is now differentiated to individual

students' financial needs and their ABSTUDY entitlements. In 2023, all Indigenous students received financial support, which helped maintain a high number of completions (120+) at JCU.

**What other broad strategies does the university implement to increase access and enrolments for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students that does not rely on ISSP funding? (only one or two paragraphs are required)**

The University has long recognized that regional and remote students who present at the time of enrolment often do not have the requisite ATAR grades for their chosen courses. Because of this, it offers a suite of pathway courses for underprepared students to access degree courses (e.g., TAC, Certificate courses, Diploma courses, and JCU Prep). The content of these courses is also under constant review to ensure their effectiveness in building capacity for success.

The University has also recognised that in the northern regions of Queensland less than 50% of Indigenous students complete Year 10. This reduces the number of students who can undertake university study. JCU and Prof. Nakata have long argued that we must address this matter more directly if we were to see any significant rise in the number of Indigenous students entering university studies. As a result, two areas of work have progressed.

The first area of work led by IERC, through Prof. Nakata and his ARC-funded research team, has been to improve the academic performance of Indigenous P-10 school students in Math and Science in partnership with state schools (2017-2024). This longitudinal work involved 19 schools and over 4,000 students (including 1,000 non-Indigenous students) with the objective of innovating the design and delivery of the Australian curriculum. ARC funding to continue this longitudinal work has been approved to extend the project (2024-2031) and to include Catholic and independent schools. Certainty of this ongoing funding has provided the IERC team the means to also progress similar work now in the literacy curriculum (2024-2031).

The second priority area led by JCU/IERC has been to advance work for those who did not complete Year 10 to return to formal studies and to build up capacities for university studies. Three modules for post-school leavers in math, chemistry, and academic literacy were developed in 2023 at Year 9/10 levels and will be ready for online delivery in 2024. A second suite of modules will be developed in 2024 to extend the capacity of students to the levels needed for entry into JCU pathway courses. These modules will be offered in 2025.

**Scholarships provided through ISSP**

The ISSP scholarships supplement areas where broader university equity scholarships do not provide assistance or their funds have been exhausted. This has enabled much of the ISSP scholarship funds to be directed towards driving success. As can be seen in the table below, the funds are prioritised as Reward Scholarships to incentivise enrolment, academic progress, and completion rates.

**Table 1 ISSP Scholarships - breakdown of 2023 payments<sup>1</sup>**

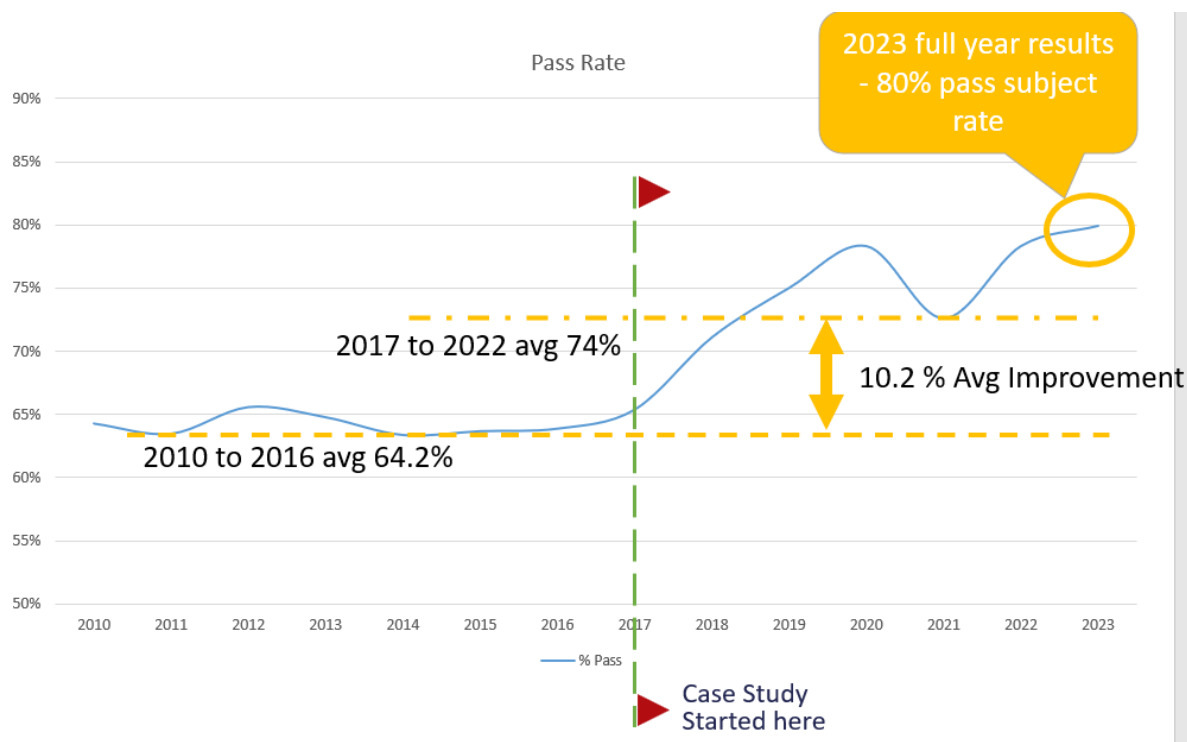
|                            | Education Costs |          | Accommodation |          | Reward         |            | Total <sup>2</sup> |            |
|----------------------------|-----------------|----------|---------------|----------|----------------|------------|--------------------|------------|
|                            | \$              | No.      | \$            | No.      | \$             | No.        | \$                 | No.        |
| Enabling <sup>3</sup>      | 0               | 0        | 0             | 0        | 0              | 0          | 0                  | 0          |
| Undergraduate <sup>4</sup> | 12,500          | 5        | 12,500        | 5        | 318,200        | 276        | 343,200            | 286        |
| Post-graduate <sup>5</sup> | 0               | 0        | 0             | 0        | 0              | 0          | 0                  | 0          |
| Other                      | 0               | 0        | 0             | 0        | 0              | 0          | 0                  | 0          |
| <b>Total</b>               | <b>12,500</b>   | <b>5</b> | <b>12,500</b> | <b>5</b> | <b>318,200</b> | <b>276</b> | <b>343,200</b>     | <b>286</b> |

### 3. Progression (outcomes)

**What embedded ISSP strategies, activities and programs has the university implemented to support students to complete units? [if these strategies have been reported in previous years, please just note in summary]**

The progress results at JCU, in the table below, show a 10+% increase in pass/fail rates, compared to all previous years, in the first year of our case study (2017). The higher levels were maintained in the following three years, except for the years impacted by COVID-19. In 2023, the pass/fail rate achieved was 79.9%, returning JCU to an upward trend in performance. This result puts Indigenous academic performance off by ~3% when compared with the non-Indigenous cohort and draws us closer to closing the gap.

This innovation in learning support services is based on research studies of Indigenous academic persistence by Prof. Nakata and world research knowledge showing positive correlations between a student's self-efficacy levels and academic performance. The innovation and gains achieved by the Indigenous learning support services at JCU in degree completions are now leading the sector in a national push to increase the number of Indigenous graduates.



**What new strategies, activities, or programs has the university implemented to support students to complete units in 2023? Were there new strategies: that supported students to complete units; to help retain students? How does the university measure the effect these strategies have on student progression? What were the outcomes or success? What was the impact of support through tutorial assistance and mentoring and other measures provided through the university?**

The improved services have been built in collaboration with an industry partner to drive an evidence-based learning response service, which is now transferable to other university contexts and can be scaled for a national approach to increase completion rates. This platform provides real-time data and information sets that enable a more accurate diagnosis of learning and well-being issues, early intervention strategies, targeted tutoring campaigns, and measures of academic performance. For example, the IERC services at JCU now have over 200,000 data points, and with the help of built-in machine-learning capacity, we can now see that it takes a minimum of nine hours of tutoring to get an under-prepared Indigenous student through their undergraduate subject; and where there are also high levels of self-efficacy in a student, the grades are higher.

The management team responded by increasing the tutoring budget and raising end-of-year completion targets.

The ISSP funds, as required by the grant condition, have been deployed for success and strategically managed by the Indigenous Management team at the IERC (all team members except one are Indigenous). This team is led by the DVC Indigenous Education & Strategy. Importantly, most IERC learning support staff are Indigenous, and this brings a certain level of competence to our services that fits well with Indigenous students.

**How does the university invest in the cultural competency of staff and students? How is it measured and what impact has it had?**

JCU has recruited external parties for many years to provide its staff cultural competency training (e.g., CCA, AIATSIS). From 2024, JCU, with the help of IERC, will develop its own cultural capability modules for its staff. The initial trials will be conducted with the IERC staff, and their feedback will be used to refine their use before issuing it to all JCU staff. This initial exercise will be led by the senior Indigenous staff at JCU. Once the modules are ready for implementation across the university, they will operate and be managed by the university's HR section and included in the broader suite of progress measures reported to the University Council.

**What other broad strategies does the university implement to support student progression that does not rely on ISSP funding? (Only one or two paragraphs are required)**

The University has established an annual Indigenous Student Awards program to celebrate the progress Indigenous students are making toward their degrees. This flagship event is attended by students, their families, the VC, the Chancellor, DVCs, Deans, School principals, and school students. Twenty-six awards are presented by the university's senior leaders to showcase academic progress and persistence. The evening caters to 150 people and has become a highly anticipated event each year for the community.

**Table 2 Tutorial assistance provided in 2023**

| Level of study | Number of unique students assisted <sup>6</sup> | Total number of tutorial sessions attended <sup>7</sup> | Total hours of assistance <sup>8</sup> | Expenditure <sup>9</sup> (\$) |
|----------------|---|---|--|-------------------------------|
| Enabling       | 19  | 195   | 145                                    | \$8,619                       |
| Undergraduate  | 340   | 8,991   | 6,245                                  | \$371,217                     |
| Post-graduate  | 21  | 212   | 140                                    | \$8,322                       |
| Other          |   |   |  |                               |
| <b>Total</b>   | <b>380</b>                                      | <b>9,398</b>  | <b>6,530</b>                           | <b>\$388,158</b>              |

## 4. Completions (outcomes)

**What ISSP embedded strategies, activities and programs has the university implemented to improve award course completions of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students? [if these strategies have been reported in previous years, please just note in summary] What new strategies has the university implemented in 2023 to support students to complete qualifications? What was the impact?**

JCU and IERC have focused on completions for some time now and have set new records for completions at the university (an average of 74 graduates/year for all years up to 2016, and since then, 120+ graduates/year). This work is now shared with the sector, and IERC is currently assisting 14 universities in transitioning their student support services to learning support services. JCU also hosted the inaugural National Indigenous Learning Support Conferences in 2023, attended by 150 Indigenous delegates from 27 Australian universities.

Our next National Conference will be held in September 2024 at Murdoch University, WA, to report and share our continuing progress.

**What other broad strategies does the university implement that supports Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students complete their qualification that does not rely on ISSP funding? (Only one or two paragraphs are required).]**

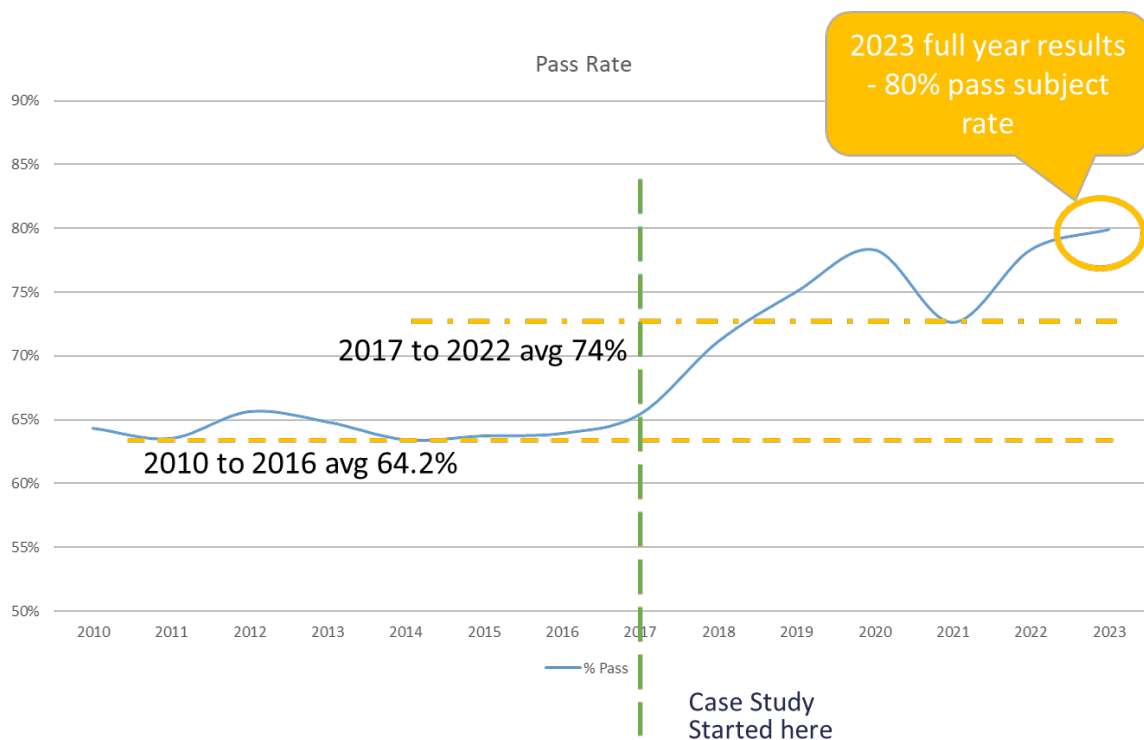
There has also been strategic STEM work across the university since 2017 with the College of Engineering and Science to review their pathway courses to improve the teaching of mathematics to Indigenous students; with VET science, OT, and Public Health to improve their understanding of Indigenous students' learning issues, with Law on how to incorporate teachings of legal aspects relating to Indigenous people; and with researchers to co-design projects with Indigenous communities. This has resulted in a greater number of Indigenous students enrolling in STEM-related programs. In 2023, there were 22 Indigenous enrolments in engineering, 33 in science, 34 in Medicine, 11 in Pharmacy, 15 in IT, 3 in dentistry, and 11 in VET science. The graduation of five Indigenous dentistry students in 2023 gave us confidence that our strategic efforts across campuses are working.

There are also a range of initiatives supported by HEPPP funds. This aspect of our work is largely motivated by the HEIMS performance data, which show that less than 30% of Indigenous students complete their degrees in four years. The contributions from HEPPP help in running the Winter and Summer school/post-school programs (allowing us to increase the number of programs to 150 students), the annual Indigenous Academic Awards night (to encourage academic persistence), and the development of online modules for post-school leavers in regional and remote communities. These initiatives, combined with the overall JCU Equity initiatives, are designed to increase the volume as well as the capacity of Indigenous students to undertake and succeed in university studies across all degree programs.

## **5. Regional and remote students**

**What support was offered through ISSP to regional and remote students, how were these students prioritised? What strategies were implemented to improve access to university study? What activities were provided? What has been the impact of these strategies and activities?**

As a regional university, all of our programs and activities focused on regional and remote Indigenous students. In 2023, the ISSP funds supported 785 Indigenous students to actively engage in their studies. They were provided with 6,530 h of tutoring, and the overall pass rate achieved was 79.9%. This is the result of systemic changes in the IERC in 2017 to adopt a learning support service. The initial target was to increase the pass/fail rate by 10%. The following graph demonstrates the incremental benefits in the academic performance of Indigenous students as well as the impact of COVID-19. Importantly, the 2023 results show a return to an upward performance trend.



The 2023 results also provided interesting data on where performance can be approved. This information is central to our 2023 Planning Day and has now become a priority area for attention in 2024. It is also important to report that this work could be performed better and quicker if the federal resource allocation model better reflects the forward work and costs involved in remediating the capacities of underprepared learners.

**Table 4 ISSP Scholarship data for remote and regional students<sup>10</sup>**

|  | Education Costs |     | Accommodation |     | Reward  |     | Total   |     |
|--|-----------------|-----|---------------|-----|---------|-----|---------|-----|
|  | \$              | No. | \$            | No. | \$      | No. | \$      | No. |
| A. 2022 Payments                           | 45,000          | 9   | 0             | 0   | 248,300 | 200 | 293,300 | 209 |
| B. 2023 Offers <sup>11</sup>               | 185,000         | 40  | 0             | 0   | 455,330 | 413 | 640,300 | 428 |
| C. Percentage <sup>12</sup><br>(C=B/A*100) |                 |     |               |     |         |     |         |     |
| <b>2023 Payments</b>                       | 12,500          | 5   | 12,500        | 5   | 318,200 | 276 | 343,200 | 286 |

## 6. Eligibility criteria

### 6.1 Indigenous Education Strategy

Indigenous leadership at JCU has been key to improvements in past years. The Deputy Vice-Chancellor of Indigenous Education & Strategy provides guidance to the University and assists with the alignment of national closing-the-gap targets (in education) and the NIAA’s priority for higher participation and success rates at the university. This is articulated in the JCU’s Indigenous Education Strategy and sets the course for a concerted effort across campus each year to increase Indigenous students' enrolment and completion rates. The

Indigenous Education Strategy has been delayed due to a strategic exercise at the University in 2022/3 to restructure its operations, and we expect this to be uploaded to the website shortly. The new Strategy will include an Indigenous enrolment target of above 1,000 students by 2030 to meet the new national targets of doubling the Indigenous enrolment base by 2035. From 2023, a newly established Indigenous Advisory Committee (IAC) with direct lines to the VC and the VCC will help coordinate and progress the Indigenous education priorities across the university and ensure Indigenous targets are met each year.

## 6.1. Indigenous Education Strategy

## 6.2. Indigenous Workforce Strategy

As noted above, the Indigenous Workforce Strategy is driven by the Deputy Vice Chancellor of Services and Resources and assisted by the Deputy Vice-Chancellor of Indigenous Education & Strategy, and the Indigenous Workforce Action Group (IAG) is constituted by Indigenous and non-Indigenous staff members from across the University. This Group meets on a quarterly basis and reports on progress at the end of each year. As can be seen from the Indigenous Workforce Strategy, Indigenous employment targets were set at 4.68%, and followed extensive negotiations across the University. A copy of the Indigenous Workforce Strategy can be found at <https://www.jcu.edu.au/indigenous-engagement/indigenous-workforce-strategy>. The IAG will be replaced in 2024 by the IAC. The senior Indigenous appointments in the university will drive this new committee. They will include the DVC(IES), the Head of the Indigenous Teaching & Learning program, the Head of Indigenous Research, Senior academics and researchers, and Managers.

The priorities for the broader University programs and activities are also guided by commitments to the Reconciliation Action Plan and include priorities for educating all students on Indigenous histories, cultures, and languages. A copy can be found here:

[https://www.jcu.edu.au/\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0014/1113206/Reconciliation-Action-Plan-2023-25.pdf](https://www.jcu.edu.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0014/1113206/Reconciliation-Action-Plan-2023-25.pdf).

As explained in a previous section, the IERC will trial a Cultural Capabilities module in 2024 to provide staff with a more focused orientation on developing the capabilities they need to design and deliver improved services to Indigenous students and Indigenous people in our region. If successful, this will be considered for the entire university staff.

## 6.3. Indigenous Governance Mechanism

The Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Indigenous Education & Strategy) is responsible for James Cook University's Indigenous education strategy and the overall strategic leadership of the IERC. The DVC(IES) reports to the VC and ensures the objectives and performance of the Indigenous Education Strategy are aligned with the University's Strategic Intent and the University Plan. This Indigenous appointment reports monthly to the VC on the strategies and progress of this plan and is a member of the University Executive (UE). UE meets weekly.

The Head of Indigenous Teaching & Learning and the Head of Indigenous Research are members of the University's peak committees (e.g., Academic Board & University Research Committee). The Indigenous Management Team manages the prioritization, administration, and reporting of ISSP funds. This team comprises senior Indigenous staff members and is chaired by the DVC (IES).

No specific charter has been established for the governance mechanism, which will be rectified in 2024. It has been the practice at JCU to rely on the principal accountabilities embedded in the DVC(IES) contract:

- Building the professional and work capacity of the Indigenous people in North and Far North Queensland in collaboration with community and peak organisations, industry leaders, and other education providers.
- Work with the University's executive team to embed a regard for issues of importance to Indigenous Australians at JCU, including leading the focus on the Reconciliation Action Plan and the Indigenous Employment Strategy as 'Everybody's Business' and at all levels of the University.

- Provide strategic direction to the Centre for Indigenous Education and Research and being accountable for the effective and efficient planning, management, and operation of the Centre, ensuring the achievement of organisational objectives and growth of programs. This includes being accountable for the management of funds provided by the Commonwealth Government to provide additional support for Indigenous students.
- Contribute to public debate and national and state policy issues and discussions on issues affecting Australian Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, particularly those relating to northern Australia.
- Lead, promote and facilitate the integration of strategies and initiatives that support the University's commitment to the principles of Reconciliation, which exemplify respect for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander heritage and the valuing of justice and equity for all Australians.
- Ensure the Indigenous education and research scholarship at the University is at, or above, national, and international standards.
- In conjunction with the Deputy Vice Chancellor (Students); Senior Principal, Domestic Pathways and College Deans, develop, implement, promote, and evaluate strategies aimed at improving access, participation, and retention of Indigenous students.
- Lead an institutional research strategy relevant to Australian Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in partnership with Academic Divisions and research institutes and centres.
- Develop initiatives and programs to encourage all JCU students to learn more about Indigenous Australian people, histories, and cultures and work with College Deans to embed Indigenous perspectives in the curriculum.
- Develop strategic partnerships through engagement with industry, government, professional and community organisations to promote the goals of the University.
- Promote a culture of cultural respect, shared responsibility, fairness, and excellence across the University and with external stakeholders.
- Work with and report to the University Council on the performance of the University's Indigenous priorities and targets.
- Ensure business risks are identified and managed through effective risk management strategies and operations.
- Demonstrate a commitment to the University's values.
- Lead, support, and promote the inclusion of sustainability initiatives in all aspects of operations, including supporting the principles of the TropEco Program and engaging in commitment to JCU sustainability goals and objectives.

These qualities and accountabilities have been reflected in the roles of other senior Indigenous appointments and provide the foundation for a cohesive means of working on Indigenous priorities at the different levels. However, the primary responsibility for administering and disbursing the ISSP funds is with the DVC(IES).

### **6.3.1. Statement by the Indigenous Governance Mechanism**

The Indigenous management team at the IERC develops the priorities and manages the Indigenous program and activities funded by NIAA through its ISSP arrangements. In 2023, all members except one are Indigenous. The Indigenous members hold senior appointment roles in the University and are members of all significant committees in the University. The team meets monthly and has the authority to adjust the budget and strategies to ensure outcomes are achieved. This structure will be revisited in 2024 to align more strategically with the decision-making process in the University and the new IAC to ensure Indigenous education and employment targets are met each year.

## Additional information for completing the template

---

<sup>1</sup> This information provides for the number of students and cost of the scholarships expended in 2023. 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 2023 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.

<sup>2</sup> 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.

<sup>3</sup> Include payments to all enabling students, including remote and regional students.

<sup>4</sup> Include payments to all undergraduate students, including remote and regional students.

<sup>5</sup> Include payments to all postgraduate students, including remote and regional students.

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

<sup>7</sup> 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).

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

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

<sup>10</sup> Only record amounts which required payment during the 2023 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.

<sup>11</sup> Record all verbal and written scholarship offers for the 2023 calendar year, including those offers that were not accepted by the student. Record the 2023 component of new scholarship offers and the planned 2022 value of previously awarded scholarships (including continuing scholarships).

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