Racism@Uni: Study into Antisemitism, Islamophobia, Racism and the Experiences of First Nations People

Final Report
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Acknowledgement of Country

The authors and partners of this proposal wish to acknowledge the Traditional Owners of the nations across Australia and pay our respects to Elders past, present and emerging.

UTS acknowledges the Gadigal People of the Eora Nation, the Boorooberongal people of the Dharug Nation, the Bidiagal people and the Gamaygal people upon whose ancestral lands our university stands. We would also like to pay respects to Elders both past and present, acknowledging them as the traditional custodians of knowledge for these lands.

Table of Contents

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF COUNTRY II
PROJECT OVERVIEW 1
A NOTE ON TERMINOLOGY 1
METHODS AND SCOPE 2
KEY CONCEPTS 2
METHODS 11
KEY THEMES 14
1. THE PREVALENCE OF RACISM EXPERIENCED BY UNIVERSITY STAFF AND STUDENTS - DOMESTIC AND INTERNATIONAL RESEARCH, SURVEYS AND EVIDENCE 15
1.1 Australia 15
1.2 International 17
2. NATURE, IMPACTS & EXPERIENCES OF RACISM AMONG DIFFERENT COHORTS 19
2.1 Students 19
2.2 Staff 39
3. PREVALENCE AND EFFICACY OF CURRENT UNIVERSITY RESPONSES TO RACISM 50
3.1 Truth-Telling initiatives 51
3.2 Australian University Action Plans and Policies 53
3.3 Programs, projects and campaigns 54
3.4 Cross University Networks and Activities 58
3.5 Student Groups and Employee Resource Groups 60
3.6 Research Centres 61
3.7 First Nations Education Units 64
3.8 Curriculum design and delivery 65
3.9 Student and staff activist campaigns 69
4. CURRENT TARGETED RESPONSES TO THE DISTINCT EXPERIENCES OF DIFFERENT COHORTS 72
4.1 Australia 72
4.2 International 74
4.3 Efficacy and evaluation 77
5. HOW CAN UNIVERSITIES EMBED ANTI-RACISM INTO POLICY AND PRACTICE? 79
Australia 79
5.1 First Nations Enabling Programs 79
5.2 First Nations Student Centres and Units 80
5.3 Student Organisations and Partnerships 81
5.4 Benchmarks for measuring sector performance and ongoing improvement 82
5.5 International 83
5.6 Impact 85
6. GOVERNMENT PREVENTION AND RESPONSE 86
BIBLIOGRAPHY 91

INTRODUCTION

The Australian Human Rights Commission (the Commission) has been funded by the Australian Government to undertake the *Racicm@Uni: Study into Antisemitism, Islamophobia, Racism and the Experiences of First Nations People* in response to Recommendation 33 from the Australian Universities Accord Final Report, to be led by the Race Discrimination Commissioner. As part of the study, a systematic literature review is required.

This Report has been developed by a team of researchers from the Centre for Social Justice and Inclusion (CSJI) and the research arm of the Jumbunna Institute for Indigenous Education and Research (Jumbunna) at the University of Technology Sydney.

Project Overview

This Report is part of a suite of activities being undertaken by the Commission under the oversight of the Race Discrimination Commissioner in relation to their aim of working with governments, business, community partners, education providers, the media and workplaces to help individuals and organisations understand their rights and meet their legal responsibilities under the United Nations Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination and the federal *Racial Discrimination Act 1975* (RDA).

The National Anti-Racism Framework, released in late November 2024, after extensive consultation over more than three years, now provides a roadmap for governments, business and community organisations to address all forms of racism in Australia. This Framework contains 63 recommendations for a whole of society approach to eliminating racism, with proposed reforms across Australia's legal, justice, health, education, media and arts sectors as well as workplaces and data collection.

In parallel, the Australian Universities Accord, a 12-month review of Australia's tertiary education system, recommended the conducting of a survey into the prevalence and impact of racism across the tertiary education system (Australian Government Department of Education, 2023, p. 32; Australian Government Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency, 2024).

This Review is part of the initial response to the Accord Recommendation and seeks to investigate the prevalence, nature and impact of individual and systemic racism within Australian universities (for both students and staff), with a particular focus on (but not limited to) the experiences of First Nations peoples, antisemitism, Islamophobia, international students, and people from other negatively culturally and racially marginalised backgrounds.

A note on terminology

Accurate terminology is important, both as an academic requirement, and for respect (Carlson, Berglund, Harris, & Poata-Smith, 2014). In this report, we use the term 'First Nations' and 'First Nations peoples' interchangeably with 'Indigenous' to refer to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples of Australia. However, we recognise that this approach is not without contention. Firstly, these terms do not reflect the diversity of First Nations Australians, and it is important to remember that while many First Nations people in Australia prefer to be known by their specific group or clan names, while some prefer 'First Peoples'. Secondly, we acknowledge that some First Nations people do not like being referred to as Indigenous, as this is deemed a catchall term often used by governments that fails to acknowledge the diversity of First Nations peoples of Australia. We have wherever possible, used the term First Nations peoples except when referring to the global context where we use 'Indigenous'. When referring to a particular First Nation grouping in another country, we have relied on the preferred term of use in that place. Where quotes and references to specific research is used, we have generally used the original terminology included in the literature.

Methods and Scope

This Report provides findings from a review of domestic and international research, evidence and data on existing and emerging trends in the prevalence, nature and impact of systemic and interpersonal racism within universities on both students and staff, including those with experiences of intersectional discrimination. There is a focus on literature published within the past ten years with some key important publications included from outside this timeline.

In determining the scope of this literature review it is necessary to first establish the parameters of the task. In this section, we offer a brief discussion of the key concepts of this review, as well as the methods used in this report.

Key concepts

We have, where possible, aligned terminology in this review with the Commission's previously published research. We note that the Racism@Uni Project is oriented towards understanding a wide range of lived experiences of racism, which requires not exclusively defining terms and concepts without thorough consultation and collaboration.

The scope and terminology, as detailed below, takes into account emerging findings of current (and previous) Australian Government reviews and processes, as well as broader government social cohesion and anti-racism efforts. Specifically, the review has regard to the National Anti-Racism Strategy including the National Anti-Racism Framework initiative. The authors of this report agree with the Commission's view that terminology can be both empowering and limiting for individuals and communities (Australian Human Rights Commission, 2024). It should also be noted that where different terminology is used, this may reflect the choices of the research cited.

Colonialism

Australia's modern history is a complex one built on colonisation, domination and misappropriation of land, culture and knowledge systems. Dispossession and displacement of First Nations peoples is reinforced by persistent social, cultural, economic and political systems, which enact policy and program regimes (Rigney, Bignall, Vivian, & Hemming, 2022). Such systems continue to disempower First Nations peoples when they "maintain decision-making agency and authority over Indigenous affairs" (Rigney, Bignall, Vivian, & Hemming, 2022, p. 9). In a colonial/settler context, this leads to both the perpetuation of colonised peoples as 'less than' based on race, which continues to justify conquest and the construction and maintenance of structures of governance and administration (Bhabha, 1983).

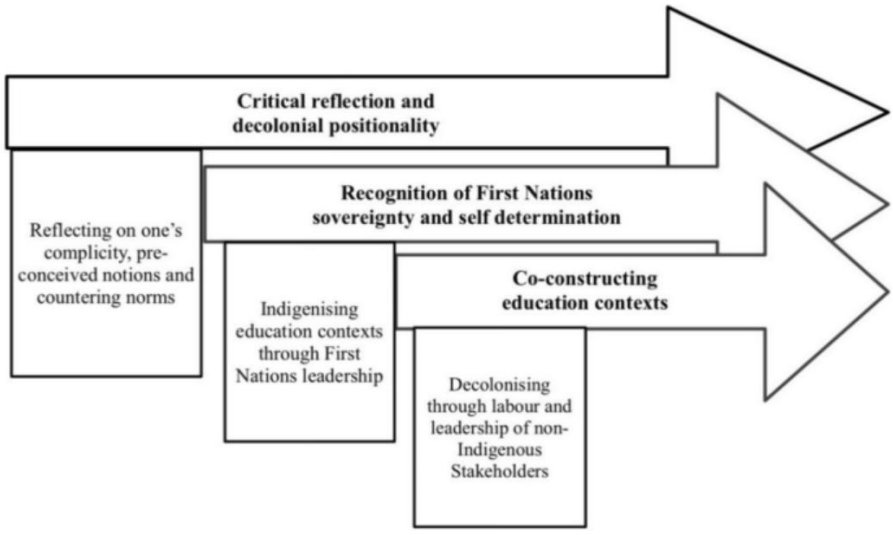
Australian higher education institutions were founded within this colonial context, representing the epitome of "an exclusive and elitist sphere, marked by imperial and patriarchal norms that have favoured white, heterosexual men" (Phillips, 2024, p. 1). The consequences of this foundation for First Nations people of Australia were, and continue to be, immense. As Morgan argues, "from the earliest days of colonization, Aboriginal people's participation in Eurocentric education can be best described as an exercise in social engineering and a not-so-veiled form of cultural genocide" (Morgan B. , 2019, p. 163). Universities clearly have and continue to play an active role in this social engineering, not only as a by-product of history. As Morgan explains "[a]ssimilationist and Eurocentric education has and continues to be one of the tools that has severely contaminated Indigenous cultures and has served to relegate Indigenous peoples to the margins of modern society" (2019, p. 178). First Nations scholars have noted with frustration the way in which lifelong inequalities are often perpetuated within the very education systems that should act as one of the strongest tools to redress them (Bodkin-Andrews & Carlson, 2013).

Colonialism has similarly shaped shared experiences for First Nations peoples across the globe, impacting natural environments, relational structures that supported collective wellbeing, cultural knowledge systems, languages, and ceremonial practices. As McKinley and Smith (2019) note, education has been "both a target and tool of colonialism, destroying and diminishing the validity and legitimacy of Indigenous education, while simultaneously replacing and reshaping it with an 'education' complicit with the colonial endeavour" (McKinley & Smith, 2019, p. 19).

Tuck and Gazambide-Fernandez (2013) analyse how universities and curriculum globally continue "to enforce colonization and racism" and the way in which curriculum "has continued to absorb, silence and replace the non-white other, perpetuating white supremacy and settlerhood" (Tuck & Gazambide-Fernandez, 2013, p. 73). Smith and Tuck (2016) note that in the United States (US) life on predominantly white college campuses frequently includes "a mixed bag of racial microaggressions and racialized aggressions," emphasising the call to "decentre whiteness" in university curriculum (Smith & Tuck, 2016, pp. 14-20).

Enduring setter/colonial structures continue to shape the experiences of First Nations peoples in Australia. The settler education system has been built upon the dispossession and erasure of First Nations people, while failing to properly recognise or protect First Nations human rights. The dehumanising effect of racism in Australia is self-evident in the historical and current experience of First Nations people living in this country, as acknowledged by bipartisan government efforts to close the gap between First Nations and other Australians (Commonwealth of Australia, Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet, 2020).

In response to the ongoing impacts of colonialism in higher education, First Nations scholars have proposed a range of decolonising approaches which aim to address systemic inequalities and power imbalances within institutions, including in curriculum, teaching practices, research, and institutional policies. Understanding First Nations perspectives of the history of colonisation is fundamental to decolonisation (Smith L. T., 1999) as is reclaiming knowledges and culture (Hughes & Fricker, 2024). Hughes and Fricker (2024) propose that the work of decolonisation in higher education must be undertaken via a model of co-constructing decolonising practice through shared labour and leadership of First Nations and non-Indigenous educators (illustrated below).



Such practices are also illustrated in the Australian Indigenous Education Project (AIPEP), an Aboriginal-led project focused on decolonising psychology (Dudgeon, et al., 2020). First established in 2013 and, now in its second iteration (AIPEP2), AIPEP2 has 34 partner universities / higher education providers engaged in a national community of practice facilitating educators to share their experiences and support each other to develop their curricula. The project aims to decolonise psychology, increase the number of First Nations students graduating from psychology study and consequently increase the number of First Nations people working in the psychology field, including as registered psychologists. This both facilitates appropriate and effective psychology services for First Nations communities but aims to tackle social exclusion and systemic racism by increasing access to, and engagement with, culturally safe mental health services and support programs for the community (Dudgeon, et al., 2020).

This review is informed by Goenpul scholar Aileen Moreton-Robinson's (1999) seminal discussion of race in Australian academia. Moreton-Robinson highlights that whiteness is centred as normal, but invisible, and white superiority and internalised dominance is hidden by

ethnocentrism. For white Australians, the ethnocentrism embedded in institutions, language, and everyday interactions, reinforces a worldview that their culture is the standard by which all others should be judged as well as 'universal' or 'neutral', rather than as culturally specific and tied to power.

Moreton-Robinson's concept of white self-centredness allows white academics and students to unconsciously accept that they are better and know more than those who are positioned as the non-white other (Moreton-Robinson A. , 1999, p. 4). Whiteness thus confers privilege and dominance to white people where race only belongs to non-whites who are constructed at the margins and "more often than not, the Indigenous other" (Moreton-Robinson A. , 1999, p. 3).

It must also be noted that truth-telling is critical to consideration of the history, context and response to racism in Australia. Broadly, truth-telling can be understood as activities that engage with a fuller account of Australia's history and its ongoing impact on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. Generations of First Nations people have tirelessly advocated for truth-telling: for stories of injustice, survival, and resilience to be formally heard and acknowledged. The Yoorook Justice Commission emphasises that truth-telling is more than an account of history, it is a reclamation. Voices of First Peoples are, for the first time, being included on the public record on their own terms, with oral testimony accorded the same authority as the colony's written archives (Yoorrook Justice Commission, 2025). This work reveals the way in which historical injustices continue to manifest — perpetuating harm, deepening inequity, and guiding Australia's future. Truth-telling is also a crucial step on Australia's path to recognition and reconciliation. Recent research (Payne & Norman, 2024) has aimed to address an existing evidence gap about what encourages Australians to engage with truth-telling exploring:

- what truth-telling means to First Nations peoples and non-Indigenous Australians
- the key barriers to and enablers of engagement with truth-telling and First Nations histories and
- the implications of these findings for progressing truth-telling in community settings.

Section 3 of this review will further explore the implications of truth-telling as a foundational principle for anti-racism initiatives in universities.

It is also worth distinguishing between concepts of colonialism, colonisation and coloniality. In brief, Maringe and Chiramba (2023) articulate colonialism as a concept used justify the act of invading another country, frequently on a pretext of 'discovery', "for the purposes of extracting economic and human resources, annihilating its cultural and intellectual bases, and exerting political influence over the indigenous people" (p. 145). In the Australian context, this concept is clearly illustrated in the doctrine of terra nullius (land belonging to no one) under which the British claimed Australia, as a colony of settlement, not conquest, ignoring Indigenous land rights and tens of thousands of years of ownership and custodianship of Country.

Colonisation can be considered the process via which colonialism is enacted and enforced. In Australia, while colonisation was predicated on the denial of the existence of First Nations peoples, sovereignty and ownership of country (Bradfield (2024); Fredericks et al (2014); Maddison (2019); Moreton-Robinson (2020b)), as well as maintaining colonial 'truths' of white superiority and Indigenous inferiority. This process, while differing in different geographic contexts, has common foundations.

Aníbal Quijano (2000) explains coloniality as the ongoing legacy of colonialism in contemporary societies via which patterns of human relations, thinking and organising are reproduced and integrated into new social orders. His research explores the notion of the coloniality of power - the tendency and replication of the power relations that established the colonial matrices and the continued application of these power relations in the post-colonial times.

Maringe and Chiramba (2023) argue that the concept of coloniality is particularly useful in understanding the way in which higher education institutions have maintained their colonial legacies, arguing that universities, along with other national institutions, tend to default back to colonial patterns of relations and systems through which they were established, but which they claim to wish to dismantle.

Cultural safety

The National Closing the Gap Joint Council, describes cultural safety as being "about overcoming the power imbalances of places, people and policies that occur between the majority non-Indigenous position and the minority Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander person so that there is no assault, challenge or denial of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander person's identity, of who they are and what they need". It emphasises that "cultural safety is met through actions from the majority position which recognise, respect, and nurture the unique cultural identity of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. Only the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander person who is recipient of a service or interaction can determine whether it is culturally safe". (Commonwealth of Australia, Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet, 2020, p. online).

Cultural safety was originally conceptualised in the context of health care for First Nations people in Aotearoa New Zealand, during the 1980s (Papps & Ramsden, 1996). It was first proposed by Māori midwifery students in response to feeling unsafe within the predominantly Anglo (Pakeha) educational settings they were trained in and was then further developed to help understand the poor uptake of health services by Māori people more generally (Ramsden, 1993). The concept moved beyond cultural awareness and cultural sensitivity to consider the experiences of recipients of care (Taylor & Guerin, Health Care and Indigenous Australians: Cultural Safety in Practice, 2010) and services (Australian Human Rights Commission, 2018, pp. 4-5) and has now been more broadly applied and adopted in other sectors as an approach to create anti-racist environments which support First Nations (and other staff with lived experience of racism and racial discrimination) in workplaces, as well as the delivery of culturally appropriate, safe services. It is noted that the National Anti-Racism Framework recommends that a nationally recognised definition of First Nations cultural safety be developed, with minimum standards, for application across sectors (Australian Human Rights Commission, 2024).

Everyday racism

Essed (1984) developed the concept of everyday racism to explore ways to "make visible the lived experience of racism" (1991, p. 1). Her work takes an interdisciplinary approach to examining how various dimensions of racism are experienced by individuals, specifically Black women from the US and the Netherlands, in everyday situations. While the concept of everyday racism relates to both interpersonal and structural racism (detailed below), Essed's focus is more strongly on individual accounts of racism and the pervasive impact on those who experience it. This seminal work reinterpreted many of the meanings and everyday practices that the majority of society had come to take for granted by exploring questions such as how Black women recognise covert expressions of racism?; what knowledge of racism do Black women have, and how is this knowledge acquired?; and how do they challenge racism in everyday life?.

Interpersonal racism

The Australian Human Rights Commission defines interpersonal racism as racism that occurs in everyday interactions. This can be between individuals or groups and is what most people recognise as racism. It can take a range of forms, including abusive language, harassment, exclusion, or humiliation. Interpersonal racism can also be expressed through casual remarks or jokes. Interpersonal racism does not always target a specific person and may not even be intended to cause harm or offence. However, the lack of intent does not reduce the negative impacts of racism (Australian Human Rights Commission, 2024, p. 36).

Interpersonal racism can be subtle or overt. Subtle interpersonal racism includes microaggressions, comments, questions, assumptions or actions that reinforce racist ideas or stereotypes about people and communities. For example, making assumptions about a colleague's capability and skills based on their race or skin colour (Victorian Equal Opportunity and Human Rights Commission, n.d.).

The term microaggressions is used to describe everyday negative behaviours, that stem from prejudice towards marginalised groups, however it is worth emphasising that when these are directed towards negatively racialised people, they can be either deliberate forms of racism, or subconscious racist actions (Reconciliation NSW, 2024).

While the terms racism, prejudice, discrimination may be used interchangeably, these concepts can also be distinguished. Duckitt defines prejudice from a social psychological perspective as

"complex and multifaceted, as primarily affective, as motivationally driven and rooted in ideological beliefs, and as powerfully influenced by both individual differences and by intergroup social and power relations, particularly involving threat, competition, and inequality" (Duckitt, 2013, p. 39). In addition, Tileagă and colleagues (Tileagă, Augoustinos, & Durrheim, 2022) argue that prejudice also has a social element – drawing on Memmi's observation that prejudice is part of a "collective language" (Memmi, 2000, p. 112) that society creates and then uses to talk about itself. Prejudice is "first of all a cultural atmosphere; one breathes it in with the air of the family and the society" (Memmi, 2000, p. 133).

Tileagă and colleagues suggest that address prejudice requires not tacking the prejudice per se but addressing collective ideological practices that reinforce racial and other kinds of ideological orders that keep people in their place. Racism is one of these, and so addressing racism "must be fundamentally geared towards the removal of the practices, mechanisms, and institutions that maintain systemic white privilege" (Bonilla-Silva, 2013, p. 266).

Discrimination can be distinguished as an action by which a person or group of people are treated unfairly or less favourably than others. Discrimination may be unlawful if it is due to a personal characteristic specified in legislation, such as race, age, disability, sex, or sexual orientation, and if it occurs in specified areas of public life including work, education, and accessing services. Discrimination can be direct, where a person is explicitly treated less favourably, or indirect, where a rule or policy that seems neutral unfairly disadvantages a person or group of people.

Intersectional racism

Intersectionality is a conceptual framework conceived by Kimberlé Crenshaw, an African American legal academic (Crenshaw, 1989). Intersectional racism describes how an individual's multiple identities, such as race, gender, or class, overlap and interact to create unique forms of discrimination and marginalisation that are more complex than racism or other forms of oppression alone. These different aspects of a person's identity then inform their experience of systemic and structural inequality. In other words, a person's experience of racism, is also affected by other parts of their identity, such as their sexual orientation, gender identity, age, socio-economic status, or whether they live with a disability. A number of Australian scholars have considered the significance of intersectional racism, or intersectional discrimination, where discrimination is compounded (Arbeláez-Ruiz (2021); Blackham and Temple (2020); Carangio et al (2021); Colic-Peisker and Tilbury (2007); Dreher (2009); Groutsis, O'Leary and Russell (2018), as well as developing frameworks through which organisations can focus on intersectional actions (Diversity Council Australia, 2023).

Negatively racialised

The Commission uses the term "negatively racialised" to refer to communities that experience the harms and traumas of racialisation, rather than to define or identify individuals or communities. It is used to highlight how racism operates by racialising various groups of people negatively, to maintain the dominance of groups racialised as white.

A range of authors have explored the way in which racialisation occurs, notably Omi and Winant who first published *Racial Formation in the United States* in 1986. In the revised third edition (Omi & Winant, 2014), the authors explain how concepts of race continue to be created and transformed, to shape U.S society, and how it permeates both identities and institutions. They emphasise that race is not biological and that racial formation occurs via changing social, economic, and political forces that determine the content and importance of socially constructed racial categories. Thus, their definition of racialisation not only extends to individuals, but the extension of racial meaning to previously racially unclassified relationships, social practices, or groups (Omi & Winant, 2014, p. 13). In considering the shifting and competing forces over thirty years, the authors also highlight examples of racial formation that can be seen in contemporary racial debates, including systemic racism, police violence, 'colour-blind' racial ideology, political representation, neoliberalism and discourses over immigration and multiculturalism.

While Omi and Winant (2014) acknowledge the inherent instability and socially constructed characteristics of race, they argue that there is also a crucial corporeal dimension to the concept. In other words, human bodies are visually read, understood, and narrated in the context of symbolic meanings and associations. This is not because of biologically based difference among humans across phonemic variables such as skin colour or hair texture, but because of socio-

historical practices including conquest and enslavement which classified humans for purposes of domination. As a result, these same distinctions have also become important for resistance to domination (for example, the Black Lives Matter movement).

Similarly, Diversity Council Australia (DCA) has sought to consider the physicality of racialisation, proposing a definition of culturally and racially marginalised (CARM) which refers "to people who cannot be racialised as white.[1] This group includes people who are Black, Brown, Asian, or any other non-white group, who face marginalisation due to their race. The term "culturally" is added because it recognises that people may also face discrimination due to their culture or background" (Diversity Council Australia, 2021).

Preferred terminology and language used to describe race/ethnicity/cultural backgrounds in Australia and globally is constantly evolving (Diversity Council Australia (V. Mapedzahama, F. Laffernis, A. Barhoum, and J. O'Leary), 2023). Diversity Council Australia has noted that while Australia has shifted away from directly racially exclusionary language in recent decades, terms such as non-English-speaking background (NESB), culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) and cultural diversity continue to avoid addressing race and, by extension, racism (Diversity Council Australia, 2022).

DCA offers the example of a woman who is a Muslim migrant from South Sudan, who may face discrimination because of her race and her religion and her cultural background. This example reflects increasing understandings of the impact of intersectionality, but also shifts in religious and ethnic hierarchies over recent decades. As Giroux (1993) explains, this can be seen in racist discourse that has shifted overtime from equating difference with deviance and cultural deprivation, to a position that acknowledges racial diversity, but claims that different racial formations, ethnicities and cultures pose a threat to national unity. This is particularly apparent in research on manifestations of Islamophobia (e.g. Titley & Lentin (2021); Birt (2009).

Associated approaches continue to be developed to help understand and combat negative racialisation, including recently a Racial Dignity Framework (Gatwiri K. , 2025) which is explored in more detail in section 3.3.

It is further worth noting that as understandings of racism in a contemporary Australian context have developed, the inaccuracy of previously preferred terms has become more apparent. For example, people who may come from a culturally or linguistically diverse (CALD) or non-English speaking background (NESB) may never be negatively racialised or experience racism if their appearance suggests they are white. However, as many previous studies and datasets have used terms including NESB or CALD, these may be used in this report when specifically referring to such research. The report also preferences terminology that communities self-identify with when this is indicated.

It is also worth noting that conversely, some groups may experience negative racialisation, despite their white appearance. Researchers have noted that while Jewish people come from many ethnic backgrounds, including those perceived as white, lived experience of antisemitism do not reflect being racialised as white. For example, Frosh (2023) notes that being Jewish does not always equate with being considered white and while many Jews are able to benefit from white privilege in ways that other racially marginalised groups cannot, this is likely to be contextual and unstable. He offers a useful example that while a Jewish driver may be able to enjoy white privilege when passing a police car, that is unlikely to extend to a context in which white supremacists are looking for a target to harass (Frosh, 2023, p. 122). This is a question also explored in detail by British Iraqi-Jewish journalist and author Rachel Shabi (Shabi, 2024). Shabi argues that a lack of widespread agreement about whether or not Jews are white, is not about how Jewish people should be categorised, but an illustration of the way in which racism creates race - not the other way around.

A number of other terms are commonly used in international contexts, notably BAME (Black and minority ethnic) which is widely used in the United Kingdom in public policy and in UK university programs aimed at supporting under-represented and negatively racialised people.

[1] Note: the term CARM was original coined by Dr Virginia Mapedzahama

Racial literacy

Racial literacy is a set of skills that: enable critical and intersectional understandings of racism and how race operates in society; increase awareness of the power dynamics that influence the process of racialisation, and racist practices, systems, and structures; equip people with tools to understand and challenge racism; are built over time involving continuous learning and unlearning, including about normalised practices, ways of being and knowing, and understandings of history particularly in relation to colonisation; and are determined by the needs of communities who experience racism (Brown, Kelada, & Jones, 2021; Grayson, 2017).

In a recent article drawing on preliminary findings from an ongoing research project, *Breaking the Racial Silence*[2] Bargallie and colleagues outline a theoretical framework for conceptualising racial literacy practices in Australia with the aim of assisting in the development of critical anti-racist education praxis that can foster generative pedagogies of race and racism in the Australian context (Bargallie, Fernando, & Lentin, 2024). The authors argue that racial literacy in Australia "is dismally low and talk of race and racism silenced" (2024, p. 1533) and as such it is vital that racial literacy remains grounded in epistemologies and theories drawn from Critical Race Theory (CRT), Critical Indigenous Studies (CIS) and the lived experiences of those with an intimate knowledge of how systems of power founded on whiteness operate.

Bargaillie and colleagues have subsequently developed a guide for academics (Lentin & Bargallie, 2024) that provide tools to understand the history and sociology of race, racism, and anti-racism, and so contribute to enhancing racial literacy in society. They note that the aim of racial literacy, as first set out by the Black and Native American scholars Twine (2004) and Guinier (2004), is to help people who face racism navigate a systemically racist world. In a contemporary Australian university context, racial literacy is fundamentally a process of solidarity building, growing a common knowledge of what race and racism do, and developing effective strategies to defeat them.

'Reverse Racism'

The above definitions and approaches lend themselves to exclude from this literature review the accounts, narratives, and experiences of white people who say that they experience 'reverse racism', which could include systemic and/or interpersonal racism.

A 2018 study examining a national survey of Australians in relation to witnessing racism, found that 10 per cent of respondents reported an event where they perceived a white Australian had been the target of racism (Nelson, Hynes, Sharpe, Paradies, & Dunn, 2018). The authors note that political discourses related to reverse racism are common across Australia, the US (Hughey, 2014) and UK (Hewitt, 2005). In the Australian context, a range of right-wing political groups including One Nation, Trumpet of Patriots and Katter's Australia Party have attempted to leverage votes from a perceived neglect of anti-white 'racism'. It should be noted, that this is not confined to more fringe political groups with the major political parties also encouraging white Australians to perceive themselves as racially disadvantaged compared to groups such as asylum seekers, international students and First Nations Australians by suggesting these groups receive unfair privileges (Hatchell, 2004).

Nelson and colleagues (2018) suggest that anti-white 'racism' can be considered via three approaches: an individual psychological analysis, an analysis of power and its effects, and a historical and structural analysis. While not an exhaustive list, this helps understand the tensions between different ways of approaching the analytical problem of claims of anti-white 'racism'. The authors note that while individual racialised experiences – for example racialised name-calling of white students in schools – can occur in specific social contexts where blackness has a positive premium, the power yielded in these contexts is often short-lived.

Claims of anti-white 'racism' often strongly intersect with class politics (Gillborn & Kirton, 2000), pointing to the importance of considering both historical and structural context and power - a foundational aspect of racism. An individual's ability to exercise power is evidently related to their positioning across multiple subjectivities, including gender, race, class (Nelson, Hynes, Sharpe, Paradies, & Dunn, 2018). And further, as Nelson and colleagues (2018) explain, power is never

[2] Griffith University: Human Research Ethics Approval through Griffith University Human Research Ethics Committee (GU Reference No: 2020/751).

only positional with power relations shifting, depending on context and situation and on the dynamic relationship between power and resistance.

Nonetheless, the consideration of power is central to defining and understanding racism. Operario and Fiske explain this as: "racism equals power plus privilege" (1998, p. 49) or as Banaji (2021, p. 2) writes: "Racism represents the biases of the powerful …. as the biases of the powerless have little consequence". "Put simply, the concept of 'reverse racism' – or 'anti-white racism' – just doesn't work, because racism is more than just prejudice... 'Reverse racism' is a skewed, reductionist and ultimately inaccurate understanding of racism" (Peucker, 2023).

The National Anti-Racism Framework (2024) notes that those who experience racism, commonly report overt racism, as well as a pervasive experience of being excluded from systems that maintain white privilege noting that "systems are built to maintain white privilege. Those who are white can successfully navigate, access and lead systems and institutions without having to shed their language, culture, religion and other parts of themselves" (Australian Human Rights Commission, 2024, p. 8).

Song argues that while it may be a commonly held view that *any* racial attribution, regardless of who has made it (or the specific context in which it is made), constitutes racism, this fails to differentiate between quite disparate forms of racialisation, by lumping all racialised phenomena together (Song, 2014). She suggests that this represents a growing culture of racial equivalence which de-couples the idea of racism from its historical basis, severity and power. Frequent and commonplace assertions of racism in the public sphere (she refers particularly to claims of racism in sport and related media reporting in Britain) can trivialise and homogenise quite different forms of racialised interactions making it important to differentiate more clearly between 'racism' (as an historical and structured system of domination) from the broader notion of 'racialisation' (Song, 2014).

The Victorian Anti-Racism Strategy (2024) also emphasises that while people in Australia can still face racism even with skin colour that is considered white, beliefs in white superiority and the inferiority of other racial groups have been reinforced in Australia over many years through discriminatory policies. Such policies which privileged some people and disadvantaged others, have persistent legacies in systemic and structural racism. 'Whiteness' became the default through policies that colonised, dispossessed and assimilated First Nations peoples and then discriminated against non-white migrants. This was illustrated most notably in the White Australia policy that banned non-white immigrants from moving to Australia and was formally in place from 1901 to 1975 (although the Whitlam government had begun dismantling the legislation behind the policy from 1973) (Victorian Government, 2024).

Consequently, given this Australian context, research examining experiences of white people who claim to have been targets of systemic or individual racism have been excluded.

Systemic, institutional and structural racism

Systemic racism is the way a society or institution's cultural norms, laws, ideologies, policies, and practices result in inequitable treatment and outcomes. Systemic racism involves entire systems - for example, legal, healthcare, and criminal justice systems - and the various institutions and structures that support their operation. Systemic racism can also happen without specific laws, policies, or practices that keep it in place, where the legacy of those norms, laws, policies, and practices persists in systems long after they have officially ended (Australian Human Rights Commission, 2024, p. 36). Institutional and structural racism are forms of systemic racism.

Institutional racism is closely linked to systemic racism. It exists when racism is normalised within an organisation or institution and can exist in spite of the goodwill that may exist among individuals and groups in those organisations. Elias and colleagues (Elias, Mansouri, & Paradies, 2021) explain that racism at the institutional level permeates social, cultural and power structures that perpetuate exclusion and racial inequality, including the policies and practices that guide how organisations and institutions run. Critically examining institutional racism, they argue, facilitates a better understanding of how ethnic minorities are impacted by the policy environment that shapes laws, practices and discourses in a multiracial society.

Elias and colleagues further point out that while explicit forms of institutional racism emerged as part of European colonisation, industrial capitalism and the Atlantic Slave Trade, these continue

to manifest in twenty-first-century Western societies. They emphasise that while these legacies are foundational to modern nation states, institutional racism, is not merely historical or limited to explicit racial policies. To the contrary, racism can be seen "lurking beneath the structures and institutions that privilege whiteness and disadvantage racial minorities" (Elias, Mansouri, & Paradies, 2021, p. 96).

Similarly, the term structural racism aims to describe the inequalities and barriers that prevent equal access to opportunities, including laws, policies, and cultural norms. Menendian (2025) argues that structural racial inequality does not depend on either racist individuals or ideas, but that race is so deeply entrenched (specifically in the US) that even if acts of racial discrimination were curbed and racist ideas eliminated, racial disparities would still persist on a massive scale. He explains that structural racial inequality is the result of a complex set of relationships and interactions between numerous institutions, policies, and people over many years, a great many of which may be even well-intended or not based on racist ideas. He asserts that these:

> *result in significant and persistent racial disparities based upon a structural logic that, once established, requires only indifferent policies preferences and largely self-interested individual and collective action. Structural racism is the persistent indifference and lack of regard to the conditions of structural racial inequality. Left undisturbed in that way, structural racial inequality is a highly adaptive perpetual motion machine that maintains itself indefinitely and operates independently of racist actors or ideas*
>
> (Menendian, 2025, p. 2).

It should be noted that the terms systemic, institutional, and structural racism, while distinct, are often used to refer to similar phenomena and are sometimes used interchangeably in the literature.

While there are differences in terms of the geographical and geopolitical contexts referenced in the literature, there are key similarities which should be considered. Most universities within the purview of this report are situated in settler colonial nation-states. As such, universities reflect colonial history in terms of preferencing western epistemologies, curricula and research methodologies. But at the same time, they also help maintain contemporary colonialism through their influence on law, policy, media and civil society.

For example, there are reports that students from Africa who study health sciences in Australia, the United Kingdom (UK), United States of America (US), and Canada all contend with racial stereotypes from domestic staff and students (Inyama, Williams, & McCauley, 2016). Further, the literature highlights that East Asian international students in the US experience more barriers (including race-based discrimination) than students from other parts of Asia, as well as domestic students, in completing their studies (Perry, Weatherford, & Laush, 2016).

This is not to state that anti-racism work is non-existent in universities. However, even when anti-racism or racial literary is considered within the university context, the literature suggests that racism is not usually understood, particularly in an intersectional manner.

In compiling this review, it is important to note that Australia, Canada, the US, and Aotearoa New Zealand share some similar issues and tensions related to the ongoing impacts of colonisation and denial of Indigenous sovereignty, as well as immigration and border protection/control. This manifests as the white majority attempting to maintain authority over who counts as belonging to the nation-state, who can speak and who should be listened to. At the crux of this is how asymmetrical relations of power privilege the 'West' over the 'rest' and imagine the 'West' as being embodied by white individuals (Hall S. , 1992).

White supremacy

Bonnett observes that "whiteness has developed, over the past two hundred years, into a taken-for-granted experience structured upon a varying set of supremacist assumptions (sometimes cultural, sometimes biological, sometimes moral, sometimes all three). Non-White identities, by contrast, have been denied the privileges of normativity, and are marked within the West as marginal and inferior" (1997, p. 188). In this context, Gillborn notes that while 'white supremacy' is a term usually reserved for individuals, organisations and/or philosophies that are overtly and self-consciously racist in the most crude and obvious way, perhaps "the most dangerous form of 'white supremacy' is not the obvious and extreme fascistic posturing of small neo-nazi groups,

but rather the taken-for-granted routine privileging of white interests that goes unremarked in the political mainstream" (Gillborn D. , 2005, p. 485).

White supremacy in this context refers to the centuries-old racialised social system comprising the 'totality of the social relations and practices that reinforce white privilege' (Bonilla-Silva, 2006, p. 9). These operate in and through everyday racisms to maintain a normalised orientation towards "white superiority, virtue, moral goodness and action" (Feagin, 2013, p. 10).

In an Australian article exploring white supremacy in higher education, Pechenkina and Lui (2018) detail the ways in which critical race theorists have, over recent decades, exposed the range of ways white supremacy underpins education policy and practice citing research from Feagin, Vera, and Imani (1996); Gillborn (2005); hooks (1989); Ladson-Billings (1998); Leonardo (2009); Pérez Huber (2009); Yosso et al. (2009). They explain that critical race theory (CRT) is founded in the assumption that society (specifically the US in which it was first conceptualised, but also is other western societies) is grounded in white supremacy (see Bell (1980); Crenshaw (1991); Delgado and Stefancic (2023).

Gillborn (2005) similarly argues that in Britain, while race inequity may not be a planned and deliberate goal of education policy, neither is it accidental. Through an empirical analysis of education policy in England, he highlights patterns of racial advantage and inequity that are structured in domination, representing "a form of *tacit intentionality* on the part of white powerholders and policy makers. It is in this sense that education policy is an *act* of white supremacy" (p. 485).

Methods

In undertaking this report, an approach that was both exploratory and systematic was adopted to capture both peer-reviewed and grey literature. We have applied a simplified protocol guided by subject matter expertise to capture an overview of the available literature.

This research has been stratified into the following research categories, each with their own respective approach:

1. Domestic and international research, surveys and evidence on existing and emerging trends in the prevalence, nature, impacts and experiences of racism within universities on students and staff, including through a systemic and intersectional lens.
2. Frameworks for prevention, including best practice examples and other guidance available within national and international university contexts to strengthen sectoral and institutional anti-racism with intersectional approaches and activities.
3. Impact and effectiveness of the rules, legislation, regulations, policies and other arrangements of universities in relation to preventing and addressing racism on university campuses (both physical and online).
4. Methods for universities to increase transparency and accountability to their students, staff, communities and the Australian Government on racism and discrimination prevention and response activities.
5. Benchmarks for measuring sector performance and ongoing improvement.
6. Adequacy of legislative and regulatory mechanisms in supporting universities to respond to racism and discrimination.

Due to the diverse research categories included within this report, data gathering approaches were developed to obtain information from sources relevant to each research category. Approaches were exploratory and flexible given this novel subject area in the context of tertiary institutions. In keeping with the brief given by the AHRC, peer reviewed, and grey literature published between the years 2014 and 2025, in English, were included in this report. A brief overview of the research approach is below.

Peer reviewed literature searches

Peer reviewed searches were performed using key terms relevant to each research category in the following databases JSTOR; Google Scholar, and the UTS Library. These three databases represent a balance between what is appropriate and what is feasible for the research timeframe and research question.

Examples of searches include combining “University” and “Australia” with the following key words to focus searches: “Racism”, “Islamophobia”, and “Antisemitism”. To identify First Nations specific topic areas, search terms combined “Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander”, “Indigenous” “First Nations” with “University”, “Tertiary Education”, “Higher Education”, “Racism”, “Retention” and “Australia”.

Grey literature searches

Grey literature[3] searches were performed in an inductive manner with iterative searches conducted within a broad range of search engines. Grey literature searches were performed in Google, Google Scholar, Microsoft Co-pilot, The Conversation articles, and Analysis and Policy Observatory (APO) to identify reports, policy documents, working papers and other sources related to the prevalence of racism in Australia between 2014 and 2025. Targeted searches of university specific websites and affiliated organisations were researched. These targeted searches included Australian and international tertiary institutions, followed by screening and data extraction of relevant data[4].

To capture both Australian and international data, Google searches were conducted and adapted from the Canadian Agency for Drugs and Technologies in Health method, where the top 25 search results based on key terms were screened according to the aim of each research category (Candian Agency for Drugs and Technologies in Health, n.d.). Further peer reviewed academic literature was identified from literature referenced within relevant grey literature and were included in the findings of this report.

To capture international data, Microsoft Co-pilot was also searched to identify best practice examples and other guidance available within the US, UK, New Zealand, Canada and other countries relevant to the Australian university context. Research questions aligned with the aims of this report were used as prompts for the Microsoft Co-pilot searches, such as “what frameworks for preventing racism are currently available?” Outcomes were then cross-referenced in Google, peer reviewed databases, and university websites.

Grey literature found in Google, Elicit, and Semantic Scholar pertaining to “nature, impacts and experiences of racism” were also validated and cross referenced within other databases, search engines, and targeted university related sources. Additional grey literature searches not discussed in this report, but included in the report's findings, were guided by authors’ expert knowledge of the subject area.

Critical race theory

This review draws on methods highlighted in critical race theory (CRT) - an approach taken by activists and scholars engaged in studying and transforming the relationships between race, racism, and power, considering a broad perspective that includes economics, history, setting, group and self- interest, and emotions and the unconscious (Delgado & Stefancic, 2023).

CRT developed in North America in the 1970s, as lawyers, activists, and legal scholars began to realise that many advances of the civil rights era of the 1960s had stalled and, in many respects, were being rolled back. Understanding that new theories and strategies were needed to combat the subtler forms of racism that were gaining ground, early CRT scholars Bell (1980) and (1989); Freeman (1988), Crenshaw (1988), Delgado (1989), and others, began working on what became known as CRT. The theory has now expanded from jurisprudence, chiefly of

[3] Grey literature, as defined by Schöpfel (2011, p. 2) are the “document types produced on all levels of government, academics, business and industry in print and electronic formats that are protected by intellectual property rights, of sufficient quality to be collected and preserved by library holdings or institutional repositories, but not controlled by commercial publishers i.e., where publishing is not the primary activity of the producing body.”
[4] Refer to the appendix for a comprehensive list of Australian universities included in this review.

interest to academic lawyers, into an approach considered by a wide range of disciplines including education.

CRT's approach to the unequal and unjust distribution of power and resources along political, economic, racial, and gendered lines globally, along with consideration of legal systems, that perpetuate established power relation in society, make it particularly useful for considering the dynamics of race and power in educational theory, research, policy and practice (Taylor, Gillborn, & Ladson-Billings, 2023). Overviews of the introduction of CRT to education can be found in Parker et al. (1999), Solorzano & Delgado Bernal (2001), Solorzano & Yosso (2001) and Yosso et al. (Yosso, Parker, Solorzano, & Lynn, 2004).

CRT begins with the notion that racism is "normal, not aberrant" in society (Delgado R. , 1995, p. xiv) and, because it is so enmeshed in the fabric of our social order, it appears both normal and natural (Ladson-Billings, 2023). Taylor describes the key approaches of CRT scholarship as "…marked by a number of specific insights and observations, including society's acceptance of racism as ordinary, the phenomenon of Whites allowing Black progress when it also promotes their interests (interest convergence), the importance of understanding the historic effects of European colonialism, and a preference for the experiences of oppressed peoples (narrative) over the 'objective' opinions of Whites" (Taylor E. , 2023, p. 3).

Indigenous Research Methods

We acknowledge that this review is founded in traditional western research methodologies as outlined above, but we aim to incorporate more subjective, collaborative, and relational approaches where possible (Tynan & Bishop, 2022).

The methodology was designed to be, as far as possible, culturally responsive and grounded in principles that honour the voices, experiences, and aspirations of First Nations peoples. A strengths-based approach was adopted, emphasising the inherent strengths, resilience, and capabilities of First Nations communities. The methodology for this review was also underpinned by a guiding principle of First Nations self-determination, recognising that First Nations peoples are best positioned to identify and address their needs and priorities.

Particularly where referencing the experience of First Nations peoples, the review has sought to prioritise First Nations voices, recognise the diversity of First Nations worldviews, knowledges, and realities, and emphasise the social, historical, and political contexts which shape First Nations' experiences, lives, positions and futures (Laycock, A. with Walker, D., Harrison, N. & Brands, J, 2011).

Key Themes

When considering the prevalence, nature and impact of racism[5] on individuals and groups of students and staff in universities, it is important to situate these experiences within an institutional context.

As discussed previously, institutional racism exists when racism is normalised within an organisation or institution and can exist despite individual goodwill of participants in those organisations. Racism at the institutional level permeates social, cultural and power structures that perpetuate exclusion and racial inequalities, including the policies and practices that guide how organisations operate (Elias, Mansouri, & Paradies, 2021). Sara Ahmed's scholarship on racism in universities in Australia and the UK (Ahmed S. , 2012) situates universities as institutions practicing what Acker calls “inequality regimes”: the “interrelated practices, processes, action and meanings that result in and maintain class, gender and race inequalities” ((2006, p. 443) and (2012).

Ahmed (2012, p. 44) argues that:

> *[t]he struggle to recognize institutional racism can be understood as part of a wider struggle to recognize that all forms of power, inequality, and domination are systematic rather than individual. The critique of the psychologizing of racism made by anti-racist scholars and activists over generations is thus part of the struggle to recognize institutional racism (see Hesse 2004). In other words, racism should not be seen as about individuals with bad attitudes (the ‘bad apple model’), not because such individuals do not exist (they do), but because such a way of thinking underestimates the scope and scale of racism, thus leaving us without an account of how racism gets reproduced. The argument can be made in even stronger terms: the very identification of racism with individuals becomes a technology for the reproduction of racism of institutions. So eliminating the racist individual would preserve the racism of the institution in part by creating an illusion that we are eliminating racism. Institutions can ‘keep their racism’ by eliminating those whom they identify as racists.*

Creating higher education institutions that effectively prevent and respond to racism must be informed and guided by the lived experiences of people who experience racism at an individual and institutional level, but also go further to address systemic racism.

[5] While this review explores both literature that specifically and collectively interrogates antisemitism, Islamophobia, racism and the experiences of First Nations people, we have used the term racism where such discriminatory experiences have been researched.

1. The prevalence of racism experienced by university staff and students - domestic and international research, surveys and evidence

1.1 Australia

There is, to date, no robust prevalence data available about racism experienced in a higher education context in Australia. It should be noted that a focus on racism in Australian universities is a relatively recent development: in a 2016 international journal special issue exploring building anti-racist universities, the authors noted a "puzzling absence" of contributions from Australia (Tate & Bagguley, 2016, p. 289).

The data about racism in universities is reflected in patterns of data more broadly available about racism in Australia, despite a range of research carried out in recent decades. In a 2021 concept paper for the National Anti-Racism Framework (Tan, 2021), the former Australian Human Rights Commission Race Discrimination Commissioner observed that, despite the need for comprehensive national data to inform, guide and deliver effective anti-racism, "[r]obust, nationally consistent data about racism and racial inequality is not available in Australia (Tan, 2021, p. 6)."

Work subsequently undertaken for the Commission's National Anti-Racism Framework (Australian Human Rights Commission, 2024) also identified that data on racism in Australia was limited, inconsistent across jurisdictions, and often ad-hoc. The Framework put forward a range of recommendations calling for a national, comprehensive approach to collecting data for anti-racism purposes that embeds Indigenous Data Sovereignty and Indigenous Data Governance and a human rights-based approach. The Commission further recommended the development of a National Anti-Racism Data Plan, in which supported communities with lived experience of racism to be meaningfully engaged in co-designing a national approach to data about race and racism. This included the development of new population and administrative data standards on Indigenous status and ethnicity, strengthening data about different forms of racism, and initiatives to address personal and structural barriers to reporting racism.

Ben and colleagues (2022b) have canvased quantitative research on racism in Australia finding that while there is limited data specific to universities, there has been considerable attention given to identifying the nature of racism and measuring its prevalence and impact more broadly. While these include a significant number of empirical, survey-based studies examining racism and related phenomena (such as discrimination, prejudice, Islamophobia and anti-immigrant sentiments), their differential concepts, wide-ranging measures and diverse study designs, are likely to have impacted the varying prevalence rates they report.

Ben and colleagues (Ben, Mansouri, Denson, Walton, & Paradies, 2024) report that scholarly research measuring racism in Australia dates from the 1980s and 1990s and included a range of surveys focused on immigration and anti-immigrant attitudes (including the Australian Values Study (AVS), the Longitudinal Study of Immigrants in Australia (LSIA)). Surveys from the 2000s focused more explicitly on the experience of racism, of the Australian population, First Nations peoples, and children including the Geographies of Racism National Survey (2001–2008), the Scanlon Foundation's Mapping Social Cohesion (MSC) survey (2007 – present), the Household, Income and Labour Dynamics in Australia (HILDA) longitudinal survey (2001 – present). Three nationally representative, multidimensional surveys were established in 2002–2004: the General Social Survey (GSS); the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Survey (NATSIHS); and National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Survey (NATSISS). Around this time, two longitudinal datasets were established focusing on children: Growing Up in Australia: The Longitudinal Study of Australian Children (LSAC), and Footprints in Time: The Longitudinal Study of Indigenous Children (LSIC).

The 2014 Australian Bureau of Statistics' national General Social Survey (GSS), found 34 per cent of respondents reported experiencing racial/ethnic discrimination (Blackham & Temple, 2020). Similar results were seen in the 2015–2016 national Face Up to Racism survey which found that forms of everyday racism such as name-calling, mistrust and disrespect were reported by 34–40 per cent of participants (Blair, Dunn, Kamp, & Alam, 2017). The Face Up to Racism

survey was conducted by Western Sydney University as part of their *Challenging Racism Project* (Blair, Dunn, Kamp, & Alam, 2017) and involved online surveys of 6000 Australian residents between July and August 2015, and in November 2016, that were largely representative of the Australian population.

It is worth noting that in response to more general questions about racism, than specifically in relation to their own experience, respondents acknowledged that the prevalence of racism is much higher. In Face Up to Racism, 79 per cent agreed that racial prejudice exists in Australia, with 11 per cent self-identifying as racist (Sharples & Blair, 2020), while 86 per cent in the national Geographies of Racism survey agreed with this proposition (Habtegiorgis, Paradies, & Dunn, 2014). This phenomenon of individuals perceiving greater discrimination than they personally have experienced has also been identified in other research (Dunn & Nelson, 2011).

Other research undertaken in Australia attempting to establish the prevalence of racism in the broader Australian community includes Ben, et al. (2022a); Elias, Mansouri, & Paradies (2021); Ferdinand, Paradies, & Kelaher (2015); (Forrest, Poulsen, & Johnston (2006)) however, this has not extended to specifically to higher education settings.

Recent best estimates from the Scanlon Foundation's annual Mapping Social Cohesion survey suggest that 17 per cent of Australian adults reported personal experiences of discrimination based on skin colour, ethnicity or religion, with 34 per cent of respondents from non-English speaking backgrounds reporting such experiences (O'Donnell, Guan, & Prentice, 2024). Previous surveys between 2007 and 2023 found that reported experiences of discrimination based on skin colour, ethnicity or religion have ranged between 9 and 20 per cent over that time. While the Mapping Social Cohesion survey is not specific to the higher education sector, survey participants have frequently highlighted the experiences of international students. This is particularly relevant to the current context of recent Federal Government and Opposition rhetoric about enacting policies to reduce immigration and capping the number of international students coming to Australia (Truu & Evan, 2024).

The most recent Australian Reconciliation Barometer has noted an increase in the percentage of First Nations respondents who had experienced at least one form of racism in the previous six months from 43 percent in 2018 and 52 per cent in 2020 to 60 per cent in 2022 (Reconciliation Australia, 2022). It is worth noting that this research was conducted prior to the 2024 Voice Referendum. The Challenging Racism Project (Blair, Dunn, Kamp, & Alam, 2017) also identified that rates of racism experienced by First Nations participants were much higher than non-First Nations participants.

Rates of racism were also higher for survey respondents who spoke a language other than English compared to those who only spoke English and relevantly, the most common setting for these experiences was within educational institutions (Blair, Dunn, Kamp, & Alam, 2017). Fifty-seven per cent of First Nations respondents and 56 per cent of LOTE (Language Other Than English) speaking respondents experienced racism within school and university settings.

While a range of quantitative data does exist, researchers have noted serious limitations, as Ben et al (2022a) identified in a review examining 42 survey-based research studies and six ongoing organisational reporting initiatives. Ben et al (2022a) identified eight gaps to racism data collection and analysis in Australia, including six areas where data collection and analysis were missing or inadequate impacting on knowledge about the nature, prevalence and impact of racism in Australia:

1. Cohorts experiencing racism: experiences of racism among young people (under 18) and humanitarian migrants.
2. Perpetrator demographics: perpetrators' racial/ethnic backgrounds and other demographics such as age, education and sex.
3. Types of racism: vicarious racism (for example, as witnessed), the existence of structural racism in society (for example, in Australia; towards a group), and specific forms of racism such as being harassed, hassled or stopped from doing things.
4. Settings where racism is experienced: domestic settings, media, sports, online, and financial settings.

5. State- and local-level data: while data about the state where study participants reside are often collected by national studies, those studies rarely report state- and local-level data.
6. Responses to and outcomes of racism: attitudinal, cognitive, behavioural, and health related responses to racism are scarcely studied. Relatively few studies report on associations between experiencing racism and certain health outcomes, such as physical health or substance use, and between racism and key indicators of socio-economic status or outcomes such as employment or income.

Two additional gaps related to limitations in data collection methodologies:

7. Longitudinal data: Longitudinal designs are scarce, limiting understanding of the transformations and effects of racism over time. These include changes over the lifespan and during critical life phases, and changes in the prevalence and impact of racism on various outcomes; and
8. Capacity and resourcing of routine data collection: Organisations play a critical role in the routine collection of racism data yet face limitations to their data collection methodologies and coordination, and challenges related to organisational resources.

Efforts to address these continuing gaps have led to proposed research methodologies which move beyond individual studies to summarise and synthesise national findings rigorously drawing on robust, established practice in systematic reviews and meta-analysis (Ben, et al., 2022b).

Povey, Trudgett, Page and Locke argue that the lack of robust data reflects the problem of "anything but racism" - the concealment of racism that extends to reporting and the "associated discourse of denial, facilitated by language and grammar constructs" (Povey, Trudgett, Page, & Lea Locke, 2022, p. 359). The tertiary sector is not alone in its diluting of language on racism. One of the key findings of a report prepared for the AHRC mapping government anti-racism policy and programs over the past decade was that there is a reluctance on the part of all levels of government in Australia to use the term 'racism' and a preference over the past decade for the use of 'social cohesion' which has weakened approaches to anti-racism (AHRC, 2024, p.2). Povey and colleagues cite a range of literature beyond the time scope of this review that identify how racism is "hidden in plain view in the higher education system" (Povey, Trudgett, Page, & Lea Locke, 2022).

It is worth emphasising that while a range of qualitative surveys relating to racism in higher education have been undertaken in Australian universities (and will be discussed below), these have not been intended to establish prevalence.

1.2 International

Comparing the literature available in Australia to the US, further illustrates the lack of peer reviewed research on racism in Australia. As an example, a database search via JSTOR with the search prompts 'racism in America' brought up 217,824 results. The search prompt 'racism in American universities' resulted in 76,045 book chapters, journal articles, and research reports. Taking the USA's larger population into account, this still represents 74 per cent more literature on the topic than in Australia, reflecting the USA's more established history of research and literacy about race as a framework for evaluating societal, cultural, and political systems. Erin Wen Ai Chew, National Convener of the Asian Australian Alliance, highlights this difference by noting in a personal communication with a co-author (Elaine Laforteza, 2024) "Look at how the US has Black History Month or Asian-American History Month...we don't have anything like that in Australia."

Moreover, the US has in recent decades collected race and ethnicity data through the Census Bureau and other federal agencies. In contrast, "Australia does not collect data on race and ethnicity, and prefers the use of collective cultural groups, whose information is not consistently collected and reported at all levels of government and service delivery" (Zhang, 2023).

Some American research provides indicative data about prevalence of racism in some US universities. One study found that "5-15 per cent of racial/ethnic minority students - including Black, Hispanic, Asian, AI/NA/NH and Multiracial students – were more likely to report

discrimination relative to white students" (Stevens, Liu, & Chen, 2018, p. 665)[6]. Another quantitative study of US university students in Georgia (Shah, 2021) surveyed more than 1200 students during April and May 2020. During their lifetime, 47.5 per cent of students reported experiencing some level of bias or hatred, ranging from 'rarely' to 'very often.' The survey also reinforced the importance of external environments to student experiences of racism: in the survey period which was 1-2 months after the onset of COVID-19, 17.6 per cent of students reported experiencing race-related bias or hatred.

Beyond the US, there are varying degrees of evidence about the prevalence of racism on university campuses.

In the UK, a 2019 report from the Equality and Human Rights Commission found that 24 per cent of students from an ethnic minority background and 50 per cent of staff from ethnic minority backgrounds had experienced racial harassment (Equality and Human Rights Commission, 2019). Twenty per cent of students had been physically attacked and 56 per cent of students who had been racially harassed had experienced racist name-calling, insults and jokes. Other common experiences included: subtle and nuanced acts (microaggressions); being ignored or excluded from conversations or group activities; and being exposed to racist material or displays. In most cases students said their harasser was another student, but a large number said it was their tutor or another academic. Over half of staff who responded to the survey described incidents of being ignored or excluded because of their race. More than a quarter said they experienced racist name-calling, insults and jokes. Much of this harassment took place in office environments, frequently in plain sight of their colleagues. International students reported feeling unwelcome, isolated and vulnerable[7].

A study from New Zealand shows that young Māori, Pacific, and Asian people (aged 15-24) experience racism more than white people (Harris, et al., 2024). However, this study was not based just on university campuses, but instead accounts for young people more generally and while we can extrapolate this to account for this age range being at university, it is not a true or accurate reflection of the prevalence of racism in the higher education context.

There is no readily available comprehensive data on the prevalence of racism in Canadian universities, although one publication (Henry F. D., 2017) includes some survey data about experiences of university staff. Ramos and colleagues chapter on representation and income among racialised and Indigenous faculty (Ramos, et al., 2017) presents solid empirical evidence on systemic racism in academia, while recognising that more robust data is needed. The authors provide evidence that racialised faculty are underpaid and are less likely to be hired, tenured, and promoted. The publication concludes that racialised and Indigenous faculty at Canadian universities face discrimination, undervaluation, and systemic obstacles, with equity policies poorly enforced and human rights policies reinforcing neoliberal ideologies.

Significantly more literature is available in relation to qualitative experiences and impacts of racism in Australia, both within universities and in the wider community. While this literature cannot be used to establish prevalence, it can give voice to the nature, impacts, and experiences of racism. This is explored further below.

[6] AI/NA/NA refers to American Indian, Alaskan Native, or Native Hawaiian which were grouped in this way by the study authors.
[7] Full details of this research which may be useful to the Commission's current work are available in detailed research reports: 'Racial harassment inquiry: survey of university students' (available from the EGRC on request) and 'Racial harassment inquiry: survey of universities' and 'Racial harassment in British universities: qualitative research findings'.

2. Nature, impacts and experiences of racism among different cohorts

The impacts of racism on individuals and communities have been widely documented in terms of health, wellbeing, economic security, educational outcomes and employment over many years. While only a small amount of this research specifically references the experiences and perspectives of university students (Levy, Heissel, Richeson, & Adam, 2016), it does provide important context for the need to address racism in universities. In addition, it is worth observing - as VicHealth did in a recent synthesis review - that "[r]acism and racial discrimination are fundamental causes and determinants of health and health inequalities globally. Children and young people are particularly vulnerable to racism's harms" (Priest, Guo, Perry, Thurber, & Jones, 2021).

2.1 Students

The literature highlights a range of ways in which racism on campuses is experienced by those at whom it is directed. For students, this can include:

- **Systems and processes that impact on student enrolment and access**: Admission processes can fail to consider the differing needs of marginalised cohorts of prospective students. For example, the literature has found that when First Nations students faced a challenging admission process, such as difficulties in applying for recognition of prior learning (RPL) and a lack of articulated pathways from VET qualifications into higher education, they felt stressed, disempowered, and undervalued (Simpson (2022); Stuart & Gorman (2015)). Similarly, research into the experiences of young African people from refugee backgrounds has identified that even when flexible pathways to higher education exist, these are difficult to access without high levels of navigational capacity[8] and that the stress of racism pervades these students' educational experiences (Molla, 2021)[9].
- **Anglo and Euro Centric assessment practices and curriculum**: Students in a recent University of Melbourne study (Omer, 2023) reported issues with assessment, citing experiences such as "[t]oo many examples and case studies and exam questions are related to alcohol. As a Muslim, I have not knowledge (or interest) in these examples, and I cannot relate to them" (p. 12); '"Exams, lectures and tutorials are 100 per cent not culturally appropriate" (p. 17); "the exam contained an optional question that deeply disadvantaged me as a non-native speaker who could not understand the words of the song played [by] the lecturer" (p. 26). Similarly, the students identified concerns with curriculum: "[i]t sometimes feels that looking at something outside of the European canon feels like an obligation for some people, mostly students as teachers have expressed in person to me that they would like to have a more diverse focus in their own courses" (p. 12); "[t]he course outlines and syllabi, even in the film department, are very Eurocentric and Hollywood American-centric. I find that I'm so invisible. Despite that, there are lasting film industries in other parts of the world" (p. 11); and "[w]hen I cite from Chinese credited resources, my professor refused to recognize the creditability of it" (p. 13). Veldman and Guilfoye (2013) describe this as "cultural insensitivity, in which academies may favour Western knowledge to the exclusion of other forms" (Veldman & Guilfoye, 2013, p. 4).
- **First Nations perspectives are rarely included:** Recent Australian research on improving completion rates for First Nations students has found that Engaging with Indigenous knowledges and perspectives in the classroom is critically needed to support

[8] Navigational capacity refers to the ability to recognise and pursue pathways to achieve goals. Appadurai (2004) likens planning and working towards future goals to 'navigation', which requires knowledge of both a destination and intermediate stops (or nodes) along the way. They argue that this navigation is a capacity that relies on resources – economic, social and cultural – including knowledge and previous experiences of successful navigation (i.e. one's own knowledge and experiences as well as the knowledge and experiences of one's sociocultural group).

[9] Significant research has been undertaken in this space by the Australian Centre for Student Equity and Success (ACSES) at Curtin University including for a range of marginalised student cohorts including CALD students, humanitarian migrants, refugee young people, and Indigenous students.

learning outcomes (Fredericks B. , et al., 2022). This, alongside employing teaching methods that align with Indigenous learning styles (for example, those that emphasise observation, imitation, and practical application (Hughes & More, 1997)) helps build a strong sense of belonging and positive experiences in the learning environment for First Nations students (Fredericks B. , et al., 2022).

While such recommendations are not new (Behrendt, Larkin, Griew, & Kelly, 2012) and despite continuing attempts by the tertiary education sector to improve practice in this space (Universities Australia, 2011), First Nations students and graduates continue to report this as problematic (Fredericks B. , et al., 2023). Fredericks et al (2023) note that while important work has been undertaken by universities to develop frameworks and design principles to guide Indigenisation of curriculum (e.g., (Bunda, 2022); (Howlett, Ferreira, Seini, & Matthews, 2013), there is still, as Raciti (2022) notes, "a seemingly persistent reluctance to embed Australian Indigenous knowledges (yes, plural) and perspectives (also plural)" in some disciplines (Raciti, 2022, p. 211). In this article Raciti is referring specifically to marketing, but also references broader business disciplines and draws on her experience as the inaugural Associate Dean (Learning and Teaching) in the (then) Faculty of Arts and Business in her university and as an Adjunct Fellow with the (then) National Centre for Student Equity in Higher Education.

- **Linguistic bias and stereotyping**: Australian research suggests a mismatch between current academic thinking on the importance of translingualism in education and the relative invisibility and lack of privilege given to languages other than English on campus, especially from a non-European context (Dobinson & Mercieca (2020); Sender (2020). This has been found to be particularly experienced by international students from East Asia and South Asia (Park, Hodge, & Klieve, 2022), who experience linguistic racism in the form of accent bullying and stereotyping, leading to psychological distress including depression and suicidal ideation. 'Ethnic accent bullying' refers to bullying in the forms of 'laughing' and 'joking' towards ethnically and linguistically different background speakers' English accent. 'Linguistic stereotyping' refers to predefined negative perceptions imposed on English speakers based on their race, ethnicity, and nationality. These speakers are often 'heard,' 'seen,' or 'imagined' speaking 'bad' or 'low proficient' English irrespective of their actual high-level in English. An 'ethnic accent' may shape perceptions of one's English competency, which does not seem to elicit the same treatment as British, Australian, American, Canadian (and so on) English accents (Sender, 2020).
- **Low expectations**: One study examining the experience of new migrant students (particularly from refugee backgrounds) in Australian regional universities found that numerous students interviewed as part of the research spoke about their frustrations with a pattern of other students and university faculty having low expectations of them (Harvey & Mallman, 2019). The students were aware of widespread underestimations about their interest in classroom participation, cultural stereotypes and assumptions that they were not very intelligent or capable of challenging tasks.
- **Microaggressions:** One Australian study of students from African backgrounds found that participants reported a disturbing level of racial vilification, verbal abuse and microaggressions in their daily life as well as in educational settings (Molla, 2021). The author noted that the stress of racism in educational settings, regardless of the availability of flexible pathways to and academic support mechanisms in higher education, meant that students were limited in their ability to convert these opportunities into achievements. These damaging consequences of racial microaggressions included self-exclusion of African young people from academic and social activities (Molla, 2021).

  Another recent study examined the experiences of medical students in Australia and the UK, finding that despite 'widening participation' policies and practices aimed increasing the numbers of students from lower socioeconomic, ethnic minority, rural and remote and Indigenous backgrounds, students frequently experienced misrecognition and microaggression reinforced feelings of being unwelcome in a culturally unsafe environment. Indigenous Australian students particularly struggled to feel comfortable in the world of medicine, but person-centred support from key staff members helped

establish a sense of security and stability in developing a new identity as a medical student (Coyle, Bullen, Sandover, Poobalen, & Cleland, 2025).

A systematic review of racial microaggressions in US higher education learning environments (Ogunyemi, 2020) examined more than 40 studies which included microaggression experiences of minorities, difficult racial dialogues, coping strategies for microaggressions, and system intervention strategies. More than 80 per cent of reports related to microinsults, close to 28 per cent to institutional microaggressions, 20 per cent to micro-assaults, and 5 per cent to microinvalidations. Microaggressions were prevalent and 'invisible' in colleges with minority students seemingly worn down by ongoing strategies used to confront the inherent associated stresses. Difficult racial dialogues were characterised by intense emotions in both professors and students that interfered with successful learning experiences. American research has also highlighted the intersectional experience of microaggressions in the higher education system. Harris (2017) highlights gender influences on multiracial microaggressions – for example, women's hair played a large part in the assumptions about identity. The author stressed that these findings reinforced the importance of future research exploring the intersectional influence of race, gender, and other social identities in multiracial students' experiences with multiracial microaggressions (Harris J. , 2017).

- **Racial bias and racialised stereotyping:** Recent research (Goldsmith, MacKenzie, & Wynter, 2024) has identified significantly different responses from faculty to prospective PhD students. Approximately 7000 emails were sent by the research team from fictitious students to academics based at the main campuses of Australia's Group of Eight universities. Depending on the student's name and association with a racialised group, statistical analysis showed the white-sounding names averaged a 7 per cent higher reply rate and a 9 per cent higher positive response rate than the non-white sounding names. Racialised stereotyping of students (Mitchell, Stelle, Marie, & Timm, 2017) is often reinforced by media representations (Ritter & Roth, 2015) and thus likely to become more evident when race based events are given greater media coverage.

  Fredericks and colleagues provide recent first-person accounts from First Nations graduates, many of whom noted that much more work needs to be done within the universities they studied at to improve the focus on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander content and knowledges and draw further on Indigenous perspectives within the curriculum (Fredericks B. , et al., 2023). Racism in university classrooms was discussed by many of the graduates in Frederick and colleagues' study. In some cases, the perceived racism was from their peers with other students making comments like "colonialism was good for Indigenous people" (Fredericks B. , et al., 2023, p. 23).

- **Retention and completion:** Racism and discrimination towards First Nations students from non-Indigenous peers and staff has been found to impact on successful course completion (Simpson, 2022). Examples cited in the literature include questioning over Indigenous cultural identity, and students being treated negatively by others due to the perception that they are receiving 'special treatment' (Stuart & Gorman, 2015); (West, 2016)). Again, Fredericks and colleagues, provide insight into First Nations student experiences by detailing these verbatim: "I had students go, 'Oh, you must have got scholarships for coming here': when they worked out that I was Indigenous, or 'Oh, did you take a bridging pathway?' 'No, I actually got here the same way that a lot of people in this room got here" (Fredericks B. , et al., 2023, p. 23).

- **Social segregation and isolation**: Social segregation and isolation are commonly reported by negatively racialised students. The University of Melbourne Racism survey (Omer, 2023) found students reported a deliberate isolation of students based on race. Student quotes highlighting social exclusion included: "[m]any local Australian white students sometimes ignore international students' existence. Sometimes they just assume we don't exist and continue their own discussion in class" (p. 11); and "I have experienced situations where my classmates declined to collaborate with me, citing that I am not their friend and am Asian. They preferred to work with their friends" (p. 11). Isolation is also nominated in the literature as a significant challenge for First Nations students, including in a recent international scoping review (Baeza Pena, Xing, Blue,

Saward, & Anderson, 2024), and by Fredericks et al (2023). McAllister and colleagues found that having Māori and Pacific colleagues and mentors within their discipline, heavily influenced the success of Māori and Pacific postgraduates, reducing discomfort and isolation (McAllister, et al., 2022).

A 2017 systematic review of research on students from refugee backgrounds (including in Australia) also identified that these students frequently found aspects of themselves invalidated and misrecognised by different individuals within higher education, including by peers both from, and not from refugee backgrounds, teaching staff, and by the systems themselves. Aspects of their lives which were invalidated included their intelligence, refugee life story or identity and current life struggles. This invalidation involved dismissal, not understanding or recognising, or negative judgement (Mangan & Winter, 2017). Students in a number of the studies reviewed reported that they felt they were treated as inferior to other students in their institutions, suggesting an underlying racism. A Sudanese male participant in one study said "I usually feel isolated. If you are given team work ... they run away from you" (Onsando & Billett, 2009, p. 84). They spoke of their ideas and assignments being 'pushed aside' by both educators and other students, as though their contributions were less valid or valued than others. Such discrimination left them feeling distracted, stressed and unmotivated to a who attend, compounding already-existing challenges with learning. These experiences were echoed in other studies, where students felt they were assumed to be stupid, with staff appearing surprised when they contributed in class (Harris & Marlowe, 2011).

- **Racism in professional practice settings:** A number of studies have examined students' experiences of racism – particularly in health disciplines – in professional or clinical practice settings (Archuleta et al (2024); Lall et al (2021); Caffrey et al (2023); (2024)). Students from ethnic minority backgrounds reported racism as well as cultural and/or religious microaggressions. While being valued for their race and ethnicity, white students also experienced discrimination and inequity due to age, sex, gender, and sexual orientation. One recent study examining the prevalence of exposure to racism, discrimination, bullying, and harassment for Māori medical students and physicians found high exposure to multiple forms of racism, discrimination, bullying, and harassment in medical education, training, and work environments (Cormack, et al., 2024).

Surveys undertaken by student led organisations have been particularly useful in shedding light on the nature and impact of racism, Islamophobia and antisemitism on students. The University of Melbourne People of Colour committee (part of the university's student organisation, UMSU) has now undertaken their third annual survey of racism in their institution (Omer, 2023). The surveys were conducted in semesters two of 2021 (Hadi, 2021), 2022 (Adam, 2022) and 2023 and have grown from 51 responses in 2021 to 855 responses in 2023. The surveys are not an attempt to establish prevalence but to explore students' experiences of race discrimination and microaggressions in academic settings, and their comfort with reporting incidents. The demographics collected from students were in relation to current or alumni status, the course they study/studied, residency status, whether they identified as a 'Person of Colour' and whether they had witnessed or experienced racism at university. In addition, focus groups were conducted in person, with participants asked questions covering three main themes: how racism manifests at the University of Melbourne, the challenges to reporting racism, and initiatives to tackle racism and improve reporting.

Key themes emerging from the survey and focus groups related to:

- Language and terminology - academic policies and guidelines are often not translated or available in languages accessible to students from diverse backgrounds, particularly international students.
- Lack of representation in the curriculum and the teaching staff, particularly when it comes to topics related to colonialism and intersectionality.
- The impact of racism on students' sense of belonging and inclusion within the University community.
- Challenges in addressing racism effectively on campus, including the perception that racism is no longer a significant issue in the University. This perception can lead to

resistance when these issues are raised and highlights 'white fragility'[10] with some individuals reacting defensively when confronted with discussions about race and racism (Omer, 2023, p. 133).

- Barriers to reporting including a lack of transparency, complexity and accessibility when it comes to reporting issues, navigating university websites, and finding resources; lack of culturally appropriate support for victims.
- Concerns about how Indigenous knowledges are taught and treated.
- The need for education and awareness campaigns on recognising different forms of racism, including microaggressions

(Omer, 2023).

Anti-Asian Racism

Other community-based organisations, although not student specific, have also undertaken research projects which expose more details of the nature of racism experienced by students. For example, the Asian Australian Alliance undertook research in 2020 and 2021 examining incidences of racism in the context of COVID-19 (Asian Australian Alliance, 2021). International students accounted for 12.3 per cent of respondents to this survey, 95.2 per cent of whom were from a Mainland Chinese background. The 2021 comprehensive report covered 541 incident reports recorded from 2 April 2020 until 28 June 2021.

Respondents reported a range of disturbing incidents and behaviours including:

- Direct racial slur/name calling ("Go back to China", "Stop eating bats/dogs", "Ching Chong" etc) (35.7 per cent)
- Online harassment (25.7 per cent)
- Making it out as a joke (13.1 per cent) – i.e., making a racist targeted comment/statement and then laughing it off and/or dismissing it as not being racist but just joking around.
- Verbal threats (8.9 per cent) – i.e. making a targeted racist comment/statement with verbal intent to cause harm
- Getting spat/sneezed/coughed on (7.8 per cent)
- Physical intimidation/harassment (7.0 per cent)
- Shunning (6.5 per cent) – i.e. deliberate avoidance/exclusion of Asians/Asian Australians
- Workplace discrimination (2.2 per cent).[11]

This research further highlighted specific issues - also echoed in other literature - which include concerns about the impacts of racism on students as well as uncertainty about their immigration rights which may lead them to believe that reporting to authorities could compromise their visas (see also Pass, Madon, Murphy & Sargeant (2020); Lim & Tanaya (2021). This may also be compounded by the large number of people working illegally or being underpaid in cash, especially in the restaurant industry (Commonwealth of Australia (2016); Berg and Farbenblum (2020). Given the socioeconomic situation that many students face in relation to needing employment to make ends meet, these concerns about the status of their visa and work-rights are inextricably linked to their experience of studying.

[10] White fragility is a term first coined by US academic and author Robin DiAngelo in 2011 to describe what she views as defensive instincts or reactions that a white person experiences (for example, white man accusing someone of "playing the race card" or a white woman crying to avoid conflict) when questioned about race or made to consider their own race. She explored the concept in most depth in her 2018 bestselling book of the same name (DiAngelo, 2018). In Australia, Ruby Hamad has explored similar ground in her 2020 book White Tears, Brown Scars (Hamad, 2020).

[11] NB: Respondents were able to select more than one category. Percentages reflect this variable.

Antisemitism

The Jewish Student Experience Survey (2023), undertaken by the Social Research Centre on behalf of the Australasian Union of Jewish Students (AUJS), with the support of the Zionist Federation of Australia (ZFA), the Scanlon Foundation, the Besen Family Foundation and the World Zionist Organization (WZO), has provided useful insights into the nature of antisemitic behaviour experienced by students.

The aim of the survey was to understand Jewish students' experiences of antisemitism in Australian universities and was the first survey of its kind in Australia. An online survey was conducted between March and April 2023 with current and former (within the last five years) Jewish university students. Given the challenges in reaching this specific student population, there were two pathways to survey entry provided to maximise responses: survey invitations were sent by the Social Research Centre to contacts on the AUJS database along with an opt-in link to the ZFA, who then promoted the survey through their own communication channels. A total of n=563 surveys were completed over a three-week period, this comprised of n=396 from the AUJS database and n=167 from the opt-in link.

A significant proportion of respondents experienced antisemitic behaviours in a university setting (either on campus or online). Almost two thirds (64 per cent) of the students surveyed had experienced at least one antisemitic behaviour during their time at university. The majority (88 per cent) of these students had recently experienced antisemitism, that is, within their last twelve months of university. Women (92 per cent vs 82 per cent of men) and those who wear Jewish clothing and/or jewellery (92 per cent vs 84 per cent of those who don't) were more likely to have recent experience with antisemitic behaviour.

The most common antisemitic experiences reported were:

- People or events that made students feel intimidated because of their Jewish identity;
- Antisemitism based on perceptions of Jewish money, power or influence;
- People comparing Israel to Nazi Germany;
- Antisemitism based on religion or race;
- People denying or minimising the Holocaust (reported more commonly by women than men); and
- Being involuntarily singled out, or excluded, because of matters relating to Israel.

This research also highlighted the impacts of antisemitic experiences, distinct from the impacts of racism on campus identified elsewhere in the literature including:

- Students hiding their Jewish identities (for example, by not wearing identifying clothing or jewellery);
- Students avoiding or not attending campus; and
- Students lacking confidence in complaints mechanisms and so avoiding making complaints, even about very distressing incidents.

It is also notable that university students were reported as active participants in these antisemitic behaviours the majority (90 per cent) of the time, however close to a third (29 per cent) of respondents had witnessed university staff as active participants.

Mendes has recently analysed the findings from the two recent Australian Parliament inquiries into antisemitism at Australian universities - the Senate Legal and Constitutional Affairs Legislation Committee, which reported in October 2024 and the Parliamentary Joint Committee on Human Rights, which reported in February 2025 (Mendes, 2025). Mendes summarises that the two inquiries documented a large rise in antisemitic harassment within Australian universities, and an associated failure by many universities to take effective action to combat antisemitism, either on the general grounds of rejecting racism, or more specifically failing to uphold their duty of care to protect the wellbeing of staff and students who happen to be Jewish.

Mendes argues that the antisemitism in Australian universities highlighted through these inquiries has four principal manifestations:

- generic statements urging the exclusion of Jews (often using 'Zionist' as a code word for Jews) from campus;
- specific targeting of individual Jewish students or academics for racist attacks, often online via petitions or social media statements, although on some occasions more directly for example in an incident at Melbourne University where a Jewish professor's laboratory was targeted by a threatening, masked group of students and some staff incensed by his leadership of an academic collaboration arrangement with the Hebrew University of Jerusalem;
- the inclusion of antisemitic content by academics in formal lectures or teaching notes or recommended reading or scholarly output; and
- the manipulation of standard university processes – involving recruitment, mentoring and promotion of like-minded academic staff and Doctoral students – to create a growing cohort and potentially intergenerational political movement of antisemitic academics (Mendes, 2025).

In addition, the recent report from the Special Envoy to Combat Antisemitism (Office of the Special Envoy to Combat Antisemitism, 2025) points to broader concerns about rising rates of antisemitism in Australia and makes a range of recommendations specifically in relation to the higher education sector. The Office of the Special Envoy reports that from

> *October 2023 to September 2024, antisemitic incidents surged by 316%, with over 2,000 cases reported – threats, assaults, vandalism and intimidation. In October and November 2023 alone, episodes increased over 700% compared to the previous year, reflecting incitement by those with extremist views and misinformation in the media and online. These figures exclude much of the hate online, where antisemitism has exploded.*
>
> (Office of the Special Envoy to Combat Antisemitism, 2025, p. 4)

Although the Special Envoy does not provide a detailed rationale for her recommendations for higher education, there is a strong focus on ensuring "public institutions, particularly universities, are accountable for addressing antisemitism and guaranteeing an environment without hostility, harassment or intimidation" (2025, p. 9). The Special Envoy argues that universities must:

- ensure they adopt a definition of antisemitism that is effective in addressing antisemitism on campus practically, including being integrated into codes of conduct
- report transparently on complaints and disciplinary actions
- embrace cultural change to end their tolerance for antisemitic conduct
- ensure all members of their university communities – including staff, students and visitors – who promote antisemitic rhetoric or harassment of Jewish students or academics are held accountable.

The Special Envoy goes further to recommend that her office work with relevant government agencies including Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency (TEQSA), to enable government funding to be withheld, from universities, programs or individuals within universities that facilitate, enable or fail to act against antisemitism. And further that should significant problems remain at universities by the start of the 2026 academic year, as assessed by her own Office's report card, a dedicated judicial inquiry should be undertaken to address systemic issues, including the investigation of foreign sources of funding for antisemitic activities and academics at universities (2025, p. 9).

The AUJS Australian student survey echoes recent international research on university-based antisemitism, particularly since the beginning of the current conflict in the Middle East. A number of quantitative and qualitative studies of Jewish students (e.g. (Volodarsky, Wright, Hecht, & Saxe, 2025); (Samuel, et al., 2024); (Wright, Volodarsky, Hecht, & Saxe, 2023) suggest that for most of the Jewish students sampled, concerns about antisemitism on campus are not necessarily driven by personal experiences of antisemitic harassment, but rather a perceived environment of hostility toward Jews and Israel on their campus. This perceived hostile climate is what most negatively affects their lives, interferes with their academic pursuits, and drives their concerns about antisemitism on campus. The findings further suggest that efforts to respond to antisemitism on

campus should not merely focus on policies related to harassment and discrimination on an individual level but also work to prevent the promulgation and normalisation of antisemitic ideas that could make Jewish students feel unsafe, uncomfortable, or isolated in their campus community.

There has been significant media attention in recent months focused on antisemitism on US college campuses, particularly at Harvard and Columbia Universities. In May 2025 the Trump administration terminated grants and contracts worth a reported $400 million to Columbia University, on the basis that the university had violated civil rights law by not protecting students from antisemitic harassment during large campus protests against the conflict in the Middle East (Jack & Munir, 2025). The following month, an investigation by the US Department of Health and Human Services' Office of Civil Rights found Harvard University had similarly violated federal civil rights law for failing to address harassment of Jewish and Israeli students, threatening to cut all federal funding (Bender & Blinder, 2025). Both universities denied these claims, arguing that they had in fact undertaken substantive, proactive steps to address antisemitism on campus, including updating disciplinary processes and expanding training on antisemitism.

While these situations are yet to be explored in depth in the peer reviewed literature, reports from individual universities are useful in highlighting the nature and prevalence of antisemitism on campus. In 2024, the Columbia University Task Force on Antisemitism (CUTFA) released a report, *Columbia University Student Experiences of Antisemitism and Recommendations for Promoting Shared Values and Inclusion*, which detailed student experiences and offered recommendations for fostering a more inclusive campus environment (Columbia University Taskforce on Antisemitism, 2024). The Taskforce heard from nearly five hundred students at over 20 listening sessions who detailed experiencing antisemitism in day-to-day encounters, including dorm life and social media, in clubs and in classroom.

Harvard similarly established a 'Presidential Task Force on Combating Antisemitism and Anti-Israeli Bias' in 2024, with a final report released in April 2025 (Harvard University, 2025). Jewish and Israeli students, faculty and staff reported incidents including ethnic slurs, stereotyping and antisemitic tropes, calls for violence against Jews and Israelis, social exclusion, perceived double standards related to Israel being antisemitic (Harvard University, 2025).

These reports also offer some useful insights into possible interventions to combat antisemitism on campuses but while peer reviewed research is beginning to explore antisemitism in American universities (e.g. (Kobrin, 2025); (Briscoe K. L., 2024); (Leath, Scott, Rivens, Jones, & Koroma, 2024); (Silverstein & Block, 2025)), it is too early to assess their impact and efficacy.

More broadly, research undertaken by government and non-government organisations and agencies notes that similarly to other forms of discrimination, there is evidence of underreporting of antisemitism – including on university and college campuses. Data on reporting suggests that most Jewish staff and students who experience antisemitism, do not formally report it (Anti-Defamation League (ADL), 2024). The ADL assessed 135 US schools (colleges) and found that 83 per cent of Jewish US college students had experienced or witnessed antisemitism since the current Middle East conflict began in October 2023. The European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (2023) has suggested that several factors contribute to the underreporting of antisemitism including a lack of awareness about reporting procedures, perceptions of the process as cumbersome or distressing, and scepticism about whether complaints will lead to meaningful actions.

Recent research from Canada reviewing antisemitism on college campuses shows similar patterns (Marom & Switzer, 2025). The authors state that in the wake of the current Middle East conflict after October 7, 2023, antisemitic incidents surged on campuses in Canada citing scholarly literature (e.g. Brym (2024); Santos & Yogev (2024)), reports produced by non-government organisations (e.g. Institute for Strategic Dialogue (2023); (B'nai Brith Canada (2024); political reports (House of Commons Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights, 2024) and media reporting (Bell & Semple, 2024). Campus based antisemitism reflects similarly increasing numbers of police-reported hate crimes against Jewish people more broadly in Canada, which increased by 71 per cent in 2023 compared to the previous year (Statistics Canada., 2024).

Marom and Switzer (2025) detail that Jewish students and institutions have experienced physical violence, threats, harassment, and vandalism, with campuses being described by witnesses as

"ground zero" of this problem (House of Commons Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights, 2024, p. 11). Jewish students on campuses reported feeling unsafe, excluded, and experiencing higher-than-usual levels of antisemitism, which has been linked with heightened levels of stress and depressive symptoms (Morstead & DeLongis, 2025).

First Nations Students

Tertiary institutions and researchers – both First Nations and others – have undertaken efforts to understand the factors contributing to the tertiary experiences of First Nations students domestically and internationally. While the impacts of racism include health, wellbeing, cultural resilience and safety, and social integration or isolation, it is clear that experiences of racism also have a significant impact on education and professional outcomes.

While the levels of First Nations students participating in higher education continue to increase, completion rates remain very low compared to that of non-Indigenous students (Fredericks B. et al (2022) and (2023); Page et al (2017); Lydster and Murray (2019); (Australian Government Department of Education (2020); Universities Australia (2024)).

A significant body of research has explored why this is the case. Pham and colleagues (Pham T. D., et al., 2024) and summarise the literature, identifying a range of factors that can impact First Nations' student success, noting that these factors differ depending on the degree being completed (Pham, Blue, & Anderson, 2025) and the personal and educational experiences that influence students' abilities to devote themselves to their studies (e.g. Anderson & Reich (2017); Barney (2016); Devlin (2009); and Hearn and Kenna (2021). Several determinants of attraction, retention, and completion for First Nations higher degree by research (HDR) students have also been identified (Hutchings, Bainbridge, Bodle, & Miller, 2019) and include the role of First Nations departments and units (see also (Fredericks B. , et al., 2024)), cultural awareness and safety, and support from family and community. Anderson and colleagues (Anderson, Blue, Pham, & Saward, 2022) reported a range of success factors for Indigenous HDR students including quality supervision, academic support, and capacity building. Research including from Moreton-Robinson et al. (2020); Pechenkina (2014) and (2015); and Trudgett (2010) demonstrated that First Nations students need financial support, physical and social emotional wellbeing, mental health, wellness, family support, and counselling and mentoring services during university. Holt and colleagues reinforce the need for support from role models for First Nations students, highlighting links to underrepresentation of First Nations people in university staffing (Holt, Cross, Worrell, & Henson, 2024).

There is some consensus across the literature on the complex range of contributing factors to completion rates for First Nations students. Day and colleagues (Day, Nakata, Nakata, & Martin, 2014) categorise these into two groupings:

- *Personal and environmental factors*:
    - Financial
    - Health
    - Housing
    - Family issues, commitments and responsibilities
    - Effects of racism, alienation and isolation withing the university
    - Dislocation from kinship networks, and
    - Time pressures.
- *Academic factors:*
    - Transition from secondary to tertiary education
    - Academic skills / under preparedness
    - Cultural insensitivity
    - Unwelcoming university environments
    - Course content, and

- Teaching and learning approaches

Pham and colleagues (Pham T. D., et al., 2024) have similarly identified economic conditions, social environment and individual characteristics as three key factors influencing the completion of First Nations university graduates. The study surveyed 308 Indigenous Australians who had graduated between 2018 to 2022, noting that this three-part model worked well to provide a means to identify factors influencing Australian First Nations success in higher education, suggesting that universities should use this model to identify how they can best support these students.

As part of their integrated systematic review on strategies that promote success for First Nations undergraduate students in 2016, Milne et al noted that "Indigenous students wanted to feel culturally safe and not be exposed to racism" (Milne, Creedy, & West, 2016). This is supported by recent research by Fredericks and colleagues (Fredericks B. , et al., 2022), Taylor and colleagues in 2019, Lyster and Murray in 2018, and by Fredericks herself in earlier research in 2015 (Fredericks, Kinnear, Daniels, Croft Warcon, & Mann, 2015).

Research that directly examines the experiences of racism among First Nations students remains limited. While now dated, Sonn et al (Sonn, Bishop, & Humphries, 2000) found that 44 per cent of First Nations students in their research experienced cultural insensitivity and racism that demeaned their identity, knowledge and cultural practices, and, of those who experienced subtle racism, 14 per cent also experienced overt racism. Racism is often referenced in alternate terms such as 'lack of cultural awareness or sensitivity' or the trivialisation of Aboriginal culture, customs and practices by teachers and students (Gibbs, Paradies, Gee, & Haslam, 2022). However, as identified by Bailey in 2020, "The question of whether Indigenous students are still faced with racism and inequality has largely been answered with a resounding 'yes'" (Bailey, 2020, p. 1033).

Whether the form be overt or covert racism, experiences of racism significantly affect First Nations student engagement and academic outcomes. Higher levels of perceived racism are associated with lower engagement, developmental outcomes and overall student satisfaction. Gibbs and colleagues linked experiencing racism with perceptions of a less supportive learning environment (Gibbs, Paradies, Gee, & Haslam, 2022).

Institutional racism was deemed prevalent across Australian universities in the literature considered for this review. While change is occurring, and most universities have First Nations focused outcomes as part of institutional strategic plans, the rate of systemic change is distributed unevenly across the sector (Page, Trudgett, & Sullivan, 2017).

Experiences of racism also appear not to shift as First Nations students' progress through their academic study. A 2024 literature review identified 17 papers published between 2016 and 2022 relating to First Nations HDR students from Australia, United States, New Zealand and Canada and their retention or completion rates. Fifteen of these papers were by, or included, First Nations authors. Their review is of interest because of the comparison across four colonial/settler nations and tertiary context. The review also noted that the increasing numbers of publications on the topic indicate an increasing interest in the experiences of First Nations HDR students (Baeza Pena, Xing, Blue, Saward, & Anderson, 2024).

They found key characteristics across the literature in terms of barriers to HDR retention and completion by First Nations students that correlate with the Australian findings:

- Institutional racism and social isolation;
- Inadequate supervision and shortage of indigenous academics to support indigenous HDR;
- Supervisors' lack of knowledge about indigenous methodologies and culture;
- Culturally unsafe supervision;
- Unsatisfactory examination process;
- Socio-economic concerns and family commitments; and
- Lack of confidence in academic abilities

(Baeza Pena, Xing, Blue, Saward, & Anderson, 2024).

Australia is not alone in either the experience of First Nations students or the pace of institutional responses. Bailey's article on the lived experience of Indigenous tertiary students and racism and lateral violence in Canada points out that despite Truth and Reconciliation Commission recommendations that Canadian universities move to decolonise and seek reconciliation, Indigenous students continue to face discrimination and racism at both interpersonal levels and through interaction with the tertiary institutions themselves. Bailey makes the point that while there has been an increase in the academy's focus on Indigenous education in Canada, this has focused largely on statistical comparison and the research to date has not sufficiently addressed how lived experience might assist in interpreting what the statistics really mean (Bailey, 2020).

Hollingsworth et al point further out that there is almost no collection of data from existing Australian First Nations students to understand their experiences in the tertiary sector and their reasons for leaving their studies (Hollingsworth, Raciti, & Carter, 2020).

International Students

The literature includes a range of research investigating experiences of racism among Australian university's international student populations.

In the year to June 2025 there were 839,199 international student enrolments in Australia, 450,580 of whom were enrolled in higher education (Australian Government Department of Education, 2025). Fifty-seven per cent of international students came to Australia from China (23 per cent of international students), India (17 per cent), Nepal (8 per cent), Vietnam (5 per cent) and the Philippines (4 per cent). In the higher education sector, only 11,810 of 450,580 students (2.6 per cent) came from North America, North-West Europe or Southern and Eastern Europe (Australian Government Department of Education, 2025). While it is impossible to accurately assess the cultural background of all international students via the available data, based on the countries in which they live permanently, it is reasonable to assume that the overwhelming majority of international students studying in Australian universities are likely to experience negative racialisation.

A body of research on international students reveals that they experience difficulties both studying and living in Australia. A seminal study which explored the lived experiences of international students in Australia in 2010 (Marginson, Nyland, Sawir, & Forbes-Mewett, 2010) highlighted the challenges that international students face in terms of personal safety, English language proficiency, finances, accommodation, and issues of loneliness, racism, and segregation. With many of these challenges related either directly or indirectly to negative racialisation, it appears that little progress has been made since in addressing these issues. For example, international students continue to experience difficulty in finding employment due to working regulations, lack of understanding of employment processes, or English language proficiency (Gribble (2014); Blackmore, Gribble & Rahimi, (2017). For some international students, their accommodation experiences place their safety and well-being at significant risk (Ryan, Dowler, Bruce, Gamage, & Morris, 2016). Some international students live in appalling conditions, sleeping many to a room with little privacy and no lease. Students without leases are exposed to hidden fees and rent increases and often are unable to complain in fear of their visas being revoked (Ryan, Dowler, Bruce, Gamage, & Morris, 2016). In addition, a study of student finances in Australia found that international undergraduate students were struggling financially (Arkoudis, et al., 2018). While 90 per cent of international undergraduate students are financially supported by their parents, 14 per cent reported that they regularly went without food or other necessities, similar levels to domestic full-time undergraduate students (15 per cent), challenging common assumptions about international students' financial situation. Social isolation and lack of integration are perennial issues for international students and continue to present issues for universities (Arkoudis and Baik (2014); Yu & Wright (2016); Gomes & Tran (2017); Meng & Gao (2020).

Global research on international students also highlights similar themes in Britain (Brown & Jones, 2013), South Korea (Lee, Jon & Byun 2017), and the US (Mitchell Jr, Steele, Marie, & Timm, 2017).

One survey of international students at a large metropolitan Australian university found similar levels of discrimination and racism as the broader population, with 19 percent reporting experiences of discrimination based on race, ethnicity and culture. A small percentage of students reported verbal assault (Arkoudis, Dollinger, Baik, & Patience, 2019).

A recent systematic review of mental health and wellbeing of international students in Australia (Maharaj, Ndwiga, & Chutiyami, 2025) identified discrimination and safety factors as impacting on this cohort with more than half of the international students in one study (Deumert, 2005) reporting experiencing discrimination, racism and abuse, and nine per cent reporting that they did not feel safe and secure in Australia and that they feared for their safety and personal security. Another study (Rosenthal, 2008) found that female international students had significantly higher scores than the male international students in responses to questions about their experiences of physical and or verbal abuse, sexual harassment and exclusion while studying in Australia.

The significant impacts on the mental health of international students cannot be understated. With the prevalence of psychological distress reported to be higher among tertiary students than the general population (Browne (2017); Orygen, The National Centre of Excellence in Youth Mental Health (2017)) the literature indicates that international students are at high risk of developing suicidal ideation because of their exposure to stressors connected to living abroad (Low, 2023). The majority of international students who participated in Dovchin's ethnographic study (Dovchin, 2020) on 'ethnic accent bullying' and 'linguistic stereotyping', had experienced these two types of linguistic racism, which further posed serious 'psychological damages.' These traits of linguistic racism often lead to social withdrawal, sense of non-belonging, low self-esteem, fear, and anxiety over speaking English. The accumulation of these experiences further instigated severe depressive symptoms including suicidal ideation (Dovchin, 2020).

In developing the 2017 'Under the radar' report into mental health and wellbeing of Australian university students (Orygen, The National Centre of Excellence in Youth Mental Health., 2017), the authors noted that further research is required into the mental health of both international and First Nations university students. It also recommended that universities establish partnerships with community mental health services, and other systems that respond to the needs of high-risk groups in particular "CALD organisations to further support coordinated and culturally appropriate responses for international students" (p. 39).

International students face a range of pressures that expose them to stressors and increase their risk of mental ill-health, such as adjusting to unfamiliar environments, culture, language and academic practices (Forbes-Mewett H. &.-M., 2011). These can be compounded by loneliness, due to the loss of contact with family and social networks, and their low rates of accessing university counselling services for support (Sawir, 2008). The impact of interpersonal racism, structural racism and racialised peer exclusion cannot be underestimated.

Islamophobia

Literature on Islamophobia in universities is limited, particularly in the Australian context. In 2022, Abdel-Fattah described a "dearth of research applying the theoretical lens of critical race theory to explore Muslim university students' experiences in higher degree education institutions" in her article investigating how Muslim and non-Muslim students experience and respond to the university as a white institution and how Muslim students engage in both adaptive and maladaptive coping strategies in response to the university as a white institution (Abdel-Fattah, 2022). Abdel-Fattah argues that "white cultural system which plays out in the academy endows white students with a sense of familiarity and expectation, while burdening non-white Muslim students with a sense of exclusion, deviation and struggle" (2022, p. 143). She details the ways in which Muslim students, particularly veiled women who may be the only visible Muslim person in a classroom, feel the need to speak up about race and privilege as relevant contemporary issues, especially in classrooms where young white students have not been exposed to or had the chance to develop racial literacy skills. Muslim students also described being unable to relate to curricula which were mainly "European classical, classic liberal, stuff like that… a Western canon completely" (p. 144).

Abdel-Fattah further highlights the experiences of one of her research participants, noting that Muslim young people often feel a responsibility as "everyday explainers" (after Harris & Hussein (2018)), taking on the role of educators on history, culture, faith and politics.

> *Sam, an Afghan-Australian Muslim politics and international relations student at the University of Notre Dame, started his degree 'knowing that I'd be with a bunch of students who were mainly from the northern suburbs and who'd pin me down as the Muslim guy from Western Sydney. I went in knowing I'd be a walking ambassador for Muslims.' Sam*

> *was constantly confronted with 'the racialisation of Islam, conflated with terrorism and Arab men shouting insults at the West. I found myself having to remind people of the role of Muslims in Australia.' Sam found it 'utterly exhausting, being this ambassador for all Muslims. I became that and it just got too much … I'm constantly defending … you can't move forwards when you keep getting pushed back.' Sam spoke about classes where: 'the tutor asks a class a question, but their eyes go to me. Anything about terrorism, criminality. The stuff we'd look at would paint Muslim men as perverted towards women and I'm there a Muslim guy. I'd have to defend myself, defend Islam.'*
>
> (Abdel-Fattah, 2022, p. 145)

One mini survey conducted with a group of Australian Muslim university students through the Islamophobia Register Australia (cited (Briskman, et al., 2017) points to numerous unreported experiences of harassment. This survey was not statistically representative, however 77.9 per cent (n=67) of the student participants stated they were exposed to Islamophobic incidents. The number of Islamophobic incidents averaged 2.2 cases per person and approximately 50 per cent of the participants experienced Islamophobia in some form. Although individual experiences of Islamophobia were high, only eight per cent of cases were reported to the police. Even fewer were reported to relevant agencies or organisations like the Islamophobia Register Australia even though one-third of participants were aware of the existence of these reporting mechanisms.

The Islamophobia Register Australia has proved to be a particularly useful source of information about anti-Muslim behaviour since its inception in 2014. The most recent iteration of the Register's reports (Carland, Alziyadat, Vergani, & O'Brien, 2025) notes that in the 2023-24 reporting period the Register received 33 reports of Islamophobic and anti-Palestinian incidents in educational settings (schools and universities) representing 9 per cent of all the reports made to the Register over the period. Of these, 18 occurred in schools, and 15 in universities (including encampments at universities). Overall, verbal abuse and hate speech made up 54.5 per cent of reported incidents at the combined educational settings, and physical assault made up 15 per cent of incidents reported at educational settings. Islamophobic graffiti at a university was also reported.

The most recent report also highlights experiences of students who have been threatened, abused, physically assaulted, and fireworks being thrown at them, and subsequently being inadequately supported by University administration (Carland, Alziyadat, Vergani, & O'Brien, 2025, p. 51). Among the report's recommendations was that "Coordinated Islamophobia training for all Vice Chancellors groups (VCGs) at all universities in Australia, focusing on rectifying policies, hearing student experiences, and better duty of care to Muslim students" (Carland et al, p. 52).

An international systematic review of the impact of Islamophobia on Muslim students (including both secondary and tertiary students) analysed 44 studies which included examination of students experiences with discrimination, with students reported experiencing bullying and discrimination due to a wide variety of factors including harassment, bullying and exclusion by their peers based on their name, ethnicity, English language proficiency, immigration status or decision to wear cultural or religious dress (Abu Khalaf, et al., 2022).

These findings are echoed in another recent study (Brooks, Ezzani, Sai, & Sanjakdar, 2023) examining the racialisation of Muslim students in Australia, Ireland, and the US which offers a number of insights into the experience of young Muslim people. Muslim students endured derogatory language, stereotypes about their identity, criticisms about religious traditions and values, and systemic barriers to accessing support. These included day-to-day experiences of implicit stereotyping, bullying, microaggressions, and blatant racism. While this research was focused on schooling rather than tertiary education, the findings suggest three practices for anti-Muslim racist education that could also be relevant in higher education globally, namely: (1) establishing safety, (2) respecting identity, and (3) expanding belonging.

More broadly, a body of Australian research has explored Islamophobia in recent years including Gabsi (2024); Carland (2024); Bhatia, Poynting and Tufail (2023); Iner, Mason and Asquith (Iner, Mason, & Asquith, 2022), Poynting (2020); Abdel-Fattah (2018); Poynting and Briskman (2017); Morgan and Poynting (2016).

Most recently, the report of the Special Envoy to Combat Islamophobia (2025) has explored Islamophobia in Australia generally but has also put forward a series of recommendation in relation to both secondary and tertiary education.

The Special Envoy's recommendations in relation to the higher education sector include:

- That the Department of Education, in collaboration with the Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency (TEQSA), should lead the development of an overarching Anti-Racism and Inclusivity Framework for the education sector (to include First Nations racism, Islamophobia, anti-Palestinian racism, anti-Arab racism, anti-Asian racism, etc.) with the aim of creating a more inclusive, respectful and safe educational environment for all students, staff and communities. This framework should include clear, actionable guidelines specifically aimed at combating Islamophobia, alongside broader anti-racism, diversity and social cohesion measures. It should ensure a whole-sector approach to fostering diversity and equity by establishing a multi-stakeholder working group student and staff associations, religious and community organisations, anti-discrimination agencies and experts in multicultural and anti-racism education as well as sector representatives
- Reviewing existing policies, research and legal frameworks to ensure current anti-racism policies, legal protections and research on racial discrimination, including Islamophobia, to ensure the framework is evidence-based and aligned with national standards.
- Creating specific guidelines to combat Islamophobia that address incidents of Islamophobia explicitly, outlining prevention strategies, response protocols, educational initiatives and support services for affected individuals, including staff
- Implementing pilot programs across diverse institutions to test and improve the guidelines and framework
- Disseminating and supporting resources, training and ongoing support to facilitate sector-wide adoption and integration of the framework and guidelines
- Establishing monitoring and review mechanisms for ongoing evaluation, reporting and updating the framework to ensure sustained progress and responsiveness.
- Supporting Islamic Studies and Education in higher education by integrating it as an essential component in the national effort to combat Islamophobia by promoting its visibility and investing in its programs and research

(The Special Envoy to Combat Islamophobia, 2025).

Additional research has been identified internationally including experiences of students in the UK which explored the impact of Islamophobia and racism on Muslims who had, at the time, the lowest levels of success and attainment of religious groups at British universities (Gholami, 2021).

Gholami argues that racial and religious disadvantage must be understood separately, though intersectionally, considering what he describes as 'religification' (religious disadvantage that arguably extends beyond but is exacerbated by racialisation). In addition to being associated with extremism and terrorism, Gholami contends that this religification of Muslim students results in them having their spirituality politicised, re-signified and ridiculed in a generally unfriendly educational environment, with implications for their educational experience and performance.

It is worth noting that Gholami also suggests that the domination of secularism in higher education also works to define, problematise and marginalise religion in general and Islam and Muslims in particular. Such analysis sheds light on how institutional approaches to race and religion play a key role in perpetuation of educational disadvantage for Muslim students in the UK.

Universities UK (UUK) undertook a project in late 2021 examining the prevalence of Islamophobia and anti-Muslim hatred in higher education to help raise awareness and suggest practical actions that universities can take in response (Universities UK, 2021).

The Guidance notes that at the time of writing Muslim students comprised close to 9 per cent of UK university students (Universities UK, 2021, p. 8), with current data from the UK's Higher

Education Statistics Agency (HESA) showing this has increased to 14 per cent in 2023-24 (HESA, 2025). The UUK project highlights that hate crime against Muslim students often increases following 'trigger events', such as the EU referendum and domestic or international events, which can embolden perpetrators to spread hate. For instance, in the week following the Christchurch terror attack in 2019, reports of anti-Muslim incidents in the UK rose by 692 per cent (Universities UK, 2021, p. 5).

The project found that intersectionality presented particular challenges for Muslim students with many coming from BAME groups – at the time of writing, over half of British Muslims had either Pakistani or Bangladeshi ethnic heritage. Many Muslims are therefore navigating multiple minoritised identities and may experience a 'double penalty' on the grounds of both their race and religion. The report emphaises that Islamophobia is often gendered. Women who wear visibly religious garments, such as the hijab or niqab, are especially likely to be targeted and may therefore face a 'triple penalty' on the grounds of their religion, gender and race. One police force cited in the Guidance reported that three-quarters of all hate crimes against women in two years were anti-Muslim in nature (Universities UK, 2021).

Data from the UK's Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA), analysed in a report by Advance HE (Codiroli Mcmaster, 2020) provided for the first time figures on the significant under attainment of Muslim university students. In 2017–18 only 18.7 per cent of UK Muslim students graduated with a first-class honours degree, by far the lowest of all religious groups. To put this in perspective, 29.8 per cent of students with no religion attained a first-class degree in the same period. Factoring in upper-second class degrees as well,[12] the figure rises to nearly 8 in 10 students with no religion, compared to just under two thirds of Muslim students, who are also heavily under-represented at the most academically selective institutions. Gholami argues that it is not coincidental that the most successful religious groups are predominantly white, whereas Muslim students belong overwhelmingly to non-white ethnicities.

Other UK research (Chaudry, 2020) has also found that students frequently experienced Islamophobic microaggressions relating to their appearances including through peers maintaining excessive distance, peculiar staring and making racial jokes. It further emerged that the accumulation of religious prejudice had taken its toll on the participants psychological wellbeing.

In Canada, research has also explored the experiences of Muslim students in higher education (Alizai, 2020), highlighting two key themes: the formation of a strong religious identity in response to experiences of Islamophobia and a distinction between general Islamophobia and gendered Islamophobia. The study noted some interesting outcomes for students, including that in response to discrimination and exclusionary environments, many Muslim students (in particularly hijab wearing women) were responding by focusing on demonstrating excellence in their academic achievements. The research also found that Muslim students were becoming increasingly devout in the face of increasing Islamophobia, had a strong attachment to their religious identity, and were at the forefront of advocating for Muslims through education, activism, civic participation, and interfaith dialogue.

A 2022 systematic review (Abu Khalaf, et al., 2022) highlighted that despite a rise in anti-Islamic sentiment, Muslim young people's experiences of religious discrimination remain under researched. This mixed methods systematic review consisted of 44 qualitative and quantitative studies from 34 journals, discussing experiences of religious discrimination for participants aged 4–25 both in the US and internationally.

While Muslim students have a significant presence at American universities, research has found they are largely ignored by campus policies and resources and may find it difficult to reconcile their university experience with their religious values and practices (Stubbs, 2013). Students in later US research reported feeling that they need to tone down their identity by, for example, not using their native language or wearing cultural clothing, with university students even fearing their religious identity could impact the status of their student visa (Dimandja, 2017).

Scholars investigating the experiences of Muslim students consistently note heightened tensions and increased racism experienced by students and the Muslim community more broadly related to world events such as 9/11 (Peek, 2003), the war in Afghanistan (Ahmadi & Cole, 2020), and

[12] Gholami suggests that First and Upper-Second are the only degree classifications are considered 'good honours' in the UK context and used as an indicator of success in higher education.

government and media focus around issues such as the first Trump administration's 'Muslim ban' (Ahmadi & Cole, 2020) and the current conflict in the Middle East (Carland, 2023)

In addition to the challenges faced by Muslim students, the review (Abu Khalaf, et al., 2022) cites earlier studies (Haffejee (2015) and Miled (2020)) that discuss experiences of Muslim refugees who are likely to also carry significant trauma associated with fleeing war-torn countries, danger, and violence toward themselves or loved ones, and the lasting emotional and physical manifestations of trauma. These experiences compounded the discrimination Muslim students face, exacerbating the social and academic issues that make academic success more challenging.

The National Union of Students in the UK has also carried out research examining experiences of racism, antisemitism and Islamophobia (National Union of Students, n.d.). This research, although some of which is out of scope, is instructive as there are numerous self-published studies about the lived experiences of students.

Impacts of intersectional experiences for students

Through her foundational work on intersectionality, Kimberlé Crenshaw (Crenshaw (1989) and (1991) demonstrated how intersecting systems of racism and sexism, shaped the experiences of women of colour in relation to gender-based violence and how these experiences diverge from those of white women. With an increasing focus on the prevalence and impact of gender-based violence on university and college campuses, particularly in North America and Australia, a range of local and international research emphasises the importance of this approach.

Cooms, Muurlink and Leroy-Dyer (2022) see intersectional theory as a potentially effective tool for decolonisation in that the theory is robust enough to span across disciplines, systems and processes and can provide an accurate account of the compounding impact of power imbalances. This is suggested as a way in which the wicked problems facing First Nations people with disability which have proved resistant to mainstream western conventional approaches, might result in more effective solutions (Cooms, Muurlink, & Leroy-Dyer, 2022).

A range of authors have argued that universities play a critical role in sustaining white supremacy through the construction of inferiority and anti-Blackness (Abdallah et al, (2025); Briscoe and Oates (2024); Collins, Newman and Jun (2023); Bell et al (2021); Bledsoe (2020).

Authors also have noted the important relationality between Indigenous genocide, settler colonialism and anti-Blackness which has foundational implications for the intersectional experiences of negative racialisation both for First Nations peoples and other negatively racialised groups (King, T. L; Navarro, J; Smith, A. (Eds.), 2020).

Intersectionality: Australia

Research on intersectional racism, has largely focused on intersections of race and gender, and to a lesser extent, race and faith.

Intersectional experiences of racism in Australian universities have been researched in relation to groups including:

- First Nations women
- First Nations men
- First Nations people living with disability
- Students experiencing intersections of race and gender-based violence
- Muslim women
- Culturally and linguistically diverse migrant and/or refugee (CALDMR) students.
- LGBTQ+ students from negatively racialised backgrounds

First Nations peoples

For First Nations women, research highlights how their experiences in higher education are shaped by multiple, intersecting identities, including their Indigeneity, gender and often socioeconomic status.

While there is limited research focus on First Nations women in the tertiary sector, researchers including Moreton-Robertson (2013) and Bennett, Uink and Van der Berg (2021) agree that they have a uniquely gendered experience as members of a doubly marginalised group within Eurocentric, patriarchal institutions, such as universities.

First Nations men are also an under-represented group in Australian higher education. Stahl and colleagues outline the historical and structural inequalities faced by First Nations men pursuing tertiary study and that understanding the experiences of Indigenous men in higher education requires acknowledging the complex interplay of culture, identity, and structural inequalities. The authors call for more research and targeted supports, crucially First Nations support units, to improve the participation and success rates of Indigenous males in higher education (Stahl, McDonald, & Stokes, 2020). Stahl and colleagues' 2023 article on supporting Indigenous first-in-family men in the transition to higher education, concluded that supports at the transition from school stage, personalised support and mentorship are essential for their success (Stahl, et al., 2023).

First Nations people living with disability

Scott Avery's 2018 seminal work, *Culture is Inclusion: a narrative of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people with disability* provides valuable insights into the lived experiences of First Nations people with disabilities and advocates for a more inclusive and culturally sensitive approaches to support and services. He notes that intersectional inequality affects First Nations people with disability across various sectors, including disability services, health, education, and employment. As with other First Nations authors included in this literature review, Avery emphasises the importance of research that is led by and for First Nations communities, ensuring that their voices and perspectives are central, and discusses the need for inclusive policies and practices that recognise and support the unique needs of Indigenous people with disabilities (Avery and First People's Disability Network, 2018).

Intersections of race and gender-based violence

In Australia, prevalence data reported in the National Student Safety Survey (NSSS) (Heywood, Myers, Powell, Meikle, & Nguyen, 2022) also provides insights into the experiences of key socio-demographic subgroups of interest to this project. First Nations students were found to be more likely to be sexually harassed in a university context than other students: 21.4 per cent of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander students had been sexually harassed in a university context compared with 16 per cent of other students. First Nations students were also more likely to have been sexually assaulted in a university context (7.8 per cent) compared with other students (4.5 per cent).

Domestic students were more likely than international students to report feeling safe at their university (84.4 per cent compared with 81.0 per cent).

Interestingly, international students and students who spoke a language other than English at home were less likely to have been sexually harassed or sexually assaulted than domestic students and students who spoke English at home. One in five (17.9 per cent) of domestic students had been sexually harassed in a university context compared with one in ten (8.6 per cent) of international students. And 18.6 per cent of students who mainly spoke English at home had been sexually harassed compared with 9.6 per cent of students who spoke a language other than English at home.

This may partly be due to international students and students who spoke a language other than English at home being more likely to indicate they knew nothing or very little about the reporting and complaint processes for sexual assault and were more likely to indicate they were not at all or slightly confident in these processes. Further, these groups of students were more likely to indicate knowing nothing or very little about where to seek support or assistance with their university for sexual harassment or assault. This has also been highlighted in earlier Australian research (Funnell & Hush, 2018).

The NSSS Qualitative Report, (Nisbet, 2022) further illustrates how gender-based violence and racism can operate together. A composite case study details the experience of Amina (a pseudonym) who was the victim/survivor of sexual harassment and sexual assault perpetrated by a university staff member. The staff member copied her phone number and sent unwanted texts about her appearance, as well as leaving gifts on her desk and constantly visiting her office. They accused her of 'playing hard to get', as well as addressing her using racial stereotypes. When Amina mentioned these incidents to another staff member, they said that she should feel grateful for the attention. Amina said that she was unsure about whether reporting the perpetrator would be worthwhile. She felt that as a first-year student originally from a rural background, her lack of support networks in Melbourne would make the process difficult. Amina also found that it was hard to establish how to report the sexual harassment and sexual assault, especially given that the staff member that she initially told brushed off the experience. However, she followed through with the reporting process and the perpetrator was terminated from their role – she found that this was sufficient action and felt reassured that she would no longer see the perpetrator on campus.

In addition, the 2022 National Student Safety Survey (Heywood, Myers, Powell, Meikle, & Nguyen, 2022) highlighted that out of nearly 44,000 participating students, more than a quarter of reported sexual harassment and assault incidents occur in student accommodation or residences. While the risks of gender based violence in student accommodation have begun to be explored in the literature (e.g. Mickelburgh & Mackinlay (2023), it is worth considering whether this may disproportionally impact cohorts of negatively racialised students – in particular international students and students from rural and remoted communities including First Nations students - who may have little choice about living in student accommodation.

Muslim women and men

Muslim women have been clearly identified in the literature as being overwhelmingly targeted in Islamophobic attacks and incidents (Awan and Zempi (2019); Krayem and Carland (2021); Carland (2023); Easat-Daas and Zempi (2024); Carland et al (2025). As the Special Envoy to Combat Islamophobia explains:

> *Muslim women, who comprise the majority of targets of reported incidents of everyday Islamophobia, have had their hijabs pulled and ripped off. They have been subjected to foul, disgusting and degrading behaviour. They have been spat at, punched, choked, pushed, had hot drinks and food thrown at them, and have even been threatened with rape and murder. The visual markers of the Islamic faith serve as identifiers that trigger Islamophobic responses, explaining why certain individuals and groups, such as women, are more likely to become targets for hostility than others.* (The Special Envoy to Combat Islamophobia, 2025)

However, research also demonstrates that Muslim men are often disproportionately targeted by structural Islamophobia, particularly in relation to law enforcement Abdel-Fattah (2021); Bouma (2011); Cherney and Murphy (2016); Farooqui and Archana (2022); Tufail and Poynting (2013).

Culturally and linguistically diverse migrant and/or refugee (CALDMR) students

A range of research as identified that CALDMR students experience intersectional educational disadvantages including financial disadvantage, institutional misrecognition framed by a deficit rather than strengths-based approach to cultural and linguistic diversity, low levels of learning and language support in education institutions, being first-in-family, trauma-related learning challenges, pre-migration interruptions to education for forced migrants (Baker et al. (2022); Baker, Ramsay, Irwin, & Miles, (2018); Burke, Fleay, Baker, Hartley, & Field (2020); Earnest et al (2010); Hartley et al (2018); Molla (2021b); Naidoo et al (2018); Sheikh, Koc, & Anderson (2019); Stevenson & Baker (2018).

African students

A number of studies have also specifically examined the experience of students from African backgrounds in Australian higher education (Harris & Marlowe, 2011); (Harris, Ngum Chi, & Spark, The barriers that only you can see: African Australian women thriving in tertiary education despite the odds. , 2013); (Harris, Spark, & Ngum Chi, 2015); Molla (2021) with students describing feeling they did not belong in the university space. These tensions related to

marginalisation and invalidation seemed to be intensified in the case of women students who also faced disrupting the gender norms and expectations of their cultural background in relation to the role of women in the family and domestic care, and the need for education more broadly (Mangan & Winter, 2017).

Negatively racialised LGBTQ+ students

While there is limited research in this space a small number of studies have examined the experiences of young LGBTQ+ people from racially marginalised backgrounds in Australian universities. A recent scoping review noted the continuing "dearth of research exploring support strategies for queer students from diverse ethnic backgrounds in higher education institutions globally" (Raja, Lambert, Patlamazoglou, & Pringle, 2024, p. 3585).

One 2021 study (Sullivan & Day, 2021) examined the experiences for "Queer and Gender Diverse (QGD) Indigenous Australian" students on five Sydney university campuses finding that QGD Indigenous students are marginalised people within an already marginalised community, and so rely on identifiable items to help them navigate communities and spaces. The authors argue that developing spaces that actively embrace QGD students as members of First Nations communities and empower this group to succeed in educational pursuits and careers. They further note that there are currently no processes in place to encourage QGD Indigenous university participation, progression and retention.

Prankumar and colleagues in a recent study of the experiences of young Lebanese, Indian and Anglo LGBTQ+ students at Australian universities found that educational settings provided important spaces of learning, growth and support for this cohort, which were largely positive (Prankumar, Aggleton, Bryant, & Apoifis, 2024). Participants appreciated the presence of queer groups at university and the recognition given to LGBTQ+ students, but many felt disconnected and even alienated from the emotional or political tenor of these groups. In some cases, this was due to queer collective groups that were seen to be "racist, misogynistic and much too apolitical" or conversely too "politically confrontational" towards "those who did not yet know the 'correct' things to say" (2024, p. 1434). The authors conclude by noting that feeling 'at home' may be particularly difficult for university students from minority ethnic backgrounds, for whom sexuality, gender and race intersect in often alienating ways, but that this cohort can be supported by institutions facilitating both 'safe' and 'brave' spaces, (the former centred on safety, support and affirmation, and the later focused on challenging conversations that bring students out of their comfort zone) (c.f. Arao and Clemens (2013).

Intersectionality: International

International research on intersectional racism, has largely focused on intersections of race and gender, and to a lesser extent, race and faith.

One large scale cohort study analysed data from the 2016 and 2017 Association of American Medical Colleges Graduation Questionnaire (Hill, et al., 2020). The questionnaire annually surveys graduating students at all 140 accredited allopathic US medical schools and examined the prevalence and types of mistreatment reported by a large national cohort of medical students by student sex, race/ethnicity, and sexual orientation. Of the more than 27,000 student surveys analysed (representing 72.1 per cent of graduating US medical students in 2016 and 2017), women; Asian, underrepresented minority, and multiracial students; and lesbian, gay, or bisexual students all reported higher prevalence of mistreatment than their male, white, and heterosexual peers.

As discussed above, a number of scholars have highlighted the gendered nature of Islamophobia, particularly as experienced by veiled women (Gholami (2021); Perry (2014); Cole & Ahmadi (2010); Housee (2012).

Gholami (2021) explains that:

> *Muslim women who display visual markers of 'Muslimness' are particularly vulnerable, and such vulnerability contributes to an atmosphere of isolation where Muslim women may question their place in society* (Saeed, 2016.) *A number of the veiled participants reported their experiences of exclusion in their interaction with non-Muslim students. Low expectations and feeling of exclusion, make them feel like they have to outshine their*

> *peers in the classroom to disprove the notion that they are academically inferior. Due to the dominant discourse, which presents Muslim women as oppressed, lacking agency, incompetent, and docile, Muslim women are socially stigmatized and frequently met with prejudice in their daily interactions. These negative images are difficult to escape since Muslim women cannot conceal their identities and wearing a hijab is compounded with staring and harassment. The various acts ranged from intentional avoidance, menacing looks, to more explicit acts of prejudice such as physical attacks. Even with obstacles they face, Muslim women are strong in the face of Islamophobia, determined to erase stereotypes and to practice agency* (Rahmath, 2016).

The SWIFT Education Centre (SWIFT Education Centre., (n.d.).) reference a study (Crenshaw, Ocen, & Nanda, 2015) that found that two per cent of white girls experienced exclusionary suspensions, compared to 12 per cent of Black girls. The literature indicates that girls from racially marginalised backgrounds are more frequently suspended and expelled for subjective behavioural infractions. The study also revealed that teachers sometimes disciplined Black girls to encourage them to conform to 'acceptable' standards of femininity, often related to appearance and demeanour—standards that seem to reflect a white, middle-class notion of femininity. While this report focuses on primary and secondary education in the USA, its findings can be relevant to the intersections of sexism, gender discrimination and racism within the tertiary sector. Additionally, in the US context, Morales specifies that Black students in higher education experience racialised microaggressions "through their gender and a perceived class status as low income, regardless of their actual class background" (Morales, 2014, p. 48).

Harris (2020) argues that continuing to take 'race-evasive' approaches to gender based violence prevention and response, contributes to incomplete and inaccurate understandings about the ways women of colour students experience this violence and result in ineffective efforts to address and eradicate gender based violence for all campus cohorts, particularly for students with multiple minoritized identities (Harris J. C., 2020). Large scale US based surveys have also highlighted the interactions between sexual orientation/gender identity, marginalised racial groups and risk of sexual assault (Coulter, et al., 2017).

Similarly, international research has identified that LGBTQ+ students of colour are inadequately served by campus community support groups and spaces which often have majority white membership and leadership, priorities and norms grounded in assumptions of white privilege, and in which they experience acts of implicit and explicit racial bias (Kulick, 2016). As outlined above, Raja et al (2024) also identify a range of studies exploring campus experiences for specific groups of racially marginalised LGBTQ+ students internationally including Asian American gay men (Bhattar & Victoria, 2007); Indian international LGBQ students (Bhattar R. G., 2019); resilience in queer students of colour (Duran, 2021); college adjustment for students with intersectional ethnocultural minority and LGBTQ+ identities (Fernandes, 2018) and more (see Raja et al (2024, pp. 3591-95).

Further international studies considering the intersections of sexual orientation, gender identity and race for LGBTQ+ students of colour include Duran (2019); Garcia (2021); Shaheen (2024); and Worthen (2017).

Canadian research examining the role of demographics on education and career trajectories of refugees from an intersectional perspective suggests that a supportive educational model that promotes safety, sense of belonging and empowerment are critical to combat the structural racism, sexism and other discriminatory factors in accessing higher education (Bajwa, 2018). The study found that refugees' access and motivation to pursue higher education can be affected by their gender, race, age, and gap in formal education and that a significant systemic problem in accessing and pursuing higher education is the lack of documentation or devaluation of their academic credentials from their home countries.

As in Australia, evidence also suggests that racially marginalised students are likely to experience higher levels of gendered violence. A recent Canadian study of 6,554 students, including 764 international students found that compared with their domestic peers, international students of all ages, genders, sexual orientations, minority status, grade levels, and time spent at university faced an increased likelihood of being targets of sexual violence (Fethi, 2023). This reflects a growing research base indicating the particular vulnerability of international students in relation to crime, exploitation, and campus sexual violence Forbes-Mewett (2015); Forbes-Mewett &

McCulloch (2016); Harris (2020); Ortensi (2020); Tambora (2020)). This literature also included research examining the intersections of gender, race, and sexual orientation among college students (Whitfield, 2021), which found these students experienced disproportionate rates of intimate partner violence.

2.2 Staff

At this time, comprehensive data for Australian higher education in relation to cultural diversity of staff, (apart from First Nations staff) or in leadership roles is not currently available (SAGE, 2025). However, a range of research examining specific cohorts clearly suggests significant under representation of negatively racialised groups in academia in Australia and internationally. Crimmins (2022) notes that numerical and statistical data reveals structural and systemic underrepresentation of Black, Asian and minority ethnic (BAME) staff in universities in the UK, Australia, and the US. In Australia, she points to research on Asian Australians (Oishi, 2017) that highlights while this is the fastest growing minority group in Australia, constituting 14.4 per cent of the population in 2016, only 3.4 per cent of Deputy Vice-Chancellors were Asian-born in 2015, and as of 2022 there were no Asian born Vice-Chancellors within Australian universities. This contrasts with other overseas-born academics where 33 per cent of Deputy Vice Chancellors and 25 per cent of Vice-Chancellors were born overseas (Crimmins, 2022). In 2022, most Vice-Chancellors in Australia had an Anglo-Celtic background (82.5 per cent) or a European background (15 per cent) and there were no Vice-Chancellors with an Indigenous background (Crimmins, 2022).

Researchers have also noted the lack of cultural diversity in university governance: in 2018, of the 699 governing council roles across Australia's 41 universities, 94 per cent of the incumbents had 'Caucasian' and British backgrounds. The top tiers of senior executives were 94 per cent 'Caucasian' and British in background, as were 96 per cent of vice-chancellors (Croucher, Wen, Coates, & Goedegebuure, 2019).

The Board Diversity Index also provides a potentially useful indication through undertaking comprehensive analysis of Australian boards measuring diversity beyond gender-based data. The 2024 Index reports that while 36 per cent of board roles are filled by women, 91 per cent of these are from Anglo-Celtic backgrounds (Watermark Search International, 2024).

Much of the consideration of racism experienced by staff in institutions has been relatively recent. The overwhelming focus of Australian university workforce initiatives has been on gender equity initiatives and First Nations inclusion and recruitment programs, with culture and racial diversity an emerging focus (Oishi (2017); Khoo (2020).

Gatwiri, Anderson and Townsend-Cross (2024) note that despite this, there has been considerable growth in recent scholarship exploring the impacts of minoritisation for academics (e.g. Gutiérrez y Muhs et al. (2012); Navarro (2017); Hernandez, Ngunjiri, and Chang (2014); Mirza (2018); Rodriguez (2009); Yancy and Del Guadalupe Davidson (2014). It is notable many of these accounts take autoethnographic perspectives which directly convey the experiences of minoritied academics. For example, Yancy and Del Guadalupe Davidson (2014) includes "heart-breaking accounts from academics of colour documenting their teaching experiences within white universities. They narrate how their pedagogical positions are constantly questioned, threatened, and diminished through everyday slights and microaggressions. They detail the constant disrespectful, racist, and condescending teaching evaluations that they receive anonymously from students, all as examples of how their expertise is minimised" (Gatwiri, Anderson, & Townsend-Cross, 2024, p. 143).

As with other groups experiencing racism, the racism experienced by academics has been associated with mental and physical health impacts. As Anderson and colleagues note, "in the face of labour market precarity, where casualisation of academic work is rampant, being evaluated negatively without any objective cause can jeopardise career progression and lead to severe mental health issues" (Anderson, Gatwiri, & Townsend-Cross, 2020, p. 151). It is also important to note that the additional burden placed on minoritised academics to carry out the work of increasing racial literacy in universities, means they are likely to be disproportionately exposed to re-traumatising racism. Gatwiri and Mapedzahama (2022) describe this as "Black people must continually open their wounds to show how they have been brutalised to get people to understand and empathise. This sometimes creates mental and emotional injuries. The price of watching

some of these all in the hopes that it will convince the world to pay attention is often not justifiable to the mental health of several black people" (p. 276 citing Charisma, (2021).

Racism remains a key factor impacting negatively on First Nations Australians at all levels of education (Elias, Mansouri, & Paradies, 2021), and is pronounced in higher education for both students and staff, with 75 per cent of First Nations staff reporting experiences of racism in the workplace (Frogley, 2018). For university staff, while their experiences of interpersonal and systemic racism may be similar to those experienced by students, there are other impacts in terms of their role as employees of organisations, and their role as educators and (re)producers of knowledge and curriculum (Ahmed S. , 2012).

In 2021, Thunig and Jones (2021) noted close to 122,000 people employed within higher education institutions in Australia. Despite accounting for 2.8 per cent of the broader population at the time, the First Nations workforce represented less than one per cent of higher education staffing. When considering the number of academic-specific roles, First Nations peoples represented just 0.3 per cent of the total higher education workforce. The authors note this context is important when considering the sheer statistical burden placed on Indigenous academics.

While there has been some improvement in the subsequent years, with the most recent data (Australian Government Department of Education, 2025) showing the headcount of First Nations staff has more than doubled (103 per cent increase) over the last decade (since 2015), this largely aligns with population growth over the decade. The growth in proportional share of First Nations staff is more modest, growing from 1.0 per cent of total staff to 1.7 per cent of total staff. In 2024:

- The headcount of First Nations staff increased from 2,135 in 2023 to 2,424 in 2024 (an increase of 13.5 per cent), and
- First Nations staff made up 1.8 per cent of the total staff in 2024, an increase from 1.6 per cent from 2023.

This continues to be under representative, with the proportion of reported First Nations staff istill well under the proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in the wider Australian population (3.1 per cent of working age population) (Australian Government Department of Education, 2025).

In addition, the type of employment contracts are also significant when it comes to analysing and considering roles, responsibilities, and power dynamics between Indigenous and non-Indigenous staff. While tenured employment of non-Indigenous staff was 58.4 per cent, only 51 per cent of First Nations academics enjoyed the security of being in tenurable term positions. Overall, 49 per cent of First Nations academics were employed on fixed term contracts is of importance: participants within this study expressed that job security impacts behaviour, how we respond to demands, and voice within the workplace (Thunig & Jones, 2021).

The focus of Thunig and Jones' research drew on data collected in a 2019 nation-wide study which undertook one-on-one, face-to-face interviews with Indigenous academic women, using Indigenous research methodologies and poetic transcription, to explore the experiences and relational aspects of First Nations academic women's roles in Australian higher education (Thunig & Jones, 2021). The authors noted a "paucity of literature regarding the motivations and experiences of Indigenous academic women, as academics" (Thunig & Jones, 2021, p. 399). They point out that these limitations in the literature persisted despite related literature clearly demonstrating why higher education institutions need First Nations academics (Behrendt, Larkin, Griew, & Kelly, 2012) and establishing that the roles of First Nations teachers within higher education are "complex and multi-dimensional" reaching across institutions and into communities (Asmar and Page (2009, p. 388); Fredericks et al (2014).

Underpinning university staff experiences of racism, the literature also highlights the importance of world events and political rhetoric in episodically elevating experiences of racism experienced by various racially marginalised groups. In recent years this has included:

- Discrimination against Asian Australians and temporary migrants in the context of COVID-19 (Berg & Farbenblum (2020); Kamp, Sharples, Vergani, & Denson (2021).

- Inflammatory rhetoric and inhumane policies towards asylum seekers (Sharples, Dunn, & Diallo, Categorising anti-asylum Seeker Sentiment through a Regime of Securitisation, 2023).
- Islamophobia and racist targeting of Muslim Australians (Dunn, Diallo, & Sharples, Segmenting anti-Muslim sentiment in Australia: insights for the diverse project of countering Islamophobia, 2021).
- Mediatised racialisation and episodic criminalisation of African Australians (Majayu (2020); Weng & Mansouri (2021).
- The 2023 Voice Referendum, which created an environment in which racism towards Indigenous peoples increased. After the referendum, Indigenous-led national crisis hotline 13YARN were facing 100 calls daily and in the first two weeks of November, 25 per cent of the calls were reports of racial vilification or abuse (Knowles, 2024).
- Increases in antisemitism and Islamophobia have been noted in the context of ongoing conflict in the Middle East – As the 2024 Scanlon Social Cohesion found, 'deeply divided response to the conflict in the Middle East are creating a deeply challenging environment for intercultural and interfaith relations in Australia today. This year has been particularly challenging for many in Australia's Jewish and Muslim communities as well as those from Palestinian, Lebanese, other Arabic and Iranian backgrounds' (O'Donnell, Guan, & Prentice, 2024, p. 42).
- Significant race related events such as the death of George Floyd in 2020 and the Black Lives Matter movement (Subramaniam & Kokan, 2023).

The research notes a range of specific impacts on staff as detailed below.

Biases in recruitment and promotion

Both Australian and international research recognise the impact of racism on university staff in terms of promotion. In 2017, Oishi reviewed 317 studies on minority faculty finding that major issues such as negative stereotypes, tokenism and marginalisation had not changed for ethnic minority scholars for the last two decades. This corroborated her research findings that the majority (54.3 per cent) of Asian Australian academics felt that their ethnic and cultural background worked to their disadvantage. Asian-born academics while well represented in lower ranks of academic positions, were severely under-represented in the most senior management positions in Australian universities. In 2015, only 3.4 per cent of Deputy Vice-Chancellors were Asian-born, there were no Asian-born Vice-Chancellors at any Australian university; and the majority of Asian Australians (63.0 per cent) believed that they were not appropriately represented in university management.

Surveys of union members conducted by the National Tertiary Education Union (NTEU) National Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander Policy Committee (A&TSIPC) in 2011 and 2018 found 75 per cent of Indigenous university staff respondents in 2018 had experienced racism in the workplace, an increase of 3.5 per cent since the 2011 survey (Frogley, 2018). The NTEU surveys concluded that racism, discrimination, a lack of cultural understanding and respect, and lateral violence continue to impact First Nations staff in the Australian higher education sector. The surveys recommended that universities:

- review existing policies and procedures (including anti-racism, anti-discrimination etc)
- ensure Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander staff are involved in review and monitoring of policies and procedures
- ensure all staff are aware of advice and complaints mechanisms
- call on the government to commit additional funding to campaigns to address discrimination and racism
- work with unions to develop appropriate collective agreement clauses and internal procedures which attempt to tackle racism

- work with unions and other key stakeholders to develop understandings of and responses to lateral violence. (National Tertiary Education Union, 2018)

A recent Australian Research Council (ARC) three-year longitudinal study *Developing Indigenous Early Career Researchers*, investigated a strength-based, culturally relevant approach to First Nations early career researcher (ECR) mentoring (Povey, Trudgett, Page, & Lea Locke, 2022). While mentoring was found to be an important foundation for a successful academic career, Povey et al found that much of the underpinning ideologies of mentoring are grounded in white hegemony and can compound First Nations educational inequity.

The research on First Nations ECRs, also confirmed racism in the tertiary context has significant health, social, emotional and educational impacts and that First Nations ECRs often face subtle and overt forms of racism that impact both career trajectories and wellbeing (Povey, Trudgett, Page, & Lea Locke, 2022). Results from the ARC study, which set out to explore the career trajectories of First Nations Australian scholars in the early period following completion of doctoral studies, have provided significant insight into the racism experienced by early career First Nations scholars (Trudgett, 2024). The project was a longitudinal study in which ECRs who participated in the study were interviewed once a year, over three years, with a view to exploring enablers and barriers to their work and career success.

A number of studies of Black academics in Australian university workplaces (Mapedzahama & Kwansah-Aidoo (2017) Mukandi and Bond (2019); Anderson, Gatwiri, & Townsend-Cross (2020); Gatwiri (2021); Gatwiri et al (2021)) identify repeatedly reported experiences of microaggressions, hyper-surveillance and epistemic othering. This is characterised by research alienation, funding gaps and being passed over for promotion leading to feelings of exclusion and fractured belonging within academia (Gatwiri & Udah, 2024). Black scholars, whose work focuses on exposing how white supremacy and racial violence are instrumentalised, also continually report the relegation of their scholarly work to the margins (Watego, 2021).

A Canadian study of more than 300 senior university leaders, mapped the demographic composition of academic leaders across Canada, including presidents, vice-presidents, assistant vice-presidents, associate vice-presidents, provosts, and vice-provosts. The findings suggest that 'visible minority'[13] people in leadership are under-represented compared with their presence in the university population—consistent with the pyramid of exclusion where the representation negatively racialised people decreases as they move up the ranks (Cukier, 2021). While Canadian universities espouse commitments to diversity and inclusion Cukier argues there has long been a gap between the rhetoric and practice, what Henry and colleagues (Henry, et al., 2017) label the 'Equity Myth'. They further note that "analyses of racism, racialization, and Indigeneity in the academy are notable by their absence" Cukier argues that this is not a result of labour market availability, but a result of the priority and effort that organisations put into recruiting and retaining visible minorities in leadership.

A 2020 study of New Zealand based universities showed that Māori and Pacific academics, compared with non-Māori non-Pacific male academics, were significantly less likely to be promoted to the professoriate (associate professor, professor) and earn less, over a 15-year period. These gaps are not explained by research performance (measured by Performance Based Research Fund scores), age or field (e.g., science) (McAllister, et al (2022). In follow up research, Kidman and Chu (2021) explored ways to address current promotional processes that discriminate against Māori and Pacific academics in New Zealand universities

US research (Rucks-Ahidjana, 2019), examines the pressures facing racially marginalised academics with almost three-quarters of Black, Asian and Latinx professors reporting feeling a need to work harder than their colleagues to be seen as legitimate scholars, compared to less than half of white professors. The work involved in supporting and mentoring students, legitimizing one's research, and navigating ethno-racial microaggressions is part of the 'invisible labor' that most colleges and universities do not recognise in the tenure and promotion process.

[13] This study used the term 'racialized' or 'visible minority' interchangeably in line with definitions in the Canadian *Employment Equity Act*, which uses the classifications: 'white', visible minority', and 'Indigenous.' Visible minority, is defined as 'persons, other than Aboriginal (Indigenous) peoples, who are non-Caucasian in race or non-white in colour'.

High levels of cultural load

Cultural load is identified across the literature included in this review, in relation to both First Nations staff and students.

Thunig and Jones (2021) described the "in/visibility of burden on Indigenous academic women called on to be the consulted, collaborator, mentor, developer, and deliverer is impacted by ongoing racialised power imbalances between Indigenous and non-Indigenous academics" which extended to some participants describing feeling like a "black performer" and one case, so exploited by colleagues that they felt like a "house n***er" (2021, p. 404)[14].

In 2020, the *Gari Yala* project surveyed First Nations Australians who were employed at the time or had been employed in the past two years (Brown, D'Almada-Remedios, Gilbert, O'Leary, & Young, 2020). The survey used a combination of two sampling methods: an online survey of 250 Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander Australians, administered through a research-only survey panel and a non-probability/snowballing convenience sampling method. While this study examined the experiences of more than 1000 workers across sectors, slightly more than ten per cent of the participants were working in education and training organisations.

The study found that:

- 38 per cent of participants reported being treated unfairly because of their Indigenous background sometimes, often or all the time
- 44 per cent reported hearing racial slurs sometimes, often or all the time and
- 59 per cent reported experiencing appearance racism – receiving comments about the way they look or 'should' look as an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander person.

The research found racism impacted wellbeing and job satisfaction, with First Nations workers who experienced unfair racist treatment: 2.5 times less likely to always be satisfied with their job, compared to those who rarely or never experienced unfair racist treatment; three times less likely to always recommend their workplace to other Indigenous people; and two times as likely to be looking for a new employer in the next year.

The report found current workplace supports were ineffective with only one in three reporting they had the workplace support required when they experienced racism and only one in five reporting working in organisations with both a racism complaint procedure and anti-discrimination compliance training that included reference to discrimination and harassment against First Nations peoples.

In 2021, the Gari Yala data was re-analysed by gender, revealing that First Nations women who are carers were experiencing a 'triple jeopardy' – that is, the combination of three aspects of their identity are amplifying their experiences of discrimination and exclusion at work (Evans, 2021). Indigenous women with caring responsibilities were:

- More likely to feel unsafe in the workplace;
- More likely to carry extra expectations to make their workplace culturally sensitive and engaged; and
- Less supported when they encounter racism and unfair treatment.

It is worth emphasising the significant impact of cultural load as part of the (often invisible) additional workload borne by First Nations people (often women) in the workplace, where they are either the only Indigenous person or one of a small number. This workload includes extra related work demands that non-Indigenous colleagues do not have, expectations to educate non-Indigenous colleagues about First Nations people and racism, and expectations to talk on behalf of all First Nations people (Evans, 2021).

While the concept of cultural load is not new, it has become an issue of increasing attention in recent years. Universities Australia (Universities Australia, 2024) note that ongoing challenges in

[14] In this context, 'house n***er' references hierarchical divisions between oppressed communities, slavery, and indentured domestic service.

recruiting and retaining First Nations academics are rooted in systemic issues and historical inequities contributing to a lack of pipeline. Sector wide competition, an absence of identified positions within disciplines and the cultural load carried by many Indigenous academics further aggravates attraction and retention.

Cultural load can be more than being asked by a staff member's workplace to contribute/lead activities in the workplace (Australian Public Service Commission, 2023). It is also about the many responsibilities and obligations First Nations peoples have in their lives that they balance every day – they are more likely to have caring responsibilities and cultural and/or community obligations outside of the workplace. This includes:

- Cultural responsibilities in relation to caring for family members and extended family
- Being part of local advisory councils and boards
- Balancing living and working in Community
- Experiencing systemic racism
- Supporting family and community who are experiencing the impacts of intergenerational trauma
- Living and working off Country

(Australian Public Service Commission, 2023).

New Zealand based research (Haar & Martin, 2022), has identified similar themes impacting on Māori scientists: *whakawhanaungatanga* (relationship management), *kawenga* (responsibilities), *taumaha* (workload), *āheinga tangata* (human capacity), *tikanga* (correct practice), *hauora* (well-being), and *umanga takaware* (career disruption). The authors classify these pressures as *aronga takirua* (cultural double-shift) and present a theoretical model for understanding the drivers and consequences of this cultural double-shift for Māori scientists.

It is worth noting that recent work by First Nations organisations and scholars has led to some re-conceptualising the idea of cultural load: of particular note, Weenthunga Health Network, a Victorian Aboriginal health workforce organisation coined the term 'colonial load' (2023) emphasising the cognitive load imposed by colonial institutions, racist and unsafe workplaces on Aboriginal staff (Crocetti, et al., 2024). Weenthunga argues that re-framing cultural load by splitting cultural responsibilities from colonial load, places the load where it belongs – with the colonial project. This approach centres culture and cultural practice as a strength for First Nations people, asserting that it is oppression, exploitation and racism that create the load. The organisation argues that this load is placed on First Nations, people (who are often either ignorant or in denial that it exists) through biases, assumptions, expectations and entitlement by settlers and institutions.

Examples of colonial load provided include:

- Working in isolation (ie tokenism)
- Challenging restrictive western policy frameworks and practices
- Racist and culturally unsafe workplaces and processes
- Expectations to educate colleagues
- Having identity questioned
- Undertaking unpaid work out of necessity
- Deficit narratives around First Nations culture and communities.

Weenthunga differentiates this from cultural responsibilities which can include:

- Working and different times and/or locations to meet community needs
- Advocating for self-determination and First Nations rights to be upheld
- Speaking up when harm is caused

- Sharing cultural practices through a strength-based lens
- Showing up for community in reciprocity.

(Weenthunga Health Network Inc, 2023).

In addition, the literature identifies closely related high levels of cultural load borne by other racially marginalised groups, particularly women. In a recent article, Gatwiri and Krupta (2025) note that expectations to provide cultural and pastoral labour are entrenched in workload distributions for women and other racially marginalised groups, leading to cycles of overwork injuries and disenfranchisement (Anderson, Gatwiri, and Townsend-Cross (2020); Magoqwana, Maqabuka, and Tshoaedi (2019)).

Gatwiri and Krupta (2025, p. 2) further note that this pattern has been widely identified:

> *Black, First Nations and other negatively racialised academics globally, including those in Australia (Fredericks et al.* (2018)*; Moreton-Robinson* (2021)*), Canada,* (Wane, 2023)*, New Zealand* (Stewart, 2023)*, South Africa* (Magoqwana, Maqabuka, & Tshoaedi, 2019) *and [the] UK (Bhopal* (2022)*; Tate* (2016)*) have contextualised workload inequality within a critical race framework by suggesting that discussions about 'diversity' have become commodified, resulting in more harm for those groups in higher education institutions (Ahmed* (2013)*;* (2012)*.*

In the US context, cultural load on minoritised academics has also been identified in activities such as mentoring, diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI) responsibilities, including strategic planning and implementation, managing DEI budgets, and/or determining university wide DEI efforts (Hodges & Welch, 2023) undertaken by racially marginalised staff, particularly women.

Pay inequity

A recent study of gender pay gap among academic women of Asian ethnicity, found that this cohort at Aotearoa New Zealand's largest university experienced a gender pay gap of 33.5 per cent compared to 11.9 per cent gender pay gap for all women at the same institution (Ng, et al., 2025). The authors recommend accountability, transparency and strengthening institutional frameworks to "level up" intersectional pay gaps through three actions: "1) ensuring accountability by mandatory training, monitoring and reporting on gender pay equity, diversity and conscious inclusion 2) creating transparency in salary, pay rates, hiring, tenure and promotions, and 3) convening a task force at each faculty with specific mentorship and leadership initiatives for women of colour" (Ng, et al., 2025, p. 113).

While it is not specific to higher education, broader data may be indicative of trends in universities. A recent report from the Australian Government's Jobs and Skills Australia highlights intersectional gender segregation and gender pay gaps in the Australian workforce for the first time (Jobs and Skills Australia, 2025). The study found that regardless of which pay gap measure or benchmark is used, First Nations women had the highest gender pay gaps in Australia. Compared with all Australian males, they had a gap of 35.3%, which was almost 10 percentage points higher than for females generally and for CALD females (which were both similar).

First Nations men also had the highest gender pay gaps among male cohorts at 19.3 per cent but is still below all of the pay gap measures for different groups of women. CALD and migrant male pay gaps are far lower at under five per cent.

The First Nations female 10-year gender pay gap was 38.1 per cent, more than seven percentage points higher than for women generally and for CALD women (which were both similar).

In contrast, accumulated gender pay gaps for First Nations men were lower than the single year point-in-time measures (19.3 per cent to 16.7 per cent), while the accumulated measure was almost double the point-in-time measure for CALD men (4.2 per cent to 8.5 per cent).

Jobs and Skills Australia has indicated that is in the process of developing dashboards which may shortly offer the opportunity for this data to be further analysed in relation to the higher education sector (Jobs and Skills Australia, 2025).

The impact of racist or biased student feedback on career progression, particularly for women

A number of researchers have identified the impact of racist or biased student feedback on career progression, particularly for women ((Anderson, Gatwiri, & Townsend-Cross (2020); Gatwiri, Anderson, & Townsend-Cross (2024)). Gatwiri and colleagues (2024) take a collaborative autoethnographic approach to explain how Student Evaluations of Teaching (SETs) can be used as a tool of disciplinary control in the neo liberalised university, arguing that SETs are racialised and gendered tools of power that can be hostile and biased towards minoritised teachers, and urge reconsideration of their overuse in higher education.

Similarly, a 2021 Australian analysis of recent research regarding student evaluations of courses and teaching (Hefferman, 2021) found that student evaluations are influenced by racist, sexist and homophobic prejudices, and are biased against discipline and subject areas. With student evaluations undertaken in over 16,000 higher education institutions at the end of each teaching period, it is critical to understand that the data informing student surveys is flawed and prejudiced against those being assessed. Evaluations have been shown to be heavily influenced by student demographics, the teaching academic's culture and identity, and other aspects not associated with course quality or teaching effectiveness. Evaluations also frequently include increasingly abusive comments which are mostly directed towards women and those from marginalised groups and subsequently make student surveys a growing cause of stress and anxiety for these academics. Yet, student evaluations are used as a measure of performance and play a role in hiring, firing and promotional decisions.

Such analysis is also noted in the international research (e.g. Daniel (2022); Rollock (2021).

Racism in research

Gatwiri and colleagues (2025) argue that despite its widespread use for quality assurance within academic publishing, the peer review process has significant flaws, citing significant emerging literature from researchers who work from marginalised cultural, theoretical, and political perspectives showing that while peer review usefully upholds academic ethics and rigor, they can also be biased and exclusionary.

Australian research also notes that academics who identify or are identified with minoritised groups in society and teach marginalised subjects (which can be less valued both compared to research work and as marginalised subjects) are particularly prone to experiencing individual and systemic bias and discrimination which harm their wellbeing and restrict their career advancement (Anderson, Gatwiri, & Townsend-Cross, 2020).

Despite recent increases in the number of First Nations Higher Degree by Research (HDR) enrolments and completions in Australian universities - from 80 prior to 2000 to a total of 372 by 2014 - and with doctoral research completion rates growing from 33 in 2008 to 54 in 2018, there remains a disparity in the representation and retention of First Nations Australians in research training (Povey, Trudgett, Page, & Lea Locke, 2022). Povey et al. (2022) build on the work of Bodkin-Andrews and Carlson (2016), Seet and Paradies (2018), and Moreton-Robinson (2015), to explore institutional racism in Australian universities, in particular focusing on the impact of racism on the experiences and career trajectories of First Nations ECRs.

In a recent open letter on academic culture, structural racism and the place of Indigenous Knowledges Avery responded to a reviewer's critique of his work, highlighting the broader issues of academic culture and the treatment of Indigenous scholarship (Avery S. , 2023) writing:

> *If the Indigenising and decolonising agendas of universities are to be accepted in good faith, then there needs surety over the rightful place and purpose of Indigenous scholarship within them. Western science has not been kind to Indigenous people and people of colour. Yet Indigenous scholars are expected to suspend their values and history and conform to the Western way in order to find a home within the academy*.

The issue of racism in research has also been considered in the context of racism in conference settings (Khoo, Burford, Henderson, Liu, & Nicolazzo, 2020). The authors draw on Ahmed's (2000) work in relation to the whiteness of conferences – and the ways in which unmarked conference spaces (in Western academia) are assumed to be white. Khoo et al argue that

conferences are highly exclusionary spaces in which academic hierarchies (including racialized hierarchies) and structures are reproduced, even in the case of conferences in fields such as feminist or sexuality studies which claim to champion inclusion (Pereira, 2017). Ironically, they can be particularly important spaces for such knowledge fields that are often marginalised in universities (Bowles (2002); Krishna (2007). Ahmed also explores the racialised dynamics of conferences in her later work (Ahmed (2006) and (2012)), reflecting on the whiteness of institutions, where "white bodies gather and cohere to form the edges of such spaces" (2006, p. 132), sometimes forming a 'sea of whiteness' (2006, p. 133).

Impacts of intersectional bias on academic staff:

In addition to the research canvassed above in relation to cultural load, which particularly impacts women academics, a range of studies have examined other intersections of the racialised experiences of university staff.

Chelsea Watego (formerly Bond) has described her experiences of racism as a First Nations woman working in Australian universities (Bond (2014); Bond (2019); Watego (2021) describing the emotional, psychological, and cultural impacts of her interactions both with her students and colleagues. In relation to her interaction with students she writes:

> *My presence as an Indigenous scholar, if not confronting, is sometimes unintelligible for students. It conflicts with the comfortable colonial narratives of the "native" as mute, deficient, exotic or absent. For many Australians, the "real Aborigine" always exists somewhere else in time or place, but not in their neighbouring suburb, or at the front of the lecture theatre. My presence simply doesn't reconcile with their imaginary representations of Aboriginality.*
>
> *I know that some of my students try to decipher whether I'm an "authentic Aborigine" or a "legitimate academic", because I can't possibly be both; for some, I can't possibly be either…*
>
> *Our presence … provide[s] a human face to a version of Australian history that has eluded many of our students. They provide a powerful counter-narrative to the representations of Aboriginality that students are familiar with.*
>
> *When these counter-narratives are contested, particularly from the hostile and overtly racist students on a regular basis, it can be quite damaging for Indigenous academics, so much so, that they refuse to return to teaching. The "everyday garden-variety racism[s]"* (Hart, 2003) *remain a real workplace health and safety issue for Indigenous academics, and account for 50 per cent of the workload stress experienced by Indigenous academics* (Asmar & Page, 2009).
>
> (Bond C. , 2014, p. online)

Seven years later Watego, reflected while the Indigenous-identified workforce in colonial institutions may be "the least paid but most qualified, in the least secure of employment but the hardest working" (2021, p. 85), that drawing attention to the racism in universities, comes with even greater consequences.

> *To speak of race in this place is hard. We find ourselves no longer welcome in a whole host of spaces. I once had a home in health when I spoke about culture and strengths. But when I spoke of race in editorials, keynotes and international fora, I no longer had a home in my discipline or school. I received those defamation threats at my job, copied to my manager and the dean of my faculty. When I write about my experiences of racism, it is me who has to remind the legal department of my right to academic freedom, collect the evidence and craft the response.*
>
> *When I joke about incidents of racism on campus on my radio show Wild Black Women, a representative from the institution will have a word with me; not to address the racism I encountered, but instead to insist I not talk about it. Those directives are never put in writing, but there is no question that I am meant to heed them. When I submit a peer-review journal article or book chapter in which I've been asked to write about my experiences of racism, there will always be an additional peer-review process before it goes for copyediting, and even then it might not get published.*

(Watego, 2021)

Harb and colleagues (Harb, Anantharajah, Samuels-Wortley, & Qureshi, 2024) further query feminist support in the academy for women of colour (WOC). Their praxis-focused intervention aimed to promote visible solidarity and representation for WOC across universities and to show intergenerational care to future WOC academics who will join "what may be the last bastion of elitism and sanctioned racism" (Gutiérrez y Muhs, Niemann, González, & Harris, 2012, p. 3). As the authors explain, this environment has significant impact on women of colour including "overwork, lack of respect, underrepresentation, difficulty obtaining tenure, job-triggered mental and physical complications, and overall unhappiness– [which] have long been documented by scholars" (Navarro, Williams, & Ahmad, 2013, p. 443).

Carangio (2023) explores the career progressions of cisgender, highly skilled immigrant women of different racial and ethnic backgrounds employed in a variety of Australian industries, including academia. The study compared both the privileging effects of racism and the oppressive effects of it, while mapping the career progressions of white British and non-white Chinese, Filipina and Indian highly skilled immigrant women workers. The research found that white Anglo skilled immigrant women could benefit from their privilege and white contacts for their career progression, while non-Anglo women moved horizontally rather that vertically in their careers, and found they had to work harder than their white Anglo colleagues to convince people they were capable (Carangio, 2023). This was illustrated in the story related by an Indian lecturer with many awards in teaching, showing how multi-intersectional dynamics can operate within a white anglicized regime.

> *She [white Australian colleague] was teaching [a subject] in the morning class and I was teaching [the same subject] in the evening class. She went to speak with the head of the department and she said they should not offer classes in the evening, why? Because students would not get the subject very well because one person is teaching in the evening and one in the morning. She was just saying there would not be any consistency because one class is taught by an Indian and one by an [Anglo] Australian. There are things you don't need to say in words, some are implicit. I found it offensive [...] She insisted that I had to sit in her class in the morning so I got what I was going to teach. I totally refused.*
>
> *I am a woman with [many] degrees and this woman is [a level below] and she was asking me to sit in her class and listen to her. I put my foot down. My feedback [from the students] were on top and after that they did not say anything. [...] The woman who asked me to take a seat in her class knew very well I was more qualified than her [...]. When discrimination occurs you go to the authority [superior] you hope they will do the job but if people know each other [...] Australians will believe to the person from their own block.*

(Carangio, 2023, p. 1211)

Similarly, da Silva and colleagues have recently explored the intersections of gender and race among business academics in Brazil (da Silva, Pereira, & de Castro, 2024). The study aimed to investigate how the 'glass ceiling' phenomenon presented in the daily interactions and academic trajectories of Black women in the accounting field, finding that the glass ceiling is expressed in barriers specific to the accounting field. These block the path of Black women who aim to succeed in prestigious academic spaces, regardless of their level of qualification and are conceptualized as "stained glass ceilings", because the barriers become visible and concrete in a country where the authors argue that racism is a structuring element of social relations.

Some of the barriers identified by the research participants included a lack of networks and relationships which influenced their knowledge of career possibilities opportunities; not having access to formal and quality schooling and higher education; perceptions of accounting profession as an "eminently" masculine profession (which also proved true in practice); and sexist and racist assumptions present in everyday Brazilian interactions, which are the effect of social constructions and representations about women and Black people (da Silva, Pereira, & de Castro, 2024).

Tekeste and colleagues (2024) advocate for the needs of racially marginalised ECRs, identifying a range of issues they have faced in relation to finances, political conflicts, and family from pre to post-COVID-19 pandemic. The authors, reflecting on their own experiences, note that they intentionally hide and reveal certain narratives of their personal lives to limit the negative impact on expected professional identities, in line with previous research (Reid, 2015). They further note that although some elements of intersectional identities (race, religion, and ethnicity) are more visible and therefore harder to conceal that others, frequent concealing of the structural inequalities they face is a strategy aimed at avoiding further harm to minoritised bodies (Tekeste, Zakariah, Azer, & Salahuddin, 2024).

The project also draws on earlier research about the experiences of academics with multiple intersectional identities who frequently face heightened challenges, including structural barriers to promotion (Bourabain (2021); Rollock (2021)). In addition to these challenges, academics who identify as 'marginal scholars' (Hutton & Cappellini, 2022, p. 425) encounter institutional racism, leading to "racial battle fatigue and feelings of isolation" Rollock (2021); Tekeste et al (2024, p. 1330).

Beyond academia, the Federation of Ethnic Communities' Councils of Australia (FECCA) highlight some of the systemic workplace inequalities faced by culturally and racially marginalised (CARM) migrants, depending on their country of origin, including:

- Lack of recognition of overseas qualifications, skills, and work experience
- Lack of knowledge about Australian workplaces, industries, job application processes and culture
- Pre-migration life experiences, particularly trauma and torture
- Lack of access to upskilling opportunities
- Cost barriers to accessing qualifications and job requirements, such as driving licences
- Caring responsibilities and unaffordable paid care.

These challenges often result in CARM migrants having to take low-paid and low-skilled positions that do not reflect their previous experience and qualifications (Federation of Ethnic Communities' Councils of Australia, 2022). Academia is not immune from this phenomenon.

It is worth emphasising that limited research on academic staff references intersectionality, and when it does, it is largely focused on intersections of race and gender. This has implications for our understanding of the impacts of intersectional racism on individuals and communities in relation to issues such as direct and indirect discrimination, career progression and pay gaps. For instance, according to *The Power Gap among Top Earners at America's Elite Universities* report: "Only 11 colleges and universities (8.4 per cent) have gender parity when it comes to top earners while just two institutions have attained racial/ethnic parity. Eight schools have no women among their top earners" (Silbert & Mach Dubé, 2021). This is replicated in the Canadian context where it is reported that Canadian universities systematically discriminate against women and racialised minorities, preventing them from reaching tenured faculty and top administrative positions (Acker J. , 2012).

Victoria is the first and only jurisdiction in Australia to have formally integrated intersectionality into equality law via the *Gender Equality Act 2020 (Vic)* and released Australia's first analysis of intersectional workforce and survey data (for the Victorian public sector) in October 2023 (Commision for Gender Equality in the Public Sector, 2023). The Gender Equality Act 2020 applies to defined entities (organisations that have 50 or more employees), including the public sector, universities and local councils. If available, these organisations are required to report data about Aboriginality, age, disability, ethnicity, gender identity, race, religion and sexual orientation and are required to have regard to the disadvantage or discrimination that a person may experience on the basis of these attributes in addition to gender inequality (i.e. compounded or intersectional gender inequality).

As a result, the Victorian data considers TAFE, universities and other Victorian education institutions in relation to their regulatory obligations to take positive and transparent action towards achieving gender equality in their workplaces and in their public policies, programs and services. While the specific implications of racism in universities are not entirely clear, the 2023 analysis

indicates significant gender pay gaps for CARM and Indigenous women working in education and limited recognition of overseas education, work experience, and qualifications leading to a higher likelihood of working in unstable and casual roles within lower paid industries and sectors (Commision for Gender Equality in the Public Sector, 2023). The Commission's data analysis also shows that CARM women are less likely to report holding management roles and are more likely to indicate lower salaries – the largest identified pay gap for CARM women (26 per cent) was for CARM women compared to non-CARM men in the education sector. It should be noted however that despite the useful possibilities presented by the Victorian Government's approach, there are still significant limitations. Only 72 organisations in the last reporting round (24 per cent) were able to provide any workforce data regarding the cultural identities of their employees, and this data was generally far from comprehensive. Across all organisations with reporting obligations in the 2021 workplace gender audit, only 4 per cent of employees had their cultural identity recorded. The remaining 96 per cent of employees covered by the 2021 workforce data either had no cultural identity recorded or worked for organisations that did not collect and store information about cultural identity through their workforce systems at all (Commision for Gender Equality in the Public Sector, 2023).

Gatwiri and colleagues draw on the earlier work of Townsend-Cross and Flowers (2016) stating, '[t]he bolstering of racism, sexism, Islamophobia, and homophobia linked with the resurgence of populism make teaching "difficult knowledges" through "uncomfortable pedagogies" more complex' (Gatwiri, Anderson, & Townsend-Cross, 2024, p. 140). The authors further note '[w]e are unsettled when every act of teaching begins to feel like an engagement in the "culture wars" that we have to prepare for as if we are engaging in combat' (Gatwiri, Anderson, & Townsend-Cross, 2024, p. 151).

3. Prevalence and efficacy of current university responses to racism

In this section we discuss the current responses to racism. We have identified eight key areas of institutional response to eliminate racism or promote anti-racism:

1. Truth-telling initiatives
2. Action plans and policies that explicitly focus on eliminating racism or promoting anti-racism
3. Programs, projects, and campaigns that seek to eliminate racism or promote anti-racism.
4. Curriculum design and delivery
5. Cross university networks and activities
6. Research Centres
7. Student Groups and Employee Resource Groups
8. Student and Staff activist campaigns.

For each of these sections we discuss the prevalence across Australia, as well as provide information on evaluation and efficacy where possible, and incorporate international literature where appropriate.

While the following sections make references to 'evidence-based programs,' 'leading practice' and 'best practice', it is acknowledged that these frequently represent the context in which initiatives are presented in the literature. A range of critical race scholars in particular, critique the traditional concept of evidence-based practice in education, arguing that it is often framed through positivist, 'race-neutral,' or universalist paradigms, obscuring considerations of what counts as evidence, whose experiences are validated, and how systemic racism is often overlooked by dominant research norms. (See for example Kaerwer and Pritchett (2023); Parker (2019).

It is worth noting that recent mapping of Australia's national, state, territory and local governments engagement in anti-racism work carried out for the Commission as part of the development of the National Anti-Racism Framework (AHRC, 2024), identified a range of good practice initiatives.

However, with the exception of Australian Research Council (ARC) grants, there were no activities identified in the higher education space.

3.1 Truth-Telling initiatives

In 2021, Victoria established the Yoorrook Justice Commission, culminating in a formal truth-telling and treaty process. While this process does not represent a panacea for resolving colonial injustice, it provides an important means of relational and structural truth-telling towards more just relations and righting racial wrongs (Bracka, 2024).

The Yoorrook Justice Commission is the most comprehensive example of current state-level truth-telling processes in Australia. Since its establishment, Yoorrook has held a series of hearings to gather evidence on injustices faced by First Peoples. This history-making commission concluded its inquiry in June 2025 and released a final reform report (Yoorrook Justice Commission, 2025).

Similar truth-telling processes have commenced in a number of States and Territories:

- The Northern Territory - The Northern Territory Treaty Commission delivered a final report in 2022 (Northern Territory Treaty Commission, 2022) identifying truth-telling as imperative in the overarching Treaty process, but was closed in December 2022.
- Queensland - a Truth-telling and Healing Inquiry which was halted via a repeal of legislation with the change of Government in 2024 (Government of Queensland, 2024)).
- South Australia - has now established, as a first step to state-based implementation of the Uluru Statement from the Heart, a First Nations Voice to Parliament (*First Nations Voice Act*, 2023 (SA).
- Tasmania – a Pathway to Truth-Telling and Treaty was established in (Warner, McCormack, & Kurnadi, 2021). At the time of writing the Tasmanian Government had recently indicated that it would be appointing independent commissioners to guide a genuine Aboriginal-led truth-telling and healing process for Tasmanian Aboriginal people, based on interim advice provided by the Aboriginal Advisory Committee on Truth-Telling and Treaty in October 2024.

The work of the Yoorrook Justice Commission is by far the most comprehensive, and in this context, a number of universities have undertaken truth-telling initiatives of their own. The University of Melbourne has established a University Truth and Justice project, a signature project of *Murmuk Djerring*, the University's current Indigenous strategy. The project aims to address the University's role in historical and on-going injustices committed against Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples through an institutional process of truth-telling, justice, and transformation. Following years of investigation, the University launched *Dhoombak Goobgoowana: A History of Indigenous Australia and the University of Melbourne Volume I, Truth*, in May 2024, an independent scholarly work edited by Dr Ross L Jones, Dr James Waghorne and Distinguished Professor Marcia Langton AO (Jones, Waghorne, & Langton, 2024).

The Project aims to deliver:

- new understandings of the University's role in historic and current injustices, based on the voice and testimony of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples
- a dialogue process with First Peoples to come to a shared understanding of redress, repair, and justice
- material from *Dhoombak Goobgoowana* – and future truth-telling activities – incorporated into curricula
- a newly established 'Truth and Dialogue Centre' at the University of Melbourne as a permanent home for truth-telling activities (including research, dialogue, education)
- a dedicated digital home for truth-telling materials, including a digital repository/archive
- a series of events, conferences and seminars.

History Australia recently published a collection of articles (including contributions from the *Dhoombak Goobgoowana* authors) interrogating the promise and peril of truth-telling and critical historical studies at Australian universities. As one of the authors points out, *Dhoombak Goobgoowana* "encompasses not only dispossession, but also the trade in human remains, racial science, eugenics and appropriation of Indigenous knowledge, [and] stands out for its comprehensive coverage" (Pietsch, 2025, p. 27).

Volume 2 of *Dhoombak Goobgoowana* (Jones, Waghorne, & Langton, 2025) details the concerted efforts underway at the University and in the broader community to give far greater cultural recognition to Indigenous communities. It highlights longstanding efforts at Melbourne University, working with communities, to improve cultural recognition of First Nations peoples and the experience of First Nations staff. This is aimed at aligning with the University's contemporary commitment to First Nations leadership and promoting those voices, on campus and beyond. This necessarily involves not only acknowledging the errors of the past but also empowering First Nations people to participate in the life of the University and the nation: as students, academics, graduates and leaders, and as community leaders.

Deakin University recently agreed to a *Tanderrum* (a Kulin Nation term meaning 'safe passage' or 'agreement') as a first step in a truth-telling process that addresses the legacy of Alfred Deakin. Through this *Tanderrum*, the University commits to truth-telling and elevating the understanding and acknowledgement of the full history of our country. Alfred Deakin, one of the founding fathers of Federation, was also one of the architects of the racist White Australia policy, and as Chief Secretary in 1886, he played a leading role in drafting and passing an amendment to the *Aborigines Protection Act*-commonly known as the 'Half-Caste' Act. The law had a "devastating effect on Victorian First Peoples and was central to the beginning of the Stolen Generations," according to Yoorrook Deputy Chair Sue-Anne Hunter (National Indigenous Times, 20 January (2025).

In NSW, the University of Wollongong (UOW) launched its inaugural Healing and Recognition Track (HART) plan in the aftermath of the Voice to Parliament referendum. The plan implements a whole of university approach to First Nations advancement and reflects the commitment and drive within the university to focus on solutions, strengths, positive narratives and to celebrate success. The HART plan was developed by UOW's Indigenous Strategy Unit after reflecting deeply on the impact of the 2023 referendum on an Indigenous Voice to Parliament and what the path forward should be for an education institution genuinely committed to meaningful action.

More broadly than the university sector, Reconciliation Australia (RA) operates a program - *Community Truth-telling Pathways* (Reconciliation Australia, 2025) which aims to promote meaningful engagement with an ongoing process of truth-telling, truth-listening and truth-acting. The program provides practical resources that support communities and individuals to expand their understanding of truth-telling and to undertake it using culturally appropriate and supportive practices.

The RA approach to truth-telling is framed by four guiding principles which can be adopted by organisations as well as local communities:

1. First Nations community led truth-telling is Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander centred and is responsive to the needs and aspirations of the First Nations people of that place. The motivations particular to each community inform the design, delivery and resource needs of truth-telling in that place. First Nations community led truth-telling also implies a collective and inclusive process in which the emotional and logistical labour is shared.
2. Place based truth-telling speaks to the centrality of Country in the process. Place-based truth-telling can significantly advance grassroots reconciliation by improving local relationships and by triggering local action for change.
3. Strengths focused truth-telling looks to generate respect and understanding of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures and knowledge. It is about recognising and prioritising Indigenous strength, wisdom and skill in the truth-telling process.

4. Action oriented truth-telling inspires participants to act to ensure injustices cannot continue or be repeated. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have repeatedly expressed that reliving their trauma through public truth-telling needs to deliver real change. Truth-telling is not to stir sympathy or provide entertainment but to spark understanding, action and change.

(Reconcilliation Australia, 2024).

A recent collaborative study between RA and UNSW's Indigenous Land and Justice Research Group School of Humanities and Languages, has highlighted important considerations for the planning and delivery of effective truth-telling initiatives, as well as uncovering what motivates First Nations and non-Indigenous people to get involved (Payne & Norman, 2024).

Another recent project undertaken by Dudgeon and colleagues (2024) examined he transformative impacts of a health centred program centred on truth-telling, offering insights into transformative research approaches centred around First Nations knowledges. This program aimed to encourage reflexivity among non-Indigenous mental health and wellbeing researchers to encourage culturally safe research processes, drawing on First Nations pedagogical practices and promoting experiential-relational learning between Elders and participants. Key outcomes included the development of deep respect for the Elders and their knowledges developed through truth-telling and relationship building; awakening realisation of non-Indigenous participant ignorance of Indigenous lived experiences that included becoming more aware of racist language and becoming more aware of the continuing impacts of colonisation and intergenerational trauma. Other findings include a growth of commitment to social justice and action on course completion, and learning to reflect on ways of knowing, being and doing. The transformative journey extended to Elders, able to engage in a culturally safe way through genuine co-design, engagement and empowerment built on friendship, trust and reciprocity (Dudgeon, et al., 2024).

Another recent research on community truth-telling, a unique collaborative study between the Centre for Inclusive and Resilient Societies, Alfred Deakin Institute for Citizenship and Globalisation, and Reconciliation Australia (Barolsky, Berger, & Close, 2023), and investigates 25 case studies of successful community truth-telling activities. These case studies provide easily understandable examples of what truth-telling looks like, what constitutes best practice and how to ensure safety and protection from re-traumatising. While not specific to universities, these offer a range of examples of truth telling activities that can be adapted to suit different communities.

3.2 Australian University Action Plans and Policies

The literature review revealed that there is, as yet, no published review of the action plans and policies to eliminate racism and promote anti-racism within Australian universities. Nevertheless, a desktop search revealed there are a number of prevention frameworks specifically focused on anti-racism which have been adopted in Australian universities. What does exist is canvassed below.

In 2024, the University of Melbourne launched its first Anti-Racism Action Plan, detailing the steps it will take to combat racism on its campuses (University of Melbourne, 2024). The plan builds on an Anti-Racism Commitment published in January 2023 and is structured around four pillars – acknowledging, understanding, preventing and responding to racism.

Similar approaches can be seen in the program of activities undertaken by other universities; for example Monash university has adopted an anti-racism statement which details their commitment to eliminating multiple forms of discrimination including towards indigenous Australians (Monash University, n.d.).

Several universities have developed formal Anti-Racism policies (including Charles Sturt University; Victoria University; UniSA; Charles Darwin University; UNSW). Some universities specifically mark out the interconnection between anti-racism and various aspects of cultural diversity. For example, Queensland University of Technology names their policy as a Cultural Diversity and Anti-racism policy. The University of New South Wales has developed an Anti-Racism and Anti-Religious Vilification Policy. The University of Wollongong names their policy as

an Anti-Racism and Cultural Safety Policy, thus addressing the interconnected ways in which anti-racism and cultural safety work to benefit campus culture.

Nine universities are listed by Reconciliation Australia as having Reconciliation Action Plans (RAP). These are: University of Wollongong, ANU, UniSA, JCU, Bond University, Flinders University, Monash University, University of Newcastle and Swinburne University of Technology. RAPs enable organiastions to sustainably and strategically take meaningful action on reconciliation, including as the RAP advances through the levels of the RAP Framework, on systemic and transformational change.

The University of Newcastle has a Cultural Capability Framework 2020-2025 that aligns with the University's RAP and states that it draws on best practice principles to achieve cultural capability as identified in the Behrendt Report and the Universities Australia Framework/Guiding Principles for the Development of Indigenous Cultural in Australian Universities. It comprises four domains: To Know, To Do, To Belong and To Be; and six standards: Teaching and research, Leadership, Resources, Physical environment, Indigenous students success, and Community relationships.

It is difficult to ascertain the efficacy of these action plans as there is currently no published literature on the evaluation of them.

3.3 Programs, projects and campaigns

Since 2019 the Indigenous Law and Justice Hub at Jumbunna have been working in collaboration with the National Justice Project to establish ***Call It Out – a First Nations Racism Register*** which was launched on 21 March 2022. While based at UTS, this is a broader community project, aimed at recording racism in all sectors, not just in the tertiary context. It provides a simple and secure way for people to report incidents of racism and discrimination toward First Nations peoples, with details of individuals reporting on the Register are kept confidential. In mid-2024, the digital reporting platform was supplemented with the addition of apps for apple and android devices, as well as print and easy read resources to assist reporting.

The Register provides an independent, First Nations-controlled platform which is distinct from traditional complaints and legal processes. Reports of incidents to police or complaints bodies are often restricted or limited to more overt acts of racism, and responses available through antidiscrimination and other laws and complaints mechanisms can be inaccessible or otherwise ineffective. In contrast, Call It Out is an ongoing, respondent generated initiative with a national focus. The Register provides the opportunity to identify patterns of racism at institutional and structural levels, including to inform evidence-based advocacy and campaigning initiatives that proactively strive towards eliminating racism and discrimination towards First Nations peoples in this country.

The first annual report from the project, analysed incidents of racism recorded during the first 12 months of the Call It Out Register, covering the period 21 March 2022 to 20 March 2023 (Allison, Cunneen, & Selcuk, 2023). Close to 500 validated reports were received. The most common types of racism were negative attitudes or stereotyping (20 per cent) and discrimination (17 per cent). Reported experiences also included:

- Bullying
- Institutional racism
- Hate speech
- Not recognising cultural rights
- Verbal abuse
- Shunning or exclusion
- Threats or intimidation
- Physical abuse, assault or attack
- Property damage or vandalism
- Graffiti.

Reports by witnesses were proportionately more likely to identify negative attitudes or stereotyping, while accounts shared by both First Nations people experiencing racism directly and friends or relatives reporting racist incidents were proportionately more likely to identify racial discrimination.

There have been a significant number of universities adopting bystander intervention programs which aim to reduce racism and other forms of harassment and discrimination by encouraging bystander action. These intervention programs are often considered in the context of gender-based violence prevention work that is currently being carried out in many universities across Australia. ***Bystander anti-racism*** is defined as action that someone takes in response to witnessing racism, such as reporting the incident to an authority figure, seeking the help of others, comforting or supporting the target, or interrupting or distracting the perpetrator (Priest, et al., 2020). Bystander anti-racism action and education aims to minimise the physical, psychological and social harms that result from racism and potentially prevent or reduce racism (Nelson, Dunn, & Paradies, 2011). However, it is important to note that such actions may not always be safe, especially for those who are already minoritised or marginalised based on intersecting identities, like gender and/or race. Researchers have identified this issue noting that that obstacles to bystander anti-racism may include people's "fear of violence or vilification, being targeted by perpetrator" (Nelson, Dunn, & Paradies, 2011). Universities currently using bystander approaches include Western Sydney, La Trobe, Monash, ANU, RMIT, Flinders, and Wollongong. A number have adopted the MATE Bystander Program, developed by Griffith University, which is now used across various industries and organisations.

While it could be considered out of scope for the timeframe of this report, since 2012 a number of universities have been participants in the **Commission's *Racism. It Stops With Me*** campaign – 18 universities are currently listed as supporters of the campaign.

The ***Speak Out Against Racism (SOAR)*** program pilot launched by Western Sydney University in 2017, was the first large-scale population-representative study on experiences and attitudes to racism and racial bullying, and on bystander responses to racism and racial discrimination among Australian students in government schools in New South Wales and Victoria. While not directly relevant to the experiences of university students or staff, the project highlighted a range of issues which could be considered by universities in developing effective responses to racism. The project:

- Examined experiences of, attitudes towards, and responses to, racism and racial bullying among school students.
- Identified health, wellbeing, education and social outcomes of racism and racial bullying for individuals, schools and communities.
- Explored the enablers and obstacles associated with bystander responses to racism and racial bullying.
- Developed, piloted and evaluated a school-based program to foster proactive bystander responses to racism and racial bullying. As noted below, the fact that this project has been evaluated, unlike many other initiatives and interventions, makes it a valuable contribution to the literature.

The ***Racial Dignity Framework*** (Gatwiri K. , 2025) is a new initiative supported by the Australian Research Council through a DECRA Fellowship. The research locates belonging and dignity as social justice and human rights issues that are central to how well individuals live with ourselves and how we live with others. The project drew on lived experience of African migrants in Australia to explore how experiences of negative racialisation result in a loss of dignity and, consequently, a loss of belonging. These concepts of dignity and racism are linked together to extrapolate how racialised experiences of humiliation, dehumanisation, devaluation, and minority stress result in diminished self-esteem, self-love, and self-image, and, consequently, fractured belonging.

The second phase of the project (Gatwiri & Kim, 2025), focused on developing, piloting, and refining the Racial Dignity and Racial Indignity Framework as a practice tool to identify the micro-practices of Racial Indignity and support the affirmation of Racial Dignity in everyday organisational life. Building on the findings from Phase 1, this phase aimed to operationalise the core concepts of Racial Dignity by partnering with seven community and human service

organisations across Australia, including Southern Cross University's Faculty of Education. The pilot ran from June 2024 to March 2025 and included recruitment, selection, training and orientation, ongoing reflective debriefing sessions, and the analysis and adaptation of the framework.

Gatriwi's work highlights a new approach that offers considerable insight into ways forward for addressing racism in institutional settings. She writes:

> *We find ourselves in strange times, characterized by a discernible backlash against diversity, equality, and inclusion initiatives. As such, our collective understanding of the harmful impacts that ongoing exclusion and inequality have on people's sense of dignity is essential. The concept of dignity is one that can advance our current social, cultural, and political dialogues within a multicultural context. In Australia, conversations about race are particularly complicated by the persistent myth of a postracial society (Kamaloni 2019). The Racial Dignity Framework provides insights about how and why racism as well as other forms of exclusion are a dignity issue and operates as a 'map' to help us conceptualize racism and white supremacy in bite sizes, especially for those of us who are not just in racial grief and confusion but also in racial overwhelm. I am not inferring that RDF is a replacement for other frameworks, especially those that focus on competency, but I am suggesting it is a place to start a desperately needed conversation that interrogates the intersection of indignity and racism. In so doing, the RDF unmasks micro-practices often hidden within well-formulated cultural supremacist logic.*
>
> (Gatwiri K. , 2025, p. 17)

In 2023, the University of Technology Sydney (UTS) was the first Australian university to display ***#RacismNOTWelcome*** signs on its campus. The signs were unveiled on 21 March, which is the International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (University of Technology Sydney, 2023). This initiative is part of a broader community-led campaign by the Inner West Multicultural Network in partnership with the Addison Road Community Organisation (Addi Road) Initiated by the Inner West Multicultural Network in partnership with Addi Road.

The ***Athena Swan program,*** now widely adopted in Australian universities, has increasingly taken an intersectional focus, including in relation to race since its introduction into Australia in 2014. As of January 2024, SAGE had 42 subscribers from universities, medical research institutions and publicly funded research agencies across Australia. The scheme, overseen by SAGE (Science in Australia Gender Equity Ltd), accredit and grant awards to tertiary education and research institutions for gender equity, diversity and inclusion. It is the only Australian organisation licensed to grant awards under the internationally recognised Athena Swan Charter.

The scheme while originally firmly focused on increasing the representation of women in science, technology, engineering and medicine (STEM) disciplines, has developed a wider mission of raising awareness of and build capacity to improve equity, diversity and inclusion in the Australian tertiary education and research sector. Athena Swan requires member organisations to adopt several key principles including actively incorporating First Nations knowledges and perspectives, taking an intersectional approach to advancing gender equity, and engaging with those most impacted by inequitable practices. The program highlights good practice in relation to anti-racism and helps support member organisations to collect and interpret intersectional data (Science in Australia Gender Equity (SAGE) Ltd, 2022). The organisation also develops and updates good practice resources for member organisations, including on embedding anti-racism practice (Science in Australia Gender Equity (SAGE), 2025).

The SAGE special interest group on cultural diversity, which is part of the program, further aims to create a supportive platform for academics and researchers in health-related disciplines to come together to: exchange ideas for inclusive workplace practices, for example mentoring and Western Sydney University's introduction of Australia's first branded hijab for clinical practice, share lived experience and influence policy.

Established in early 2024, this special interest group holds monthly meetings amongst its member universities and institutes. These include: Western Sydney University, the Australian Institute of Marine Science, Charles Sturt University, Curtin University, Griffith University, La Trobe University, Monash University, Murdoch University, University of Melbourne, University of Newcastle, University of Southern Queensland, University of Technology Sydney, and the

University of Sydney. The group has recently finalised and released a guide focused on ***Championing Ethno-Racial Diversity in the Australian Higher Education and Research Sector*** (SAGE, 2025). Designed specifically for the unique context of the higher education and research sector, the guide outlines ten key areas to help institutions build their knowledge of ethno-racial diversity and move from passive inclusion to active anti-racism.

Using an evidence-based rationale, it provides concrete examples, sector trends, and real-world data. The guide places a strong emphasis on the ethical collection and use of disaggregated ethno-racial data, ensuring institutions have the tools to not only identify inequities but to design culturally safe, responsive solutions. The guide also using an intersectional lens to support institutions to address overlapping barriers faced by staff from culturally diverse backgrounds-including those who also experience marginalisation due to gender, disability, migration status or sexuality.

The ***Realise, Inspire, Support, Energise (RISE)*** project also has the potential to strengthen sectoral and institutional anti-racism frameworks within the tertiary sector. RISE is a collaborative project between Diversity Council Australia (DCA), Settlement Services International (SSI) and Chief Executive Women (CEW) and is funded by the Australian Government Office for Women through the Women's Leadership and Development Program (WLDP) 2022-2026. The RISE project has been working with 25 organisations across Australia including a number of universities to implement organisational change interventions that will help address systemic and organisational barriers for culturally and racially marginalised (CARM) women. The RISE project works with up to 15 women from each of the 25 organisations to support their progression to leadership positions (Diversity Council Australia, 2025).

The RISE project developed a series of robust tools to assist participating organisation to map out the intersectional ways in which race and gender inform career progression and the leadership pipeline. The University of Technology of Sydney was part of the pilot iteration of the RISE project and have used the guidance and resources offered through RISE to develop the university's first Cultural Diversity and Anti-Racism (CDAR) Action Plan (yet to be launched).

The two-year (2023-2026) ***ARISE (Anti-Racism, Intersectionality, and Social Justice in Higher Education) program*** is a project being undertaken by the Australian National University that aims to "fight bigotry and racism on campus. It consists of research and community programs to address structural, pedagogical and individual experiences of discrimination based on culture and race in higher education. The proposed two-year project responds to data emerging at both local and (inter)national levels about the challenges experienced by students and staff of colour in university settings, by investigating the experiences of students of colour in ANU residences."

Place based initiatives may also have a useful role to play in considering the experiences of racially marginalised students in their local communities. In addition to the research undertaken in the City of Sydney (see section on international students in 2.1: (Ryan, Dowler, Bruce, Gamage, & Morris, 2016)), a more recent partnership project has been undertaken by Ryde Council and Macquarie University (Garnier, Chik, Chang, & Benson, 2020) exploring the experience of discrimination and racism by international students in the City of Ryde where Macquarie University is based. In 2019, 400 international students responded to a street survey and seven focus groups were conducted, with the findings suggesting that while generally international students found the City of Ryde to be a safe environment they continued to encounter incidents of racist and micro-racist encounters. The report identified a number of recommendations:

- Community education on the definition of racism, and report mechanisms
- Creation of an online platform for anonymous report of racism
- An information kit for international students about support network provided by the NSW Police Force, the City of Ryde Council and other community organisations
- Promotion of multicultural events to international students and
- Promotion of multicultural inclusiveness in the City of Ryde

(Garnier, Chik, Chang, & Benson, 2020, p. 10).

While place-based initiatives to combat racism have been successfully piloted and adopted by local governments in a number of jurisdictions (particularly in Victoria with support from the State Government through Victorian Health Promotion Foundation (VicHealth) and the Victorian Equal Opportunity and Human Rights Commission (VEOHRC)), there remains significant potential for such approaches to be expanded into the higher education sector. See for example Forrest and Dunn (2007); Ferdinand, Paradies, and Kelaher (2013).

3.4 Cross University Networks and Activities

In addition to collaborative work being carried out through the Athena Swan program in Australia, a further initiative has been developed across Australian universities with ***Welcoming Universities***. This initiative builds on the success and learnings of Welcoming Cities and is a network to inspire and support Australian universities to develop a culture and practice of welcome, inclusion and belonging within their institutions, in the community, and across the higher education sector. In addition to providing these opportunities to share good practice across the sector, the initiative has recently introduced a Standard which supports universities to benchmark their work and understand leading practices in welcoming, inclusion, and belonging (see section 5.4 on benchmarking below for further information). Due to the relative newness of the Welcoming Universities network in Australia, there has not yet been enough time to measure the effectiveness.

Given the limited networks in Australia, it is worth also considering literature related to international cross university networks. Universities UK (UUK) is a group that consists of 140 universities in England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, which act on behalf of universities, represented by their heads of institution. UUK has undertaken a series of activities focused on racial harassment in higher education following research undertaken by the Equality and Human Rights Commission in 2019 (Equality and Human Rights Commission, 2019). In response, an advisory group of UUK was then tasked with overseeing a body of work, including published guidance for universities, on tackling racial harassment which was published the following year (Universities UK, 2020).

The ***UUK recommendations for universities*** included a series of practical steps that it proposed all university leaders should implement immediately including:

- Publicly committing priority status to tackling racial harassment.
- Engaging directly with students and staff with lived experience of racial harassment.
- Reviewing current policies and procedures and develop new institution-wide strategies for tackling racial harassment.
- Improving awareness and understanding of racism, racial harassment, white privilege and microaggressions among all staff and students, including through anti-racist training.
- Ensuring expected behaviours for online behaviour are clearly communicated to students and staff, as well as sanctions for breaches.
- Developing and introducing reporting systems for incidents of racial harassment.
- Collecting data on reports of incidents and share regularly with senior staff and governing bodies (Universities UK, 2020).

Of particular interest given the paucity of evaluation in this space, the UUK 2020 report recommended that "[t]o drive a cycle of continuous improvement, evaluation should be an integral and ongoing part of activities to address racial harassment. Such evaluations should incorporate the views of students and staff who have used processes such as reporting systems alongside quantitative data" (Universities UK, 2020, p. 16). Such evaluation was recommended in the context of both individual institutions and sector-wide evaluation. UUK recommended that individual institutions:

- *Develop evaluation measures for all activities and act on the results*
- *Build evaluation into all new interventions at the design phase and designate regular review points.*

- *Define short-, medium- and long-term success measures for initiatives at the outset and set targets for meeting these.*
- *Drive a culture of continuous improvement by regularly evaluating established measures to determine whether they remain fit for purpose and improve over time.*
- *Gather both quantitative (eg number of reported incidents of racial harassment) and qualitative data (eg feedback from those who have reported an incident), and use the two in conjunction to gain a deeper understanding of what the data shows. For instance, an increased number of reports of harassment may indicate increased confidence in reporting systems rather than an increase in actual harassment.*
- *Seek feedback from staff and students who have used institutional processes, including incident reporting and complaints procedures, on how they can be improved. Consult with students' unions, trades unions and staff networks to gain insight into how such processes are used and perceived among the groups they represent.*

  (Universities UK, 2020, p. 62)

In 2023, UUK published their own sector-wide evaluation (Egbu, 2023) which represents an important piece of work given the context of little evaluation being undertaken looking at anti-racism initiatives in higher education.

Professor Charles Egbu, Chair of the project's advisory group explained:

> *...we are setting out the findings of our engagement with universities, staff and students about the sector's progress in this area. What we have found is that the recommendations of the original guidance were strong, and in following them, universities have made progress in many areas in their efforts to tackle racial harassment, including publishing strategies and working with staff and students with lived experience of racial harassment. Polling commissioned by UUK also suggests that Black, Asian and minority ethnic students have increased confidence in university reporting processes, compared with 2019. However, we know that universities are at different stages of this work and that progress has not been uniform. It is essential that all universities take action to tackle racial harassment – that we continue to step up and maintain focus on this issue, even as we are faced with competing priorities and pressures*
>
> (Egbu, 2023, p. 3).

The evaluation recommends that to drive forward further progress, senior leaders at universities now need to:

- *Ensure work to tackle racial harassment is informed by internal and external expertise in this area, including learning from emerging practice and guidance, academic experts at their university and collaborating with others.*
- *Ensure that there is accountability for making progress in tackling racial harassment within the university and that success is clearly defined and understood.*
- *Work with staff and students with lived experience of racial harassment on meaningful participation and co-production, ensuring the purpose of this work is clear and that the wellbeing of staff and students with lived experience is prioritised.*
- *Communicate the university's evidence and resulting approach to racial harassment clearly to staff and students, including on reporting channels and level of progress made in tackling racial harassment.*
- *Review and continuously improve the training offered to staff and students, ensuring it is reaching the whole student population and relevant staff members, and that it is meaningful, with space for reflection.*

(Egbu, 2023, p. 6).

The Review also sets out a series of practical actions to achieve these goals alongside good practice case studies which are discussed further in section 4.2 of this paper.

Also in the UK, Advance HE (the organisation which oversees the Athena Swan program) has developed a parallel ***Race Equality Charter*** which aims to help institutions in their work to identify and address the barriers facing BAME staff and students, while also providing a framework for action and improvement. Institutions can apply for a bronze or silver award, depending on their progress (Advance HE, 2025). The Race Equality Charter covers:

- professional and support staff
- academic staff
- student progression and awarding and
- diversity of the curriculum.

While the Charter largely supports paying institutional members, it does provide access to an evidence-based Good Practice Database for those working to advance gender and race equality in higher education through Athena Swan and the Race Equality Charter.

In the US, the National Association of Diversity Officers in Higher Education (NADOHE) released a guide in 2021 for higher education leaders to foster diversity, equity, inclusion, and justice on their campuses. ***A Framework for Advancing Anti-Racism Strategy on Campus*** is a comprehensive tool to support students, faculty and staff as they work establish anti-racism. NADOHE convened a task force to create the framework which aims to assist diversity officers and higher education leaders with advancing anti-racism strategies after the senseless murders of Breonna Taylor, Ahmaud Arbery and George Floyd and the rise in incidents of anti-Black racism on college campuses. The NADOHE President Paulette Granberry Russell (as cited in NADOHE, n.d.) summarises the NADOHE framework as a:

…foundation to build upon as we work together to eradicate systemic racism and advance racial equity on campus. If colleges and universities wait to respond only to individual events or take action only after harm is done to their communities, they will fail to truly create safe, equitable conditions for their marginalized students. Working together toward a common goal, we can transform our institutions of higher education into equitable, just and inclusive organizations.

The NADOHE have developed standards of professional practice for Chief Diversity Officers in higher education (2020). However, due to the complexities of differing institutional types, missions and past and current histories, there has not been an overarching evaluation process or research project that measures the efficacy of this network in advancing equity, diversity and inclusion.

3.5 Student Groups and Employee Resource Groups

Alongside completing their degree, university students can opt to join a student group. These usually include clubs, societies or collectives. While clubs and societies can sometimes be used interchangeably, clubs are often more focused on specific activities or interests (e.g. Chess Club), societies can have a broader scope (e.g. First Nations Society), and collectives are more about shared values and collective decision-making. Collectives often focus on social, political and/or cultural issues (e.g. Ethnocultural Collective, Indigenous Collective). In the Australian context, these groups cannot be equated to American Greek college system of fraternities and sororities.

This review investigated the availability of student clubs, societies and collectives in all the Australian universities that could be considered in-scope of this research. The focus was on groups that pertain to anti-racism and issues that affect Black, Indigenous, People of Colour (BIPOC) and/or are relevant to the purview of this literature review. Not all university cultural groups were included as they may not specifically focus on anti-racism even if their members may have lived experience of racism. The review identified a wealth of student organising in this space, but future research is needed on their efficacy within their institutions and the wider sociopolitical context that they operate within. It was identified that of 43 Australian universities, all but six publicly list groups within their universities that support a range of specific groups (for example Muslim students, Indigenous students or Jewish students) or racially marginalised students more generally (for example international students or People of Colour groups). These are discussed further in section 5.3.

While there is little literature related to the impact of peer engagement of racially minoritised students, Griffiths and colleagues (Griffiths, Dickinson, & Day, 2021) have explored the

relationship between university extracurricular activities and self-efficacy in the UK. The article concludes that students who participated in extra-curricular activities, including social groups that are outside the formal degree curriculum, experienced an increase in their academic self-efficacy but recommended more research in this area.

Employee resource groups such as the UTS Multicultural Women's Network (MWN) and the University of Sydney's Mosaic Network also deliver events and advocacy work (e.g. campaigns) to promote anti-racism and celebrate cultural diversity. For example, both networks have worked to deliver the ***Say My Name*** (SMN) campaign, with the MWN offering a suite of resources (e.g. infographics, educational videos and associated events). The SMN campaign is a decolonial approach into understanding, acknowledging and celebrating names that are deemed as 'foreign', 'tricky' or 'unfamiliar' within mainstream Anglo linguistic contexts. The SMN campaign works to address linguistic bias, as well as to increase race literacy about the colonial frameworks which foreground how language (including people's names, accents, and ways of listening) is used in Australia and other western contexts. The UTS MWN is open to all UTS staff members who identify as female and coming from a culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) background. The Mosaic Network is open to all University of Sydney staff who identify as CALD.

Industry research suggests that employee resource groups and similar networks are effective in increasing employees' sense of inclusion (Catalino, Gardner, Goldstein, & Wong., 2022) and provide career development opportunities (DiBenedetto, 2022).

3.6 Research Centres

Australia

A number of Australian universities have established research centres with a focus on First Nations research and student support, and these frequently take an approach which integrates the research agenda with practice-based initiatives. These include:

- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies Unit - University of Queensland
- Australian Centre for Indigenous Knowledges and Education - Charles Darwin University
- Batchelor Institute of Indigenous Tertiary Education
- Centre for Aboriginal Studies - Curtin University
- The *Carumba* Institute, Queensland University of Technology
- Centre for Global Indigenous Futures, Macquarie University
- Centre for Indigenous People and Work, University of Technology Sydney
- David Unaipon College of Indigenous Education and Research - University of South Australia
- *Dilin Duwa* Centre for Indigenous Business Leadership, The University of Melbourne
- *Gabra Biik, Wurruwila Wu*, La Trobe University
- The *Gulbali* Institute, Charles Sturt University (focused on integrated agriculture, water and environment research, including cultural connectivity and environmental stewardship)
- Indigenous Centre of Excellence, Western Sydney University
- Indigenous Education and Research Centre, James Cook University
- Indigenous Knowledge Institute, The University of Melbourne
- Indigenous Research Unit, Griffith University
- Jumbunna Institute for Education and Research, University of Technology Sydney
- *Moondani Toombadool* Centre, Swinburne Indigenous Research
- Koori Centre - University of Sydney

- Kulbardi Aboriginal Centre - Murdoch University
- *Kurongkurl Katitjin* - Edith Cowan University
- Monash Indigenous Centre - Monash University
- *Moondani Balluk* Indigenous Academic Unit - Victoria University
- *Murrup Barak* - University of Melbourne
- *Nulungu* Research Institute - University of Notre Dame Australia
- National Indigenous Knowledges Education Research Innovation (NIKERI), Deakin University
- *Nura Gili* Centre for Indigenous Programs - University of New South Wales
- *Riawunna* Centre (includes research and teaching), University of Tasmania
- School of Indigenous Studies - University of Western Australia
- *Tjabal* Indigenous Higher Education Centre - Australian National University
- *Warawara* Department of Indigenous Studies - Macquarie University
- *Wollotuka* Institute - University of Newcastle
- *Yunggorendi* First Nations Centre - Flinders University.

In addition, there are a number of national level and multi-university centres:

- The ARC Centre of Excellence for Indigenous Futures, based at University of Queensland
- Innovative Research Universities – First Nations Communities Research Network
- National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Higher Education Consortium.

Further detailed examination of such integrated approaches, their outputs and impacts would be useful for future research.

There are also examples of established anti-racism research programs more broadly at some Australian universities. Western Sydney University's Challenging Racism Project mentioned previously, is a national research program on racism and anti-racism in Australia, which works to advance social justice, equity and harmony via rigorous research, community engagement, and the practical application of research findings (Western Sydney University, n.d.). The Project was established in 2002 and works with anti-racism researchers and practitioners, partnering with government, non-government and community organisations that have a shared outlook on intergroup relations and anti-racism initiatives.

The Centre for Resilient and Inclusive Societies, is funded by the Victorian Government and hosted by Deakin University and works with a range of tertiary institution and community sector partners, including: Reconciliation Australia, All Together Now, University of Huddersfield in England, Queensland University of Technology, Department of Premier and Cabinet Victoria, the Victorian Equal Opportunity and Human Rights Commission, Victorian Multicultural Commission and the South Australian Office of the Commissioner for Children and Young People. The Centre provides another example of policy focused research that actively engages in anti-racism work, with specific project streams focused on work relevant to anti-racism and young people:

- challenging racism and enhancing social belonging
- building resilience to social harms (including violent extremism)
- youth, diversity and wellbeing in a digital age and
- the dynamics of violent extremism

(Centre for Resilient and Inclusive Societies, 2024).

Other university-based initiatives include:

- National Centre for Cultural Competence (NCCC) at the University of Sydney which carries out research, education, and engagement in cultural competence.
- The University of South Australia's Centre for Research in Educational and Social Inclusion (CRESI), one of the largest research centres in the world that is focused on contributing to new knowledge about issues related to educational and social inclusion.
- Australian Centre for Jewish Civilisation (ACJC) at Monash University which carries out research on issues including the nature, causes, and effects of antisemitism in Australia, with projects on antisemitism in the cultural and creative industries and in the law.
- Centre for Islamic Studies and Civilisation (CISAC) at Charles Sturt University which has a research focus on the challenges faced by Australian Muslims, such as Islamophobia, as well as their achievements, and explores the history, formation, and future of Muslim communities in Australia.

International

In the North American context, Stanford University's Center for Racial Justice (USA) operates out of the Stanford Law School to "counter racial division and political polarization through rigorous research" (Stanford Law School, n.d.). Stanford University is also committed to conducting regular surveys to track the current racial climate among its university community (e.g. staff and students); its Office of Faculty Development, Diversity, and Engagement publishes annual reports of faculty demographics to track such progress (World Economic Forum, 2021).

Similarly, the University of Ottawa (Canada) launched the *Campus Climate Survey on Diversity and Inclusion* in June 2018 to identify more inclusive policies to promote diversity. The report (University of Ottawa, 2018, p. 6) specifies:

> *The challenges that inhibit further progress are significant. They involve, inviting, welcoming, and working with all in the university community...because it is the right thing to do and because it makes our institution stronger in every way possible. They involve continuing to move courageously down the path of Truth and Reconciliation with Indigenous Peoples and communities.*

The *Institutional Antiracism and Accountability (IARA) Project*, situated within the Ash Center for Democratic Governance and Innovation at Harvard Kennedy School (Harvard University, USA), consists of researchers, students, and experts committed to evaluating policies and practices to create anti-racist change in organisations across sectors. They also provide a search portal dedicated to race, research and policy.

Similarly, the *Institutional Antiracism and Accountability (IARA) Project*, situated within the Princeton School of Public and International Affairs is a team of researchers, students, and practitioners dedicated to answering questions about what policies and practices lead to anti-racist change in organisations Through rigorous evaluation of policies and practices, the team aims to share what works to create anti-racist change at the institutional level (Princeton University, 2025).

In Aotearoa New Zealand, many universities have taken steps to uphold the principles of Te Tiriti o Waitangi (the founding document of New Zealand), which includes partnership, participation, and protection. This involves integrating Māori perspectives and values into university policies and practices and addressing institutional racism through decolonisation efforts. Such attempts have been made at the University of Otago, the University of Auckland, and the University of Waikato, among others (Hamley, Tan, Waitoki, & Tiakiwai, 2024). While this provides an enabling environment to establish frameworks for preventing racism in universities, the Working to End Racial Oppression (WERO) organisation recently reported otherwise: WERO published a research brief in June 2024 that examined how "university policies that purport to address inequities for Māori fall short of their stated intentions and, in doing so, maintain the status quo. We identify that operations of racism within universities are ongoing and propose recommendations to better align actions with intention to uphold Te Tiriti o Waitangi obligations" (Waitoki, Tan, & Hamley, 2024, p. 2).

3.7 First Nations Education Units

In addition to First Nations research centres, on-campus centres to support First Nations students are widespread across the sector (see 5.2 for further detail). It should be noted that a number of research, practice and student focused centres are also integrated. Student support services are key to supporting student success and Universities Australia notes that for First Nations students, these have largely been delivered by specialised centres (Universities Australia, 2024). Whilst these centres are integral to student support, the student support load needs to be shared more equitably across universities, for example student support provided by faculties.

The Australian Government National Indigenous Australians Agency lists the following units in Australian universities that provide support to First Nations students, create a network of First Nations students and academics and provide a First Nations presence at all Australian university campuses. (Note that some of these are also listed above as they integrate both First Nations students support and research).

New South Wales
Australian Catholic University – Indigenous Higher Education Unit
Charles Sturt University – Indigenous Student Centres
Macquarie University – *Walanga Muru*
Southern Cross University – Indigenous Australian Student Services / *Gnibi* College
University of Newcastle – *Wollotuka* Institute
University of New England – *Oorala* Centre
University of New South Wales – *Nura Gili*
University of Sydney – Gadigal Centre / Koori Centre
University of Technology Sydney – Jumbunna Education and Research
University of Wollongong – *Woolyungah* Indigenous Centre
Western Sydney University – *Badanami* Centre for Indigenous Education

Victoria
Australian Catholic University – Indigenous Higher Education Unit
Deakin University – NIKERI Institute (National Indigenous Knowledges Education Research Innovation)
La Trobe University – Indigenous Strategy and Education
Monash University – William Cooper Institute / Monash Indigenous Centre
RMIT University – *Ngarara Willim* Centre
Swinburne University of Technology – *Moondani Toombadool* Centre
Federation University – Aboriginal Education Centre
University of Melbourne – *Murrup Barak*
Victoria University – *Moondani Balluk* Indigenous Academic Unit

Queensland
Australian Catholic University – Indigenous Higher Education Unit
Bond University – *Nyombil* Indigenous Support Centre
Central Queensland University – Indigenous Student Support Team / *Nulloo Yumbah*
Griffith University – *Gumurrii* Student Support Unit / Indigenous Research Unit
James Cook University – Indigenous Education and Research Centre (IERC)
Queensland University of Technology – *Oodgeroo* Unit
University of Queensland – Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies Unit
University of Southern Queensland – College for First Nations / College for Australian Indigenous Studies
University of Sunshine Coast – Indigenous Services

South Australia
Flinders University – *Yunggorendi* First Nations Centre / Office of Indigenous Strategy and Engagement
University of Adelaide – *Wilto Yerlo* Aboriginal Education
University of South Australia – David Unaipon College of Indigenous Education and Research / Indigenous Engagement

Western Australia
Curtin University – Centre for Aboriginal Studies
Edith Cowan University – *Kurongkurl Katitjin*
Murdoch University – *Kulbardi* Aboriginal Centre
University of Western Australia – School of Indigenous Studies
University of Notre Dame Australia – Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Student Support / *Nulungu* Centre

Australian Capital Territory
University of Canberra – *Ngunnawal* Centre
Australian National University – *Tjabal* Indigenous Higher Education Centre

Northern Territory
Batchelor Institute of Indigenous Tertiary Education
Charles Darwin University – Australian Centre for Indigenous Knowledges and Education

Tasmania
University of Tasmania – *Riawunna* Centre

3.8 Curriculum design and delivery

Australia

Designing and delivering a curriculum that genuinely includes First Nations and diverse cultural perspectives, knowledges and understandings is a foundational way in which race literacy, respect of cultural diversity, and valuing multicultural perspectives, scholarship, and methods can be established, all of which are key factors in developing anti-racism within universities. These efforts aim to address the Eurocentric perspectives that dominate academic content, pedagogy, and institutional frameworks (Bhambra, 2018). Addressing Eurocentrism in curriculum design and delivery enables marginalised epistemologies, frameworks of knowledge, and a diversity of perspectives and voices to be recognised and legitimated within university teaching and learning spaces (Araneta, et al., 2025). For example, Douglas and Watson advocate for the decolonisation of legal education and highlight the critical role of First Nations knowledge and scholars in achieving this goal (Douglas & Watson, 2024).

Within Australian universities, the need for race literacy in curriculum has been more focused on the need to include Indigenous perspectives. The *National best practice framework for Indigenous cultural competency in Australian universities* (Universities Australia, 2011) highlights that professionals, educated and trained by universities, contribute to the construction, perpetuation and implementation of structural racism through policies and practices that determine health strategies, place children in care, send First Nations Australians to jail and structure the curriculum taught to the future generation of Australian professionals, based upon little or no knowledge and understanding of Indigenous cultures, histories or contemporary realities.

It is worth noting that the concept of cultural competence, particularly in relation to First Nations peoples, is not universally accepted as a preferred approach. The Universities Australia approach draws on research that suggests that cultural competence represents a critically important journey in higher education (Sherwood & Russell-Mundine, 2017). Similarly, Frawley and colleagues (Frawley, Russell, & Sherwood, 2020) argue that developing cultural competence within the higher education sector requires leaders to facilitate and guide a whole-of-institution approach that “includes examining individual attitudes and practice in teaching as well as management, executive, policy and strategic commitment to revise and assess capacity to implement culturally competent teaching, learning, academic, research and employment spaces” (Taylor, Durey, Mulcock, Kickett, & Jones, 2014, p. 37).

However, critics argue that cultural competence focused approaches can be tokenistic (Furling and Wight (2011); Herring, Spangaro, Lauw and McNamara (2013); assume that the worker developing competence is from a dominant culture; for treating culture as a neutral phenomenon; and for lacking power analysis (Garran & Rozas, 2013) (Sakamoto, 2007). Danso (2016) cites a number of critics, especially healthcare practitioners and social workers who have called for the replacement of cultural competence with cultural humility.

Clearly, embedding First Nations knowledges and perspectives in university curricula requires significantly more than simply increasing the very basic levels of understanding of non-Indigenous staff in tertiary institutions. To quote the former Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Justice Commissioner, Tom Calma (2007): “we need to respect and promote Indigenous knowledges and perspectives. They have much to offer all Australians. Tertiary education institutions exercise cultural leadership when they offer courses that are enriched by Indigenous knowledges and perspectives. This is reconciliation in action” (cited by Universities Australia (2011).

There are an increasing number of universities actively working to incorporate First Nations perspectives in curriculum design and delivery. Bodkin-Andrews, Page and Trudgett believe that it is essential for universities to be held accountable for this broader approach that embeds Indigenous cultural competencies within the graduate attributes for all students (Bodkin-Andrews, Page, & Trudgett, 2019).

Calls for the inclusion of IGAs within universities so that all graduates can develop professional capabilities to facilitate better outcomes with First Nations peoples and communities began as early as 2007 with the work of the Indigenous Higher Education and Advisory Council (IHEAC) (Attree, Gainsford, Sainty, Bajada, & Manton, 2024). Attree and colleagues note that First Nations scholars have been key to this call, highlighting the importance of an IGA to enhancing the competence of the Australian workforce by producing graduates who engage productively and work collaboratively for the advancement of Indigenous peoples and communities.

Such IGA initiatives have been undertaken a number of universities although, the rate of sectoral change has been slow. Six years after the Universities Australia 2011 concrete target for all universities to commit to Indigenous Graduate Attributes (IGAs), Frawley found that of 43 Australian universities reviewed, only 12 had included direct references to First Nations Australians or contained graduate attributes that implied an Indigenous dimension (Bodkin-Andrews, Page, & Trudgett, 2019).

In 2024 Atree and colleagues noted that as of a 2020 count by Universities Australia, Australian universities remain committed to embedding Indigenous content with 14 universities now having a specific IGA and many more including some form of cultural capability graduate attribute (Attree, Gainsford, Sainty, Bajada, & Manton, 2024). A number of assessments of these frameworks have been undertaken including at Western Sydney (Anning, 2010); UTS (Gainsford & Attree, 2025); Charles Sturt (Gainsford, Gerard, & Bailey, 2020), with evaluation instruments developed (Bodkin-Andrews, Page, & Trudgett, 2019).

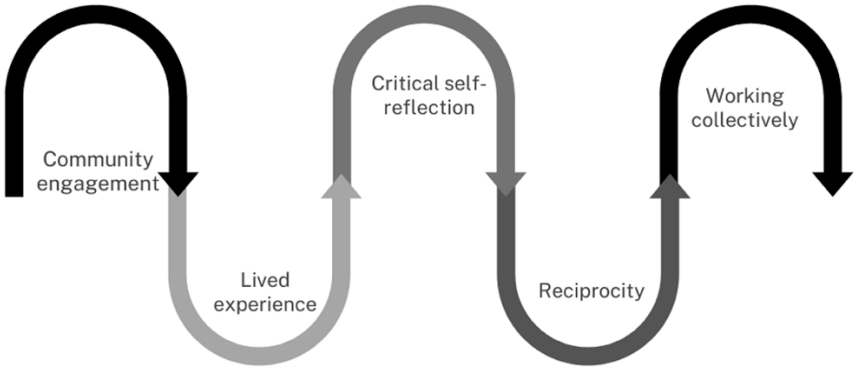
While there is limited literature at this point on the efficacy of inclusive curriculum in the context of outcomes for First Nations peoples, Bodkin-Andrews and colleagues have developed a critical Indigenous framework to evaluate the extent to which university subjects contribute to the realisation of IGAs. The framework includes measures of student knowledge, attitudes towards Indigenous issues, and applied Indigenous learning. The authors recommend careful monitoring and evaluation on the part of the universities to ensure efficacy and meaningfulness; adequate support for Indigenous staff; and a comprehensive approach involving strategic frameworks, high-level governance and visible support for Indigenous initiatives (Bodkin-Andrews, Page, & Trudgett, 2019).

One example of how this can be done in practice, is the UTS based Bunya Project which aimed to develop academic staff skills and capabilities to understand the principles and processes required to embed Indigenous perspectives into curriculum to ultimately influence systemic change in the health workforce (Bodkin-Andrews et al, 2019). The Project was conducted from 2018 to 2021, in collaboration with First Nations healthcare community organisations, to develop, trial and evaluate teaching resources in the allied health tertiary education context.

As described by Manton, Wiliams and Hayen, the Bunya Project “has been designed as a central strategy for the UTS Faculty of Health and UTS Graduate School of Health to support students achieve (IGA) and to delivery curriculum for students embarking on a career in allied health care” (Manton, Williams, & Hayen, 2023).

Manton and colleagues provide five key steps to what they call “preparing the soil” for the Bunya Project process, with community engagement a necessary component of development (see Figure 1).

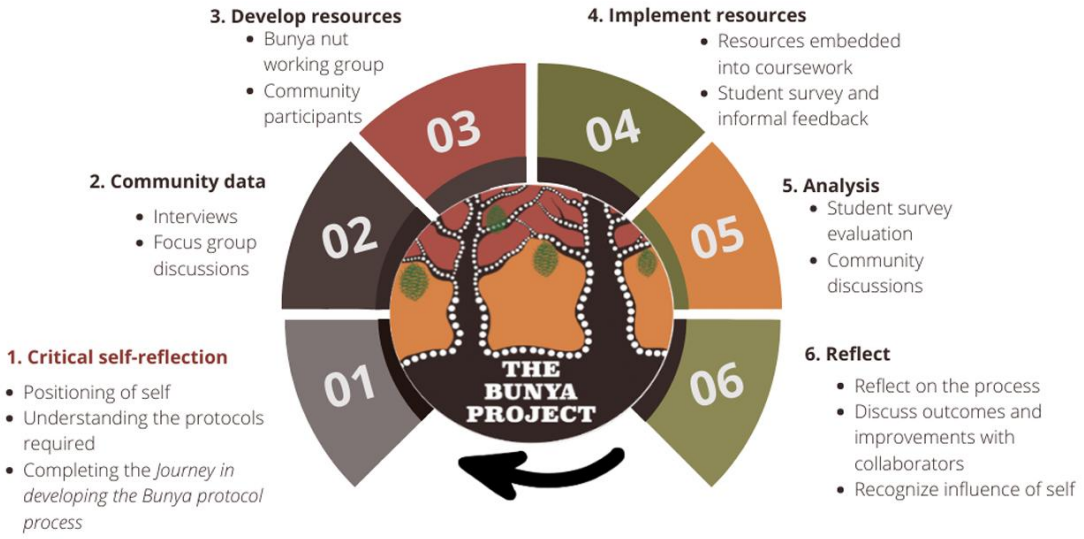
Figure 1: Preparing the soil



Source: Manton et al, 2023

Following this preparatory preparing the soil phase, the Project moves into the next stage of "planting the seed" - the Bunya Project protocol phases (see Figure 2).

Figure 2: Planting the seed



Source: Manton et al, 2023

The Bunya Project used pre-method and post-method surveying of staff and students to measure student attitudes, knowledge and learning experiences. The survey also measured teaching and learning resources and strategies (Manton, Williams, & Hayen, 2023). In 2024, Manton and colleagues concluded that by partnering with the Indigenous community-controlled sector, "universities can develop health curricula that involve Indigenous health care providers and users" and that "including Indigenous knowledges and community members in the teaching of health care practice creates potential for intergenerational change - not only among Indigenous peoples but among health care providers and educators – and for fulfilling human rights" (Manton, Williams, & Hayen, 2024, p. 97).

A further current research project *Incorporating Indigenous perspectives within ICT Curriculum across Australian Universities* funded by the Australian Council of Deans of Information, Computing and Technology, also emphasises the critical role that universities play in integrating Indigenous perspectives into higher education in areas of increasing community importance and career opportunity (Herbert, 2024).

Programs working to make curricula more culturally responsive, beyond a focus on First Nations knowledges, are infrequently seen. One such initiative working to embed cultural and racial diversity in curriculum delivery is the UTS Shopfront Community Coursework Program (Shopfront). It is a key initiative at the University of Technology Sydney that champions social justice and social change. It places UTS students at the heart of the community sector, allowing them to gain real-world experience by working on projects for non-profit organisations.

Since its inception in 1996, the program has facilitated over 1,698 projects and overseen more than 70,000 hours of student volunteering. While their remit is not specifically on anti-racism, students can work with groups who work in this field. For example, in the last two years, the Socially Responsive Design program (through Shopfront) have assisted in the creation of visual assets for two projects led by the UTS Multicultural Women's Network: the Say My Name campaign and the How I Celebrate Project. Both projects focused on celebrating cultural diversity and anti-racism to enhance feelings of cultural safety on campus and in other settings where they have been shared.

The drivers, potential and impact of broader comprehensive curriculum reform that addresses issues of diverse cultural perspectives, knowledges and understandings in tertiary education in Australia is an area which should be further investigated.

International

The international literature has considered approaches to curriculum, pedagogy, recruitment, retention, and progression, how to develop curriculum interventions that enable anti-racism within a context of professional autonomy, disciplinary inertia, and organisational resistance (Tate et at., 2016; Arday et al., 2020).

While noting that interpretations of decolonising differ markedly between Australia, Canada, the UK, US, as well as from formerly colonised countries in Africa and Asia (Hall R. A., 2023), higher education sector organisations have developed tools to support this work, including the UK based Advance HE which has developed an Anti-Racist Curriculum Project which stresses the importance of curricula that respond to the needs and perspectives of a broad student cohort.

The University of Aberdeen has been noted as a good practice example with their *Decolonising the Curriculum* initiative. This is part of the Aberdeen 2040 Strategy and our 'Inclusive' Strategic Theme, recognising that racism exists across the sector and that there are degree awarding gaps. Aberdeen aims to aim to decolonise their curriculum by identifying, challenging, and transforming pedagogical practices including class activities, course structure, assessment, terminology, and examples used in the delivery of education and agreed, as a University, to:

- Complete a review of curriculum, in Schools, in the context of decolonising the curriculum by the end of academic year 2023/24, and fully implement all changes by academic year 2025/26
- Include information on how any new course or programme will address the principle of decolonisation
- Work with students as active partners
- Review Reading Lists as an initial step

The university has also developed a suite of web resources, including a *Decolonising Toolkit*, to provide support for the work that is underway to decolonise the curriculum (University of Aberdeen , n.d.).

North American based studies (Brunsma, Brown, & Placier, 2012) have also reinforced the need for curriculum-based interventions, noting that many white students enter universities fortified by 'walls of whiteness' i.e. manifestations of racial privilege that shield white students from challenges to white supremacist assumptions about racial disparities and inequality. Those

assumptions are reinforced in historically white colleges and universities that are predominately staffed by white male faculty and primarily attended by middle- to upper-class white students.

Brunsma and colleagues (2012) have highlighted that while these institutions are undergoing demographic changes that marginally disrupt their embedded class and race privileges, institutional symbols and norms continue to act as a 'hidden curriculum' that reinforces the institution's historic ideology and demography. This inconsistency with many universities' stated missions of promoting critical thinking, diversity, and multiculturalism presents a critical challenge in disrupting these 'whitespaces' and making them more responsive to and representative of historically underserved and marginalised communities.

Internationally, there have also been advances in pivoting curricula to be more responsive to Indigenous knowledge methods. Winter and colleagues have benchmarked the extent to which UK based higher education programs followed characteristics of (de)colonised curricula (Winter, 2022) finding growing level of interest among students, the academy, and regulatory bodies. (See also Arday (2020); Gopal (2021); Hayes (2021); Morreira (2020)). For example, the University of British Columbia (UBC) has implemented the Indigenous Strategic Plan, which includes integrating Indigenous knowledge and perspectives into the curriculum (University of British Columbia, n.d.). They offer courses and programs that focus on Indigenous issues and support Indigenous students and faculty. More broadly in Canada, nearly 90 per cent of tertiary institutions are working to integrate Indigenous Knowledges and teaching methods (Universities Canada, 2023).

Meanwhile, in Aoteaora New Zealand there have been recent efforts to incorporate more knowledge on *te Tiriti o Waitangi* into university curricula, as well as incorporating more Indigenous knowledge systems (*mātauranga Māori*) into curricula and assessment. Both have been met with varying degrees of success and acclaim. For example, the University of Auckland has announced that from 2025 it will be compulsory for all undergraduates to complete a unit on the history of *te Tiriti o Waitangi* and indigenous concepts as part of their first-year studies (Brennan, University of Auckland defends compulsory Treaty of Waitangi unit, 2024). However, some scholars do not think enough is being done to give equal status to indigenous knowledge systems (Waitoki, Tan, & Hamley, 2024).

Limited evaluation has been undertaken into the effectiveness and impact of such initiatives. One Canadian study evaluated an Awareness Anti-Racism Training Program delivered at the University of Victoria (McKay, 2020) recommending that the university continue to offer anti-racism training, ensure safe learning spaces, increase opportunities for learning about microaggressions, increase training time, engage Faculty in the work and grow and fund anti-racism training at the institution.

It is also worth emphasising that efforts to decolonise curricula are not uncontested, particularly where higher education has attempted to implement national accreditation standards across the sector. In the UK for example, such work has been criticised by policymakers and lobby groups as being too closely linked with specific, political causes related to identity (Hall R. A., 2023). Politicians have undertaken regulatory attempts to limit this work through legislation *Higher Education (Freedom of Speech)* bill (UK) states that providers 'should not interfere with academic freedom by imposing, or seeking to impose, a political or ideological viewpoint upon the teaching, research or other activities of individual academics', including 'contested political ideologies … such as "'decolonising the curriculum'" (UK Department for Education, 2021), 38–39).

3.9 Student and staff activist campaigns

Internationally, there have been a range of student campaigns focused on racism and anti-colonialism in recent years which have been influential in Australian higher education. In South Africa, a student campaign known as #Rhodesmustfall in 2015, culminated in the removal of a statue of Cecil John Rhodes from a public area in the grounds of the University of Cape Town (Settler, 2019). Students at other campuses had been engaged in similar regional protests for several years previously, aimed at transformation of the institutional cultures of universities perceived to be white-normative and to facilitate access to higher education for Back students. The campaign extended into 2016 under the #Feesmustfall campaign and saw significant violence inflicted on students, particularly on non-metropolitan, largely Black university

campuses (Engh & Settler, 2016). At the University of Cape Town, the vice-chancellor's office building was renamed Azania House, and, at the University of Witwatersrand, the occupied building was named after anti-apartheid martyr Solomon Mahlangu, to global interest (Settler, 2019).

The impact of such campaigns can be seen in recent truth-telling activities in Australian universities, notably at the University of Melbourne (see also section 3.1). Waghorne (2024) discusses the issues and history of re-naming of buildings in Australian Universities in a chapter of the first *Dhoombak Goobgoowana* report noting the many names of university buildings that have been challenged across Australia in recent years, largely as a result of student activist campaigns. At the University of Sydney, activists challenged the naming of the Wentworth Building (Araluen, 2017). The Monash student union removed John Medley's name from its recreational library, which had been named in recognition of his donation of non-academic books (Lot's Wife Editors, 2017) with James Cook University renaming its Townsville campus *Bebegu Yumba*, or 'place of learning' in the Birri Gubba language (James Cook University, 2020). Griffith University has also experienced similar requests, following 2022 revelations of Sir Samuel Griffith's judicial role acquitting participants in reprisal raids against Indigenous peoples (Reynolds, 2022).

Rhodes Must Fall in Oxford (RMFO) developed subsequently in the UK, aiming to decolonise institutional structures and physical spaces in Oxford and challenge the structures of knowledge production that continue to mould a colonial mindset. The movement sought to address Oxford's colonial legacy on three levels:

> *1.Tackling the plague of colonial iconography (in the form of statues, plaques and paintings) that seeks to whitewash and distort history.*
>
> *2.Reforming the Euro-centric curriculum to remedy the highly selective narrative of traditional academia—which frames the West as sole producers of universal knowledge—by integrating subjugated and local epistemologies. This will create a more intellectually rigorous, complete academy.*
>
> *3.Addressing the underrepresentation and lack of welfare provision for Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) amongst Oxford's academic staff and students.*
>
> (Peters M. , 2018, p. 268).

Enslin and Hedge (2024) argue that redistribution, alongside recognition, is critical to deliberations and decisions about racial justice, given restitution is in most circumstances owed to countries and universities that have been and still are on the receiving end of colonial and neocolonial inequalities. The authors cite examples if a number of leading universities which are now engaged not only in initiatives to decolonise their curricula but also in wider efforts related to restorative justice. For example, the University of Glasgow commissioned a report on its benefits from slavery (Mullen & Newman, 2018) subsequently committing £20 million to reparative justice initiatives, which include scholarships, fellowships, research, and teaching about historical and modern slavery, a commitment to racial diversity among its staff and students, renaming its buildings and spaces, and a partnership with the University of the West Indies (Enslin & Hedge, 2024).

Harvard University has similarly acknowledged the role of slavery in its development as a leading global institution. The report - *Harvard and the Legacy of Slavery* (President and Fellows of Harvard College, 2022) - commits to a US$100 million investment in initiatives both monetary and non-monetary including engagement with and support for descendants' communities, partnerships with Black colleges and universities as well as non-profits and local educational institutions, visiting appointments, and developing knowledge and curricula about the university's links with slavery (Enslin & Hedge, 2024).

In the UK, there have also been movements away from recognising historical figures, including at University College London which removed the name of Francis Galton, the man who coined the phrase 'eugenics', from its lecture theatre and renamed its Pearson Building, Pearson Lecture Theatre and R.A. Fisher Centre for Computational Biology, because of the two men's leading roles in the eugenics movement (Waghorne, 2024). Waghorne (2024) notes that other approaches to universities for re-naming have been less successful. However, other student

initiatives in the UK have gained attention, in particular *Why Is My Curriculum White?* (Peters M. A., 2015), established at University College London in 2015, and now has groups based at a number of universities including Lancaster University, University of York and Bournmouth University (Peters M. , 2018). An Australasian chapter of Why Is My Curriculum White was also established by (former) Sydney University academic Dr Omid Tofighian[15].

[15] It should be noted that while these examples in this section are by no means a comprehensive list of global student-led campaigns against racism, however they are highlighted in this review because of particular their relevance to the Australian, western, colonial university context.

4. Current targeted responses to the distinct experiences of different cohorts

4.1 Australia

Significant progress that has been made by Australian universities in relation to First Nations students and staff over the past 15 years. This focus and progress suggests that prioritising specific cohorts across the higher education sector may assist in driving change.

While many universities had existing First Nations strategies prior to the launch of the Universities Australia (UA) Indigenous Strategy in 2017, the UA 2017-20 Strategy was the first sector-wide initiative that brought all member universities together to achieve common goals in advancing First Nations participation and success in higher education.

Under the first Strategy, First Nations enrolments grew steadily, Indigenous advancement strategies appeared more in central university policy documents, and there was growth in senior First Nations staff representation. However, Indigenous student completion rates still lag well behind non-Indigenous students, staff numbers are not commensurate with population ratios, and racism continues to undermine advancement.

The UA Indigenous Strategy 2022-25 shifted the focus from aspiration to implementation with actionable commitments outlined under five key themes.

- Student success
- Staff success
- University responsibility for Indigenous advancement
- Racism and cultural safety
- Recognising the value Indigenous people and knowledges bring to the university and embedding Indigenous value systems and knowledges into university structures.

The most recent annual report (2024) contained the following key findings from UA's Indigenous Strategy Annual Survey and Department of Education data:

- Data on student numbers and success showed considerable variation amongst institutions' Indigenous student cohorts. The five institutions with the greatest number of reported enrolments made up over half (55.7 per cent) of the sector's total enrolments.
- Two-thirds (24) of responding institutions had developed, or were developing, formal promotion pathways or career advancement mechanisms available for Indigenous academic, professional, and executive staff. Despite this, nearly all (32) of responding institutions reported challenges in meeting their academic staffing targets and roughly three-quarters (28) reported challenges relating to professional staffing targets.
- All institutions had at least one strategic document and reporting institutions had an average of four Indigenous-specific documents: workforce strategies were the most commonly reported documents and Indigenous-specific anti-racism statements were the least commonly reported.

  (Universities Australia, 2024).

While several universities now have positions of Indigenous Identified Deputy Vice-Chancellors and some have First Nations leadership management teams, what this data does not cover is how programs or initiatives have been developed and to what extent First Nations experiences, voices and knowledges are central.

It is also worth emphasising that responses that focus on decolonised teaching, curricula or IGAs currently exist within the context of an increasingly hostile international environment for First Nations students and staff.

Gatwiri et al (2024) make the point that the lack of decolonised teaching in the Australian tertiary education system that challenges the "normalised silence on colonialism" allows students to largely ignore the influence and impacts of the systems of colonialism. This leaves minoritised academic teachers to carry the burden of delivering decolonised content as well as face hostility from the student body and an undermining of their pedagogical efforts (Gatwiri, Anderson, & Townsend-Cross, 2024). Gatwiri et al quote a First Nations staff member; "The 'uncomfortable pedagogies' (critical theoretical and pedagogical approaches) that I employ in my teaching practice elicit student responses that are characterised by affront, denial, and defensiveness and manifest through discourses that invoke ideological justifications for social inequity. While these kinds of hostile reactions are to be expected in response to pedagogies that challenge hegemonic social structures… my body, my identity, and my presence elicits a particular type of hostility that attempts to impugn my authenticity and authority as both a scholar and as a First Nations person' (Gatwiri, Anderson, & Townsend-Cross, 2024, p. 148).

Gatwiri and colleagues also examine the impact of hostile teaching environments for staff and suggest the use of measurement tools such as Student Evaluations of Teaching (SETs) reports can be weaponised to police behaviour and career opportunities. They suggest that it is 'unsettling when every act of teaching can feel like an engagement in the 'culture wars' (Gatwiri, Anderson, & Townsend-Cross, 2024, p. 150). As explained by one First Nations staff member:

> *…articulations of these hostile classroom encounters have, at times, appeared in SET reports about my teaching, particularly claims based on the 'angry Aborigine' stereotype. Initially, upon reading evaluations such as this, I was personally destabilised and deeply concerned about the implications for my career progression. I experienced self-doubt and considered taking an approach to teaching where I would not divulge details about my identity to students to mitigate risks of similar evaluations in the future. Turning to the literature, I discovered that I was not alone, that other First Nations and minoritised educators had similar experiences*

(Gatwiri, Anderson, & Townsend-Cross, 2024, p. 148).

Without the strong and vocal support of university leadership, much of the decolonisation process in the sector is being left to First Nations peoples.

Baeza and colleagues provide a list of enablers for Indigenous HDR students based on the suite of literature they reviewed. These are:

- Support mechanisms for Indigenous students, in particular supervisory support teams;
- Facilitating environments, in particular Indigenous departments and units;
- Support from family and community, in particular through community engagement within the tertiary environment, to support the student giving back to their community through their research work;
- Incorporation of Indigenous knowledges and perspectives, including critical analysis of colonialism and active work towards transformation within the institution; and
- Individual characteristics and resilience traits including self-determination, internal motivation and persistence.

(Baeza Pena, Xing, Blue, Saward, & Anderson, 2024).

However, with the exception of programs and initiatives targeted at recruitment, retention and success of First Nations students as outlined above, Australian universities are generally at the early stages of developing evidence-based comprehensive targeted initiatives to address different cohorts of students and staff experiencing racism, antisemitism or Islamophobia.

One recent promising initiative is Monash University's Campus Cohesion research program – the first major research program in Australia to examine the discrimination experiences of Jewish,

Israeli, Muslim, Arab, and Palestinian students and staff concurrently – which was officially launched in November 2024.

4.2 International

Evaluation by Universities UK of sector wide initiatives to address racial harassment (Egbu, 2023) offers useful guidance for the Australian higher education sector in emerging good practice. This is not to suggest that clear impact measures have been widely adopted - while many universities had developed strategies for tackling racial harassment, a significant number were still in the process of developing these strategies and/or had not yet identified success measures.

Success measures and/or targets that were identified in university's strategies to tackle racial harassment fell broadly into three categories:

> 1. operational, referring to the delivery of certain activities, eg communications campaigns, training
>
> 2. attitudinal changes, eg increased confidence, raised awareness, staff being clear about behavioural expectations
>
> 3. statistical targets for staff and/or students, eg increasing diversity of staff recruited, closing degree awarding gaps, improving continuation and progression to employment for cohorts of racially minoritised students, improving staff and student survey responses.
>
> (Egbu, 2023, p. 19)

The review recommends that universities consider setting success measures regarding both staff and students which include items such as measuring ethnicity data in harassment reports (including disaggregated data), staff and student belonging levels, and recruitment-related indicators. Communicating these success measures and progress against them can also raise awareness of work to tackle racial harassment and demonstrate that progress is being made.

Incorporating lived experience of racial harassment into the development and improvement of prevention strategies was identified as critical. Universities reported a variety of ways in which this was being undertaken including through:

- offering training that is developed and led by those with lived experience of racial harassment
- reciprocal mentoring
- co-designing and delivering anti-racism campaigns that include staff and students with lived experience of racial harassment
- appointing student ambassadors
- making changes to governance structures to ensure staff with lived experience of racial harassment are involved in decision making.

A series of good practice case studies identified through the review are presented in a second report alongside the UUK review (Universities UK, 2023). Highlighted university initiatives include:

- University of Aberdeen which is taking a partnership focus with internal and external partners to develop a framework for an anti-racist university via its Anti-racism strategy 2022–25. As part of this framework Aberdeen has enhanced their online report and support tool; expanded EDI events and engagement including developing a Black History Month program; delivered an ongoing race literacy training program tailored to various staff cohorts; developed a systematic and collective approach to decolonising the curriculum (discussed previously in section 3.7); appointed race equality champions across schools and directors of professional services; and provided monetary recognition for the contribution of students to this work.
- University of Birmingham which has established a key partnership with the University of Amsterdam to collaborate and share expertise to enhance EDI and ensure community cohesion within the two institutions which share highly diverse, international and multicultural populations.

- Cardiff University which has developed a whole of institution approach to anti-racism with new team, the EDI Hub in the VC's office, which aims to strategically coordinate and embed equality, diversity, inclusion and anti-racism activity across the institution. Cardiff also has a dedicated senior compliance advisor for race, religion and belief who provides guidance across the institution and supports the university to effectively manage complex race-related issues and complaints.
- University of East London which has introduced staff anti-racism training as part of their Student-Ready University Staff Development Program which aims to support staff in implementing an anti-racist approach to teaching and learning.
- University of Exeter, based in Devon and Cornwall, which has historically had limited racial diversity, has developed joint data sharing protocols with colleagues in the police and county council's hate crime units to enable them to share incidents reported across the various organisations. Exeter also launched a dedicated fund for students to run anti-racism projects and joined the Cornwall Anti-racism Forum which brings together staff, students and local partners to collectively learn about experiences of BAME (Black and Minority Ethnic) people in Cornwall, discuss shared challenges and take forward collective actions.
- University of Leicester's *Together Against Harassment Initiative* is co-produced by staff and students, and aims to deliver a actions that foster transparency, trust, accountability, confidence, action and awareness to develop a culture of anti-racism. As part of the initiative, the university has developed a dedicated webpage for staff and students with essential information including case studies, processes, disclosure portal, training, available support and key contact information.
- Manchester Metropolitan University, in partnership with the students' union and as part of its Inclusive Learning Communities (ILC) project, recruits a team of BAME student ambassadors each year. The ambassadors provide consultation and feedback on key areas identified for development by communicating their opinions and experiences to staff across the university. The ambassadors are also involved in developing case studies which informed resources the university has produced to train staff, including training on microaggressions and the impact it has on students and a range of activities and events throughout the year that foster a sense of community and celebrate cultural diversity.
- Newcastle University has focused on their accommodation services ('ResLife'), providing peer-to-peer support from ResLife student assistants (RSAs), experienced students who have lived in the student accommodation and can draw upon their own experiences to offer peer-to-peer support. RSAs come from a diverse range of social and ethnic backgrounds, with around one third being international students. Newcastle also offers practical skills sessions on topics including handling difficult dialogues and situations, safety and security, and 'all about you' sessions. Students are signposted to information about how to report racial harassment. The team collaborates with key university services on content creation, themes and curriculum planning.
- The Open University's EDI plan includes objectives related to tackling racism and racial harassment, such as closing the degree awarding gap between Black students and their white peers and improving recruitment, progression and retention of Black students and staff. The university has also developed a free, sector-wide anti-racism course written by Black academics in partnership with Santander Universities - *Union Black: Britain's Black Cultures* and *Steps to Anti-Racism* which are available online. The university has also committed to the pilot of *100 Black Women Professors NOW*, a pioneering cross-institutional and interdisciplinary program aiming to make a step-change in the number of Black women attaining professorial and senior leadership roles in their institutions, and increasing the diversity of the academic pipeline.
- University of St Andrews launched an online Report and Support tool in 2020 which expanded with a new specific section on racism created in 2022 in response to feedback from the university's BAME staff and student network. The webpages include information on legal definitions of racial discrimination, harassment, hate crime and victimisation. As

well as information about racism, what support is available, how to report racism and how to support someone who is experiencing racism, including a listening guide

- Leeds Trinity University has taken a particular focus on the need for strong leadership to prevent burnout among BAME staff and students. The recently established Office for Institutional Equity plays a critical role in bringing the aims of anti-racist practice and intent together through a strategy for Equity, Social Justice and Belonging. This strategy requires action from leaders in middle and higher-level leadership roles to eliminate discriminatory processes and mitigate practice which contributes to awarding gaps. Leeds has also focused on anti-racist learning among members of their executive with senior leaders involved in the Nova Reid program of anti-racist learning, and meeting every month to discuss the progress they have made on the course.
- University of Westminster is taking a multi-faceted approach to tackling racism, with anti-racism enshrined in the university's values and strategies. Key initiatives include *Westminster Conversations* and the *Black History Year program.*
- University of Wolverhampton, with more than half of its students (55 per cent) from ethnic minorities are focused on an inclusive framework for curriculum design and delivery. Four overarching principles underpin their framework:

    1. Where am I in the curriculum? This is about designing and delivering courses informed by students' lived/living experiences and interests, thereby nurturing their sense of belonging, affirming and celebrating difference.
    2. Are we removing obstacles to student success and progression? This recognises the profound impact racial harassment can have on students' mental health, educational outcomes and progression and includes supporting students to become allies and challenge microaggressions.
    3. Are our students our co-creators? Making co-creation central to the philosophy of design and delivery on the university's programs means that students, irrespective of their race or ethnicity can influence curriculum.
    4. How are we developing our inclusive lens? This invites tutors to intentionally facilitate discussions about racism, privilege and what constitutes racial harassment. Students are also supported to challenge largely traditional, Eurocentric curricula.

    (Universities UK, 2023)

Universities UK has also developed guidance specifically on the prevalence of Islamophobia and anti-Muslim hatred in higher education to help raise awareness of this type of conduct and suggest practical actions that universities can take in response (Universities UK, 2021).

Canadian universities have also made continuing progress, with a particular emphasis on First Nations people, since the 2015 Truth and Reconciliation Commission report. In 2023, Universities Canada's members adopted their Commitments to Truth and Reconciliation which renewed the 2015 Principles on Indigenous Education. Universities Canada's 2022 survey on Indigenous education found that close to 90 per cent of Canadian tertiary institutions have or are in development for a strategic plan for advancing reconciliation. Nearly 90 per cent of law schools have or are in the process of updating curricula to require all law students to take a course on Indigenous Peoples and the law. Almost three quarters of Canadian institutions have programs that include an Indigenous specialisation or focus or are specifically designed for Indigenous students, and over half are offering community-based learning programs for Indigenous students in consultation with Elders (Universities Canada, 2023).

The survey also found that over 50 per cent of Canada's tertiary institutions have changed part of their governance structures or processes to incorporate Indigenous practices or decision-making processes (Universities Canada, 2023).

There have also been a range of responses in the US following significant attention to antisemitism and Islamophobia since the current conflict in the Middle East began. As discussed previously, Harvard University has faced particular scrutiny, with lawsuits also filed against Columbia University, UCLA and others. Meanwhile, federal investigations have

continued into allegations of both antisemitic and Islamophobic incidents at dozens of other US colleges and universities. Given the current circumstances American universities find themselves in in attempting to balance Executive Orders related to diversity, equity and inclusion initiatives, free speech and protection of students from antisemitism and Islamophobia, it is arguably too early to assess whether these initiatives will be successful. However, monitoring developments on US campuses will be important for Australian universities and the AHRC going forward.

4.3 Efficacy and evaluation

One major gap in knowing whether responses are successfully targeted to the experiences of cohorts of students and staff is a recognised measurement and evaluation framework at both institutional and national level to fully understand the impact of implemented responses. Any evaluation of responses aimed at distinct cohorts must step beyond quantitative data as the measurement tool based on, for example, retention rates, to including the voices of the student and staff cohorts in question. The approaches taken by UUK in relation to developing tools, guidelines and sharing good practice as canvassed in the section above, could some useful directions for development of Australian monitoring and evaluation frameworks.

As Ben et al note (2020, p. 205), “evidence as to what works in confronting, eradicating and ameliorating racism, or, complementarily, how to enable and affirm racial/ethnic equality, remains limited… relative to the amount of anti-racism work underway, few evaluations have discerned interventions’ causal effects, limiting our understanding of interventions’ effectiveness. Real-world field experiments with longitudinal bearings (Paluck & Green (2009); Paluck, Green, & Green (2018)) are especially well placed to answer questions about the extent and manners by which racism may be curbed, but remain particularly uncommon”.

Ben and colleagues (2020), in the absence of literature on evaluation, focus on effective approaches to tackling racism and interrelated phenomena like prejudice and racial/ethnic discrimination. By taking this focus, they examine the extent to which interventions produce measurable, positive changes, drawing particularly on recent meta-analyses, reviews, and experimental (field- and laboratory-based) studies.

The authors assess the most commonly used anti-racism approaches and their effectiveness in addressing racism which they group as: “(1) intergroup contact; (2) training and education; (3) communications and media campaigns; and (4) organisational development” (2020, p. 206). Without detailing every intervention that has proven effective in this review, it is worth noting that Ben and colleagues’ study highlights where practices have demonstrated effectiveness across a number of the above approaches, suggesting a robust basis on which interventions and their evaluation should be planned.

The authors suggest that interventions should:

- be carefully planned, mapped, and well developed, including their objectives, while involving a management group and various stakeholders (Donovan & Vlais (2006); Paradies et al (2009).
- use approaches that are theory-driven or based on solid theoretical foundations which have been considered more effective in curbing prejudice (Aboud et al (2012); Pettigrew and Tropp (2006).
- ensure evaluation research across interventions’ lifespan involving the use of formative research, preliminary testing of objectives and methods (Aboud et al (2012); Donovan & Vlais (2006).
- allocate sufficient resources for planning and implementation (Paradies et al (2009); Rankine (2014).
- use evaluations that consist of pre- and post- testing, randomisation, and delayed outcome measures (Paradies et al (2009); Pedersen et al (2011).
- receive strong support from organisational leaders and champions which is crucial for program effectiveness (Paradies et al (2009); Trenerry, Franklin, & Paradies (Trenerry, Franklin, & Paradies, 2012).

- consist of multiple and/or longer sessions (Aboud et al (2012); Kalinoski et al (2013.)2013; Paradies et al (2009); Pedersen et al (2011).
- emphasise invoking empathy (Dovidio et al (2017); Mazziotta et al (2011); Paluck & Green (2009); Pedersen et al (2011) and
- create greater impact through integrating initiatives and collaborating with other organisations involved in anti-racism work (Bezrukova, Jehn, & Spell (2012); Paradies et al (2009). For example through the use of multiple, multi-level (e.g. state authorities, organisations), reinforcing approaches, can render interventions more effective Paradies et al (2009) and see; Ferdinand, Paradies, & Kelaher (2017); Johnson, Antle, & Barbee, (2009); Weech-Maldonado et al (Weech-Maldonado, et al., 2018) for effective combinations of organisational development and training).

(Ben, Kelly, Paradies, & Solomos, 2020, pp. 209-10)

While significant gaps remain in assessing how well Australian universities are effectively preventing and responding to racism more broadly, there is general agreement that monitoring and evaluation frameworks are critical. Similarly, several State Government Anti-Racism Strategies discuss the need to develop a monitoring and evaluation framework to track the progress e.g. NSW Department of Education (2024) and the Victorian State Government (2024), however, these frameworks are yet to be developed. As such, developing evaluation and monitoring in this area must be a high priority for future research.

5. How can universities embed anti-racism into policy and practice?

In this section of the report, we examine the different anti-racism responses from universities, including their action plans and policies, their programs, projects, and campaigns, networks, student groups and employee resource groups, research undertaking from universities, and curriculum design. In taking such a broad sweep of the literature, we seek to cast the net as wide as possible to inform the Commission of the state of the sector.

Australia

5.1 First Nations Enabling Programs

The National Centre for Student Equity in Higher Education (NCSEHE – now the Australian Centre for Student Equity and Success: ACSES) published a 2015 report written by First Nations and other experts from Central Queensland University on research undertaken over a 12-month period exploring First Nations access courses, particularly in the context of regional, dual-sector universities, with a view to designing a best practice framework and implementation statement. In spite of its publication some eight years ago, the report confirms the finding that despite increased focus on First Nations education attainment reporting in recent decades, very little information is available on success, which remains the case today (Fredericks, Kinnear, Daniels, Croft Warcon, & Mann, 2015). The report listed the following policy and practice implications that remain salient in 2025:

- The profiling and promotion of the needs and learning styles of First Nations students in a way that will support students to affirm their Indigeneity while participating in tertiary education
- Creation of a conceptual framework to guide the development of First Nations access programs, especially for delivery by regional, dual-sector universities
- First Nations units operating within university systems require effective support to begin addressing systemic issues
- New data about First Nations access education that will support the effective allocation of money for support programs, aligning with government targets for participation and student outcomes. Policy implications include a whole of university approach cross cultural engagement, achieved through systemwide awareness and Bothways understanding and
- A strengths-based approach and Bothways philosophy are required as foundational support for First Nations enabling programs.

A 2017 study examining the impact of enabling programs on tertiary First Nations outcomes (Pitman, 2017) examined the general purpose and design of enabling programs, their relevance to First Nations participation, the scope and delivery of Indigenous enabling programs funded by the Australian Government and post-enabling success for First Nations students. It found that enabling programs have an important role and the proportion of First Nations students utilising such pathways is higher than any other equity cohort in Australian universities (Pitman, 2017, p. 245). It found these programs have a clear correlation with above-average student retention and contribute to the development of resilience and confidence for students that supports subsequent higher education study. Also noted was the need to move from increasing student enrolments to "a greater focus on cultural change and support for student success and retention" but also that further study is warranted (Pitman, 2017, p. 246).

The Australian Indigenous Psychology Education Project (AIPEP), supported by the Australian Psychological Society, the Australian Psychology Accreditation Council and the Australian Indigenous Psychologies Association and funded by the federal government, created *Guidelines for Increasing the Recruitment, Retention and Graduation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Psychology Students* in 2016 to provide evidence-based strategies to increase the number of First Nations students completing tertiary psychology programs. The Guidelines serve as a guide

on how to develop innovative, flexible and reflexive approaches that are based on respect and guided by and accountable to First Nations peoples (Dudgeon, et al., 2016).

Fredericks et al (2024) offer six key recommendations to tertiary institutions:

1. University leadership needs to ensure more cultural competency training opportunities for academic staff, professional staff, and students.
2. University academic staff should ensure their classrooms are strongly anti-racist and address any issues of racism within the classroom.
3. University leadership and Indigenous centre staff should work together to ensure strong scholarships are in place for Indigenous students.
4. University faculties and academics should work collaboratively with Indigenous centre/unit staff and Indigenous academics to ensure Indigenous perspectives are strongly embedded in course curricula.
5. University Indigenous centre/unit staff should continue to develop and strengthen strategies that build a sense of belonging and connection for Indigenous students within the university.
6. University leadership should ensure there are targets and initiatives in place to continue to grow the number of Indigenous academic staff within universities

(Fredericks B. , et al., 2024).

5.2 First Nations Student Centres and Units

For many, First Nations student centres can provide significant support: “If it wasn’t for the [Student Centre] I wouldn’t still be here, because they have been like a support and like a new family for me. When I’ve wanted to throw in the towel they’ve been there and they’ve – haven’t talked me out of it, but they’ve just been there to support and understand and basically calm me down I suppose” (Hollingsworth, Raciti, & Carter, 2020).

A study of Bond Indigenous Tutoring (BIT) at Bond University in 2019 reinforces the need for a whole of university approach to effectively support First Nations students (Lydster & Murray, 2019). BIT staff identified those correlating factors of other literature – that family responsibilities and dislocation from kinship networks are major factors to discontinuation, and that the secondary to tertiary transition and academic unpreparedness are major challenges for First Nations students. Interestingly the research nominated a definition of success as something more than academic marks, a point made by other experts in Indigenous education. Indigenous centres and units at universities were confirmed as key contributors to the success of students (Lydster & Murray, 2019).

Wirltu Yarlu, the Indigenous Education Unit at the University of Adelaide has reviewed the role student support services play in improving Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander student retention and completion. The newly developed Student Success Strategy encompasses a self-assessment tool designed to measure progress across several domains. Self-assessments are used to inform student specific support needs and enable staff to personalise interventions for each student (Hearn & Funnell, 2020).

Baeza Pena et al’s 2024 scoping review mentioned above, identified 17 papers published between 2017 and 2022 that relate to retention or completion rates of Indigenous higher degree by research (HDR) students. Papers identified are from Australia, New Zealand, United States and Canada and most have at least one Indigenous author. It found that what is required is prioritising various forms of assistance including culturally responsive supervision, dedicated Indigenous staffed spaces and a culturally secure environment that recognises and embraces Indigenous knowledge and perspectives.

Fredericks et al in their 2023 paper draw on findings from the NCSEHE funded project (above) which aimed to identify what work in effective strategies to support Indigenous students completions at four Group of Eight and one non-Group of Eight university. They found that one key success factor that supports Indigenous student completions is Indigenous centres/units as

key safe places to build a sense of connection and belonging for Indigenous students. The paper then discusses strategies that can be adopted by all universities to strengthen and improve Indigenous student completion rates.

It is clear that dedicated First Nations student centres, units and programs are effective in helping to build student confidence and a sense of belonging, which in turn are major contributing factors to retention and completion (Baeza Pena (2024); Frederick et al (2024)). Interviewees in Frederick and colleagues research highlighted that the presence of a First Nations centre/unit on campus was a key success factor for university completion with the phrase 'safe space' used by many interviewees – both students and staff. Many graduates spoke about the sense of connection, community, and belonging they experienced by engaging with the Indigenous centre/unit which was especially important for students still learning about their own cultural identities or who had little connection to their culture. The physical space and facilities provided by First Nations centres/units on campuses for students to study and socialise were also greatly valued - including where food was provided. (Fredericks B. , et al., 2024). However, as Hollingsworth and colleagues point out, not all First Nations students identify and not all access this type of support. They argue that all academic and administrative staff (Indigenous and non-Indigenous) require sustained education in the histories and knowledge of Aboriginality and the diversity of contemporary First Nations peoples to be able to respond in culturally safe ways (Hollingsworth, Raciti, & Carter, 2020).

It is also important to note that while equitable inclusion in higher education has long been considered a critical to addressing socioeconomic exclusion of First Nations people, existing measures of success in educational outcomes have frequently established with limited Indigenous control and have consistently fallen short in measuring what matters to Indigenous students and families. In a recent article, Hughes and colleagues (2025) argue that little research has been conducted on how First Nations students and their families in Australia define educational success, particularly within the urban context. The authors suggest that if education outcomes for First Nations students are to improve, policy needs to reflect the aspirations and values of these students and their families. The paper uses Indigenous Research Methodology to explore how First Nations students and their parents/carers define educational success, finding that while schooling success is typically indicated by narrow measures of attendance, academic achievement and Year 12 completion, definitions of educational success of the Indigenous participants in this research is far broader. This research is part of the Redefining Indigenous Success in Education (RISE) Project, a 5-year Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander education initiative delivered by the Aurora Education Foundation, funded by the Paul Ramsay Foundation and developed in partnership with the Centre for Social Research Methods at the Australian National University (ANU) (Hughes, Turnbull, Li, King, & Smith, 2025).

While this research does not specifically consider tertiary education, the premise is also pertinent to universities. A 2021 article exploring university data collection in the Northern Territory (Street, et al., 2021) notes that alternative measures of success are not necessarily captured in universities' data collections and does not necessarily correlate with the values held by First Nations people. The authors take a critical approach to quantitative data, concurring with Gillborn, Warmington, and Demack (2018) that "numbers are not neutral and should be interrogated for their role in promoting deficit analyses that serve white racial interests" (p.158).

Bond and colleagues, make a similar point, calling for reconsideration of "both the measures of and strategies for success in Indigenous higher education, within health and beyond, interrogating the ideological assumptions that inform them" (Bond, et al., 2020)

5.3 Student Organisations and Partnerships

Australian universities have many student clubs, associations and other groups who provide activities, support and services to students from racially marginalised communities. This approach is backed by research which indicates the value of moving toward inclusive, partnered learning communities in higher education (Mercer-Mapstone, et al., 2017).

An assessment carried out for this review found that of 43 Australian universities, all but six publicly list groups within their universities that support a range of specific groups (for example Muslim students, Indigenous students or Jewish students) or racially marginalised students more

generally (for example international students or People of Colour groups). For individual institutions, engaging with these already active students offers considerable potential to better understand the experiences and nature of racism on university campuses, and one which can reflect the nuances of very different university environments. Five universities have an Ethnocultural Collective or equivalent. Ethnocultural Collectives are generally student groups dedicated to students who identify as Black, Indigenous or as a Person of Colour (BIPOC). The UTS Ethnocultural Collective describes themselves as a space "to connect and organise together. It's a safe space for BIPOC students to forge friendships and be surrounded by a sense of community... We are working to ensure that BIPOC voices are at the forefront of campus activism and anti-racism efforts. We also offer a space for students to escape whiteness and the structures that often exclude them" (University of Technology Sydney Students' Association, n.d.).

Some Australian universities are already formalising partnership arrangements to help guide collaborative work with students on antiracism initiatives through agreements, (examples include the UTS Student Partnership Agreement 2022–2024; University of Wollongong Students as Partners Agreement; University of Newcastle Students as Partners Framework; Curtin University Students as Partners) with a range of institutions adopting similar agreements. This represents an existing mechanism through which students can formally be part of guiding antiracism priorities and programs.

An international example of such student-institution partnering is at the University of Edinburgh in Scotland. The University of Edinburgh has a Student Partnership Agreement that states how the Edinburgh University Students' Association and the University are working in partnership to enhance the student experience. Priorities under the Partnership agreement include student wellbeing and mental health (in which anti-racism is clearly relevant), transforming (including decolonising) the curriculum, and making intentional efforts to ensure all students are welcome, respected and nurtured (Institute for Academic Development, 2024). Student Partnership Agreements are generally reviewed annually and the priorities are agreed in consultation between students and staff.

Universities have generally welcomed recommendations in the Accord that the Australian Tertiary Education Commission (ATEC) monitor and track student access and success from equity groups (Universities Australia, 2023). The introduction of student success targets for equity groups, including First Nations people have also been supported, although suggestions have been made that these could be usefully expanded to set student success targets for other cultural minority groups, such as those from Pasifika and African backgrounds.

In addition, the appointment of a National Student Ombudsman (NSO) is seen as offering a useful avenue for students to report instances of racism in the sector (Universities Australia, 2024). The Ombudsman (or ATEC more broadly) could play a useful role in tracking the experience of racism and safety of students and staff, over time. While the literature has not yet begun to explore whether the NSO is providing culturally appropriate, trauma informed and accessible student safety and wellbeing support and complaint resolution in relation to intersectional gender-based violence, discrimination, racism, antisemitism and islamophobia (all of which are within its stated remit), this will be an important area for future research.

Western Sydney University has recommended that the Implementation Advisory Committee that advises the Minister on the Accord implementation should articulate an anti-racism monitoring role for the ATEC, including the collection and dissemination of good anti-racism practice within tertiary education settings (Western Sydney University, 2024).

5.4 Benchmarks for measuring sector performance and ongoing improvement

Little data is available to facilitate benchmarking in relation to sector performance in Australia. Large Australian datasets such as that collected by the Workplace Gender Equality Agency are still yet to provide sufficient information to allow sector benchmarking in relation to race and workforce experience. There is, nonetheless, recognition of the value of such data with recommendation six of the 2021 Review of the Workplace Gender Equality Act proposing

qualitative research “on the best way to collect more diversity data in addition to gender data to enable voluntary reporting, including on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander background, cultural and linguistic diversity, and disability”.

It is worth emphasising that while the literature suggests a range of initiatives which could be considered leading practice, these have largely not been evaluated in terms of impact. Developing evidence-based guidance for universities about good practice in preventing and responding to race discrimination will be an important next step in this project.

To date, 11 Australian universities have joined the Welcoming Universities network which has recently developed a benchmarking Standard (Leaney, 2024). The Welcoming Universities (WU) Standard was designed to provide a comprehensive framework to guide universities in creating welcoming, inclusive, and supportive campuses for all students and staff. It sets benchmarks and best practices across various aspects of university life, including admissions, curriculum, student support services, and community engagement (Leaney, 2024).

The Standard was launched in May 2024 and has four categories:

- Leadership.
- Social and cultural inclusion.
- Teaching, learning and research.
- Places and spaces.

Under each category are several criteria, followed by indicators outlining how these criteria can be met. The Standard establishes a framework for universities to:

- Benchmark their cultural diversity and inclusion policies and practices across the organisation;
- Identify where and how further efforts could be directed; and,
- Assess progress over time.

At the time of writing, no benchmarking information had yet been published on how effective the WU Standard has been in benchmarking the work of universities in ensuring equity, diversity and inclusion.

Limited data is available via Australian Government statistics on outcomes for cohorts of students including international students, First Nations students, those from low SES communities and students from non-English speaking backgrounds. Commonwealth higher education data sets can provide comparisons of award course completions; attrition, success and retention; and completion rates. However, this data does not allow for analysis around possible causation.

It should be noted here that there is growing focus in Australia and internationally on Indigenous evaluation and impact assessment processes. Such processes challenge and improve mainstream evaluation frameworks, centring First Nations’ self-determined priorities and worldviews, and frequently focus on sovereignty, cultural knowledge and relational accountability (Gertz (2022); Hemming (2020)). In essence, in an Indigenous framework, *what* is measured, and *how* it is measured, fundamentally shifts. Consideration of Indigenous evaluation methods as a way to enrich data on First Nations students and staff is a step towards further decolonisation of the sector.

5.5 International

In the UK, a similar project to Welcoming Universities has been developed: Universities of Sanctuary. As in the Australian experience, the initiative aims to develop a culture and a practice of welcome within institutions, the wider community, and across the Higher Education sector in the UK. The initiative also offers an accreditation program - The University of Sanctuary Award and from 2017, onward, approximately 40 UK universities are now accredited. As well as offering an opportunity for sector benchmarking, the program provides universities with resources and guidance on good practice.

In addition, the UK based organisation Advance HE, has developed a Race Equality Charter which aims to help higher education institutions in their work to identify and address the barriers facing Black, Asian and minority ethnic staff and students, while also providing a framework for action and improvement. Institutions can apply for a bronze or silver award, depending on their progress.

The Canadian tertiary sector responded to The Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada's Calls to Action report and the Calls to Justice report of the National Inquiry into Mission and Murdered Indigenous Women, Girls and 2SLGBTQQIA people through the development of Indigenous student plans.

Canada's University of Victoria launched its latest Indigenous Plan in 2023 after five years of work under the previous plan and faced with increasing Indigenous student enrolments and shifting enrolment hiring priorities for Indigenous staff. Achievements University of Victoria is building on including increasing Indigenous senior leadership, new programs in Indigenous languages proficiency and revitalisation, an interdisciplinary Indigenous Studies Major, expanding their Indigenous co-operative education programming and creating an Indigenous International Work Integrated Learning Exchange Program, and the creation of the world's first Joint Degree Program in Canadian Common Law and Indigenous Legal Orders (JD/JID) (University of Victoria BC, 2023).

Of note is the recognition that there were limitations in strategies for measuring implementation and impact in the University of Victoria's first Indigenous Plan. Baseline data has been collected and the University is developing tools and ways to track progress and better follow gradual achievements (University of Victoria BC, 2023).

Also in Canada, Rathi and Branch-Mueller in 2024 reviewed the strategic priorities of 12 academic library decolonisation and reconciliation attempts. They found that a number are making explicit efforts including commitments to collaborate and engage with Indigenous communities, focus on human resources and importantly, re-examining collection development, program and services, support for research and reviews of access and cataloguing (Rathi & Branch-Mueller, 2024).

A recent report looking at global equity initiatives in education for the Lumina Foundation & STAR Scholars[16] (Salmi, 2023) presents several instructive case studies that address important aspects of inequality linked to the historical, cultural, and epistemological foundations of modern higher education systems, which are essentially shaped by their colonial origin and the Eurocentric biases embedded in their programs. These include a Scottish example which presents an attempt to decolonise the curriculum in a systematic way; a Mexican case study documenting how a university designed in collaboration with Indigenous groups offers a welcoming environment that promotes local languages and culture; a New Zealand case study illustrating transformative efforts to better respect the distinctive culture of Māori students; and a study of the Roma Civil Society Organisation highlighting the importance of creating a favourable learning environment where students from marginalised cultures can feel welcome. The report represents a wide ranging exploration of innovative initiatives aimed at enhancing access and success in higher education for traditionally excluded and under-represented students.

The emerging trend of removing Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI) and race-literacy focused subjects in the US offers an example of the ways in which race literacy has and can be a foundational and established part of the academy, to the point that it has evoked reactionary and race-based backlash. While this trend may have been evident for more than a decade, there are clearly increasing concerns for DEI initiatives including those relating to racism in recent months (Aguinis, et al., 2025).

However, even prior to the election of the Trump administration, race related initiatives in universities had experienced backlash. A 2023 systemic review (Schotte, 2023) explored the impact of affirmative action policies in the US and India that had been adopted to address socio-economic inequalities between ethnically defined groups in employment and education noting that these had been controversially discussed in the literature and in public debate since the mid-1990s. Recent US policy announcements are likely to have global implications for the work of universities including in relation to research partnerships (Grove, 2025) with major global

[16] Lumina Foundation is a US based prominent philanthropic organisation focusing on higher education, while the STAR Scholars Network is a network of students who are first in their families to attend college.

organisations announcing that they have ended or scaled back their DEI efforts (Murray C. and Bohannon, 2025).

5.6 Impact

This is an area which requires considerably more research in terms of the efficacy and impact of various university approaches to addressing racism, from policy responses to prevention initiatives. This research gap is not isolated to the Australian context, but internationally as well.

One study currently underway across six states and territories (NSW, VIC, QLD, TAS, ACT, WA), and within seven universities (Australian National University, University of Technology Sydney, Charles Sturt University, Charles Darwin University, University of South Australia, Griffith University, Victoria University, Deakin University, University of Melbourne, Curtin University, University of Canberra, and Western Sydney University) is parallel randomised controlled trial (RCT) is being used to compare the impact of different types of training – online materials, peer-assisted sessions, role model talks, and career coaching – on the employability of Culturally and Linguistically Marginalised (CALM) students (in this case defined as domestic students who are not born in Australia and speak other languages). Results of the trial will be available in December 2025.

This exploration of initiatives which could support racially marginalised students builds on earlier research on graduate experiences of First Nations students (Plater, 2020). Plater and colleagues found that the achievements and capabilities of First Nations participants in their study were only valorised and rewarded if they adapted and conformed to workplace cultures that are dominated by white people whose belief systems are habituated to and protected and sustained by structural racism. When the graduates resisted inequitable assimilation and attempted to assert their intellectual and cultural capital, they ‘hit the white ceiling’, meaning that discourses of equal opportunity, meritocracy, neutrality and objectivity were used to rework and disguise race as a marker of inferiority and turn it into a race-less admonition of undesirable individual qualities.

Some recent research examining Australian responses to racism (Ben, et al., 2022a) (Elias, Mansouri, & Paradies, 2021) have examined the effectiveness of the most commonly used anti-racism approaches, namely: intergroup contact; training and education; communications and media campaigns; and organisational development. While this research was not specific to universities, it did examine many of the approaches frequently taken in higher educational settings and workplaces. In addition, it highlighted learnings from the evaluation of a collaborative programme by VicHealth and the University of Melbourne, the Localities Embracing and Accepting Diversity (LEAD), which applied a locality-based approach to anti-racism, piloting in the towns of Whittlesea and Shepparton. The project emphasised prevention as the key objective of anti-racism and demonstrated the effectiveness of interventions that are well planned, have a high-quality evidence base and involve well-coordinated partnership and collaboration (Ferdinand, Paradies, & Kelaher, 2017).

In the US, there is a range of literature exploring the efficacy of anti-racism measures. One evaluation conducted by Cooper et al examined psychology programs initiatives to better address anti-racism (Cooper, Radliff, & Weinberg, 2024). Strategies which were found to support trainers in adopting antiracist practices included:

- Supportive group meetings to share experiences and resources
- Small accountability groups with goal-directed tasks
- Sharing of resources via a public repository
- Didactic training and/or professional development opportunities related to social justice and antiracism
- Development of social justice and antiracism class activities/assignments shared via a public repository
- Faculty groups organized by region, e.g., programs in Southwest US, Northeast, etc.
- Faculty groups organized by content areas, e.g., assessment, intervention, consultation, etc.

- National mentorship program for Black students and other students of colour

Another recent study examined strategies to help US college students respond to racism, against a backdrop of significant and increasing racism on campus. US Department of Education (2021) figures indicate that more than 57 per cent of reported hate crimes on college campuses were racially motivated (Fernandez, et al., 2024). The empirical research aimed to quantify the benefits of exposure to Critical Race Theory (CRT) and the ways that colleges and universities can help students develop their ability to respond to racist encounters. It found that while embedding CRT into curricula did not have an independent or direct relationship with students' self-assessed ability to respond to racism, it did increase students' self-efficacy and wellbeing, which indirectly resulted in students being better prepared to respond to racism (Fernandez, et al., 2024). Such evaluation is infrequent, and American researchers continue to call for greater accountability and transparency measures to better measure the effectiveness of DEI and anti-racism activities on college campuses (Christopher, 2023).

6. Government prevention and response

There is currently little research available that explores the adequacy of legislative and regulatory mechanisms specifically in the higher education sector. This is an area for future research which could be usefully considered. There is, however, a considerable body of research that critiques Australian regulatory racism and anti-discrimination frameworks more generally and could be applicable to universities as employers and education providers. For example, Gelber and McNamara identify the gaps between racial vilification as it is legally defined and racial vilification as it is experienced (Gelber & McNamara, 2016). Blackham and Temple also discuss the limitations of Australian discrimination law in addressing intersectional discrimination, highlighting the disconnect between the legal framework and the lived experiences of those who experience discrimination (Blackham & Temple, 2020).

The key legislative and regulatory mechanisms that support universities in preventing and responding to racism are as follows:

Racial Discrimination Act 1975 (Cth)

This Act makes it unlawful to discriminate against people on the basis of race, colour, descent, or national or ethnic origin.

Universities must comply with this Act by ensuring their policies and practices do not discriminate and by providing avenues for complaints, grievances, and redress.

Australian Human Rights Commission Act 1986 (Cth)

This Act establishes the Australian Human Rights Commission (AHRC), which promotes and protects human rights in Australia. The AHRC conducts research, provides education, and investigates complaints about discrimination, including racism, within universities

Higher Education Standards Framework (Threshold Standards) 2021 (Cth)

These standards set out the requirements for higher education providers to be registered and maintain their registration.

The Tertiary Education and Quality and Standards Agency (TEQSA) is responsible for enforcing a set of minimum standards and enforcing a baseline for provider behaviour. However, TEQSA's powers of regulation are limited by its enabling legislation and the regulatory standards. The TEQSA Guidance Note on Equity and Diversity addresses the students from equity groups including Indigenous students and students from NESB, but it should be noted that Guidance Notes are not definitive or binding documents. The definitive instruments for regulatory purposes remain the TEQSA Act and the Higher Education Standards Framework which only require the creation of equivalent opportunities for academic success regardless of students' backgrounds, within a relevant policy framework. It further requires universities to give 'specific consideration to the recruitment, admission, participation and completion of First Nations peoples' meaning that this particular group must be specifically referred to in the policy and monitoring frameworks.

State and Territory anti-discrimination legislation:

Each State and Territory has enacted legislation[17] via which individuals can lodge complaints about discrimination, harassment and bullying, depending upon the circumstances of the complaint with the relevant agency in that state or territory. A number of jurisdictions have also introduced human rights charters e.g. Victoria's *Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006.*

***Fair Work Act 2009 (Cth)* (FW Act)**

The FW Act protects staff in universities against racial discrimination via:

1. Making it unlawful for an employer to take adverse action against an employee, former employee, or prospective employee because of their race. Adverse actions include dismissal, altering the employee's position to their detriment, or discriminating between employees

2. Providing for general protections that prohibit discrimination based on race, among other attributes such as sex, sexual orientation, age, and disability. These protections apply to all stages of employment, including hiring, terms and conditions of employment, and termination

3. Facilitating complaints and remedies: Employees who believe they have been discriminated against can lodge a complaint with the Fair Work Commission or the Fair Work Ombudsman. Remedies for proven cases of discrimination can include compensation, reinstatement, or other corrective actions

4. Promoting Equality: The FW Act encourages employers to promote equality and prevent discrimination through workplace policies and practices. This includes training and awareness programs to foster an inclusive and respectful work environment.

Workplace Health and Safety (WHS) Laws

These laws require employers, including universities, to provide a safe working environment, which should include protection from racial harassment and discrimination. While WHS legislation across Australia requires that any person conducting a business or undertaking (PCBU), has a duty under the model WHS laws to do all that they reasonably can to eliminate or minimise the risk of racism occurring in their workplace The extent of these obligations is outlined in the *Code of Practice: Managing Psychological Hazards at Work* released by Safe Work Australia.

There is no substantial data readily available on whether universities are successfully implementing measures or taking appropriate risk assessment and prevention activities to prevent and address racism to ensure the safety and well-being of staff and students. However, this is an area worthy of additional investigation.

In addition, there is a lack of clarity among employers and PCBUs generally about threshold requirements for actioning racism complaints under WHS legislation. If an employee complains about racism at work posing a risk to their health and safety WHS regulators can investigate, but this is currently an area that has not been explored in any detail in the literature, despite the fact that is of increasing interest in relation to parallel obligations in relation to sex discrimination (Smith B. S., 2019).

National Student Ombudsman (NSO)

Legislation establishing the NSO was passed under Part IIF of the *Ombudsman Act 1976 (Cth)*. The NSO can deal with complaints about higher education providers registered with the Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency (TEQSA), which does not include Vocational Education

[17] **Australian Capital Territory**: Discrimination Act 1991; **New South Wales**: Anti-Discrimination Act 1977; **Northern Territory**: Anti-Discrimination Act 1992; **Queensland**: Anti-Discrimination Act 1991;**South Australia**: Equal Opportunity Act 1984; **Tasmania**: Anti-Discrimination Act 1998; **Victoria**: Equal Opportunity Act 2010; **Western Australia**: Equal Opportunity Act 1984

and Training (VET) level providers. Complaints can be made including in relation to racism, antisemitism, Islamophobia and other forms of discrimination and the NSO services include:

- Complaint resolution through a variety of pathways including restorative engagement, alternative dispute resolution and formal investigations.
- Proactively addressing systemic issues, that are identified through our complaints data, various media reports, and stakeholder engagement.
- Undertaking education and outreach activities across the higher education sector.
- Sharing findings with higher education providers and regulators, recommending actions to improve their policies and practices.

National Higher Education Code to Prevent and Respond to Gender-based Violence.

In August 2025, the Commonwealth Parliament passed legislation to require Australian universities and university-operated student accommodation providers to legally not only to respond to violence, but also to take action to prevent violence before it occurs by creating safe and respectful environments.

The National Code follows the release of the *Action Plan Addressing Gender-Based Violence in Higher Education* in February 2024 which sets clear standards in leadership and governance, education and training.

The Code establishes a whole-of-organisation framework, requiring institutions to proactively prevent and respond to gender-based violence (GBV). It is designed to ensure that safety and trauma-informed support are not peripheral considerations but integral to governance, leadership, systems, processes and culture, and takes a strong intersectional and person centred approach, stressing the need to address vulnerable cohorts including racially marginalised groups.

The Code is intended to reduce the incidence of GBV in higher education and establishes a regulatory framework to monitor and enforce compliance. Compliance with the Code will be required by 1 January 2026, with annual reporting required by 30 June each year.

University-Specific Policies and Codes of Conduct

In line with TEQSA requirements, universities have a range of internal policies, procedures and codes of conduct that address discrimination and/or racism.

These policies frequently include procedures for reporting incidents, conducting investigations, and imposing sanctions on those found to have engaged in discriminatory behaviour, including but not exclusive to racism.

The efficacy of these internal policies is an area worthy of additional investigation in the next stage of this project, with an increasing number of universities beginning to publicly report on the number, nature and outcomes of complaints by various grounds.

National Anti-Racism Framework

This framework, developed by the AHRC, aims to provide a coordinated approach to addressing racism across various sectors, including education.

It is too early to specify how this Framework will be implemented, tracked and evaluated.

In general terms, anti-discrimination laws across Australian jurisdictions:

1. **Specify prohibited grounds of discrimination**: These laws make it unlawful to discriminate against individuals based on specific attributes such as race, sex, age, disability, sexual orientation, gender identity, and more.
2. **Specify areas of public life**: The laws apply to only to specific areas of public life, including employment, education, provision of goods and services, accommodation, and

access to public places. It is also worth noting there are a range of exceptions and defences to unlawful conduct available.

3. **Prohibit harassment and victimisation**: They also protect against harassment and victimisation related to the protected attributes.
4. **Provide for complaints processes and remedies**: Individuals who believe they have been discriminated against can lodge complaints with relevant state or territory anti-discrimination agencies. These agencies investigate complaints and can offer remedies such as compensation, apologies, or changes in policies.
5. **Positive Duties**: In some jurisdictions and laws, impose positive duties on employers and service providers to take proactive steps to prevent discrimination and promote equality.

As indicated above, there has been longstanding criticism of Australia's laws that are intended to prevent and respond to racism, which may be applied equally to processes and remedies offered within the university context. The Australian Government has the ability to suspend the *Racial Discrimination Act 1975* (Cth) – the instrument that enacts Australia's obligations under the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination - in the cases of 'special measures'. This occurred in 2007 when the Act was suspended under the Northern Territory Intervention legislation allowing for all measures that constituted the Intervention to be considered as special measures (Vivian & Schokman, 2009).

Key limitations (Gaze and Smith (2017); Gelber and McNamara (2016); (Thackrah (2008)) of the frameworks identified in the literature include:

- A failure to adequately address discrimination on a range of grounds (for example socio-economic status).
- Inadequate redress and coverage of discrimination experienced on the grounds of multiple protected attributes (i.e. intersectional discrimination).
- They are likely to be inadequate to achieve substantive equality because they largely are unable to tackle systemic practices (Arantes, 2019). This has begun to change in Australia with the recent introduction of the concept of positive duty provisions (in the *Sex Discrimination Act, 1984* (Cth)) but at the time of writing the efficacy of these provisions is yet to be assessed).
- The coexistence of federal, state, and territory laws can create confusion and complexity. Individuals must navigate multiple legal frameworks, which can sometimes have different requirements and exemptions.

Laws generally rely on individuals making complainants (again there has been some shift in this via recent amendments to in the *Sex Discrimination Act, 1984* (Cth) but at the time of writing the adequacy of these provisions is yet to be assessed).

- Many anti-discrimination laws include exemptions and exceptions that can limit their effectiveness. For example, religious organisations and small businesses are frequently exempt from certain provisions, which can leave some individuals without protection.
- There can be tensions between anti-discrimination protections and other rights, such as freedom of speech and religious freedom. Balancing these rights can be complex and contentious (Taylor A. , 2019).
- Anti-discrimination agencies often operate with limited resources, which can affect their ability to effectively investigate and resolve complaints (Andrews, 2016).
- The onus of proof is on the claimant under Australian anti-discrimination laws, however precedent exists in the Fair Work Act 2009 (Cth) where the shifting onus of proof is a major attraction for bringing work discrimination actions under that statute. Gaze and Smith (2017) have identified the mechanism of protective costs orders as a way to support more people to enforce their anti-discrimination rights.

In addition, research has highlighted the specific concerns of First Nations people in relation to the limitations of anti-discrimination laws (Allison, Schwartz, and Cunneen (2013); Allison F. (2023); Allison F. (2020).

Allison uses quantitative and qualitative data to examine the extent to which First Nations people use civil law remedies provided in an anti-discrimination law to challenge racial discrimination as a significant measure of how well such laws work for First Nations peoples. She concludes that statistical evidence supports that First Nations people rarely engage in formal legal remedies to respond to racial discrimination, and "in the one significant respect, the legislation is *not* working effectively for Indigenous communities" (Allison F. , 2013/14).

Allison, Schwartz and Cunneen reinforce this in their article on access to justice for First Nations communities in the Northern Territory (in the context of the Northern Territory Emergency Response – the NT Intervention). They found that levels of discrimination are under-reported and a lack of knowledge about rights and even more significantly, difficulties in even naming a racially discriminatory incident are major barriers to utilising the available legislative avenues (Allison, Schwartz, & Cunneen, 2013). Vivian and Schokman, writing two years into the Intervention, found that it had been "imposed with extraordinary haste, without consultation, in a top-down, non-discretionary manner that has had the effect of disempowering communities and may have caused lasting cultural, social and emotional harm" (Vivian & Schokman, 2009).

Dudgeon and colleagues also cite significant gaps in the implementation and effectiveness of Australia's *Racial Discrimination Act 1975* and other state and territory laws to prohibit racial discrimination. They found there is a need for better legal mechanisms, clearer definitions of racism, and stronger political will to combat racism effectively (Dudgeon, Bray, & Walker, 2023).

The authors cite racial discrimination in the justice system as an impediment to access to health justice, and that interpersonal and institutionalised racism is so endemic that "despite extensive ongoing experiences of racism in health services, few Indigenous people have sought legislative recourse to justice through the *Racial Discrimination Act* for fear of being victimised" (Dudgeon, Bray, & Walker, 2023).

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