



University of
Southern
Queensland

Placing **uni** in **community**

A Blueprint

Future directions in First Nations
education, research, and engagement at the
University of Southern Queensland 2022-2025

unisq.edu.au

An acknowledgement & introduction

The University of Southern Queensland respectfully acknowledges that we teach and learn on lands and waterways that have long been, and continue to be, places of knowledge exchange, sharing, wisdom, and philosophy. We pay respect to Elders past, present, and to those on their current journey to Eldership.

This Blueprint envisages a new chapter at UniSQ, albeit a young chapter, which humbly seeks to build on ancient practices of teaching and learning 'on Country'. It outlines our pledge and pursuit of stronger relationships and outcomes in First Nations education, research, and engagement at UniSQ. We at UniSQ pledge to improve educational outcomes for and with our First Nations students and staff, and seek to strengthen our research to deliver positive impacts for communities and their enterprises. We also commit to a community engagement agenda that places **uni** in **community**.

Professor Geraldine Mackenzie
Vice-Chancellor

Professor Tony Dreise
Pro Vice-Chancellor, FNER*

* First Nations Education and Research





About this Blueprint

The word 'Blueprint' means a plan to develop and do something.

Contents

This Blueprint provides a high-level plan to guide and shape future directions in First Nations education, research, and engagement at UniSQ. As a high-level strategic plan, the document presents broad brushstrokes in strategy, rather than providing overly detailed implementation. More detailed information about the implementation of the Blueprint will be outlined in complementary and subsequent strategies including UniSQ's:

- First Nations Workforce Strategy
- First Nations Education Plan
- First Nations Research Strategy
- Reconciliation Action Plan, which articulates the University's approach to community engagement.

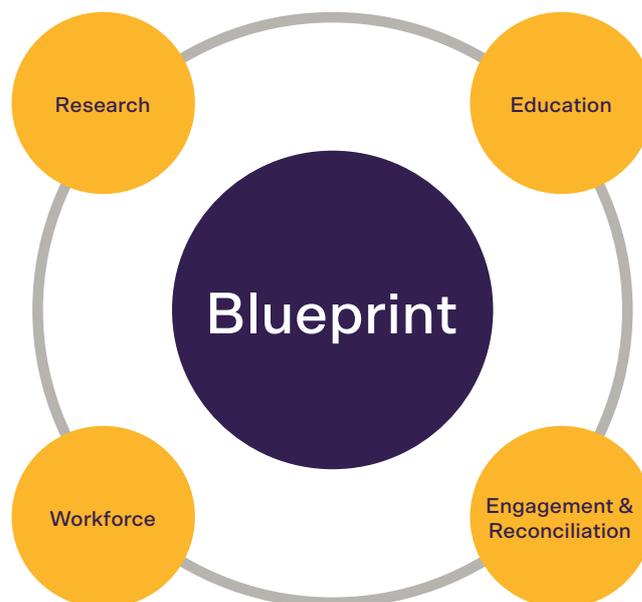
The Blueprint provides an umbrella document which drives, aligns, coordinates, and mutually reinforces a range of activities across the following key domains in First Nations business at UniSQ:

Aligning UniSQ's business to national commitments

This Blueprint has been designed to align with Universities Australia's (UA) Indigenous Strategy 2022-2025, which means that UniSQ will:

- work harder to support more Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students to complete degrees and move into positive post-study outcomes
- strengthen pathways for staff career advancement and representation at all levels of UniSQ
- systematically measure UniSQ's efforts to identify both successes and areas where more work is needed
- improve cultural safety and take action on racism against Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples by implementing Indigenous-specific anti-racism strategies
- recognise the value Indigenous peoples and knowledges bring to the university and embed Indigenous value systems and knowledges in teaching and research.

In addition to these UA goals, our work at UniSQ will be guided by the *Code of Ethics* produced by the Australian Institute for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies. This means our research will "recognise that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples have the right to control and maintain their culture and heritage, and that means benefiting from research undertaken by, with and about them". Put simply, First Nations research at UniSQ will be underpinned by cultural protocols, provide tangible benefit to First Nations, and be led or co-led by First Nations people.





Sherry Holzapfel

Outstanding Alumnus in
Health & Wellbeing 2021

Placing uni in community





This Blueprint: Why it's important

The University of Southern Queensland recognises that First Nations peoples are critically important to the very identity, spirit, and culture of our university and region. The front cover of this document has a picture of a Bunya tree. For thousands of years people from across the region have gathered around the Bunya to share food, exchange knowledge, and engage in ceremony.

The region of southern Queensland is one Australia's fastest growing, including the First Nations population. South-east Queensland is projected to become the largest Indigenous region in Australia by 2031. The UniSQ footprint is vast and diverse, taking in remote, regional, and urban settings. Southern Queensland is also a region where many postcodes are socially disadvantaged and economically marginalised, not only those places in geographically remote areas, but also the communities in peri-urban localities.

Successful completion of higher education has proven to be a 'gap closer' for First Nations peoples. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples with university degrees share similar positive rates of income and employment to their non-Indigenous peers.

UniSQ has both an ambition and obligation to provide access, equity, and excellence to all learners, including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students. The University values the power of 'place' and is committed to making higher education a safe, enjoyable, and rewarding place for all people and communities. In other words, through this Blueprint we have set ourselves a goal of placing uni in community.

Forces for change

Demographical

The University is located within one of the fastest growing peri-urban corridors in Australia, with Ipswich City (including Springfield) as the fastest growing city in Queensland. In terms of the Indigenous population, the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) has found that the 'Indigenous region' of Brisbane is the fastest growing of any in Australia. Within the next ten years, the ABS projects that Brisbane will be Australia's largest Indigenous region. By 2031, the ABS projects that the Indigenous population of Brisbane will grow to 131,078. Meanwhile the Indigenous region of Toowoomba-Roma is projected to experience a growth rate of approximately 2 per cent to 2031.

The First Nations population in south-east Queensland is roughly five times bigger than the Indigenous population in the Darling Downs and south-west. According to ABS Census 2016 data, there were over 13,000 First Nations people residing in the Darling Downs and south-west, comprising approximately 5 per cent of the region's population. The south-west includes several towns where Indigenous peoples hold significant shares of the towns' populations including Charleville, Cunnamulla, St. George, Dirranbandi, and Roma.

Cultural

Whilst the First Nations populations in UniSQ's western footprint are relatively small, they are culturally significant. The University is located on the lands of peoples who have gathered for exchange (including of knowledge and lore) for tens of thousands of years, including the Bunya festival where groups travelled vast distances to meet for ceremony and exchange. Some tribes would travel for three months to engage in the gathering. Southern Queensland is home to a number of First Nations including (but not limited to) Wakka Wakka, Kamilaroi, Euahlayi, Yuggera, Jarowair, Giabal, Kooma, and Mandandanji.

There is significant opportunity for UniSQ to continue its engagement with First Nations to improve curriculum, innovate pedagogy, and embrace knowledges through inter-cultural and educational exchange.

Several internal and external forces provided impetus for this Blueprint, including demographical, cultural, social, and educational forces.

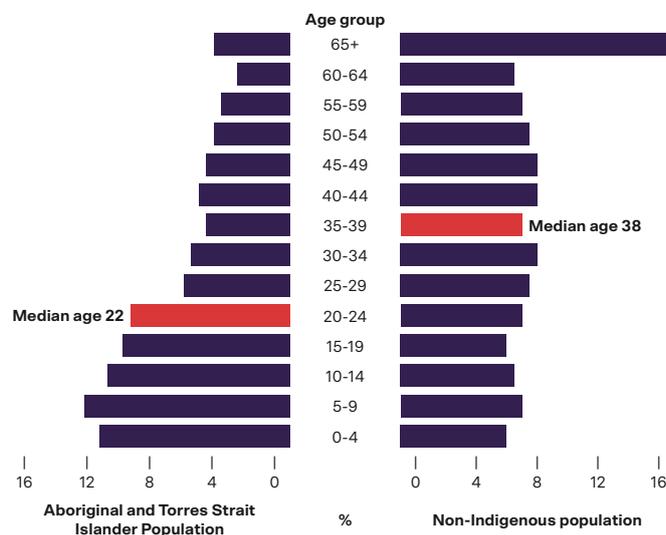
Social

The University is located in, or neighbours, places of considerable disadvantage. Communities to the west of Toowoomba generally experience higher rates of socio-economic disadvantage, while a number of peri-urban communities to the west and south-west of Brisbane are also marginalised economically and socially.

In his 2019 *Dropping off the Edge* report, Tony Vinson found that in southern Queensland places such as Ipswich, Charleville, Cunnamulla, Dirranbandi, and St. George were among the most disadvantaged in Queensland, as measured by socio-economic status (SES), child wellbeing, crime, health, disability, domestic violence, housing stress, internet access, unemployment and income, and education. Internal data at UniSQ also show that Indigenous students are more likely than their non-Indigenous peers to come from disadvantaged backgrounds.

Engagement with schools will remain vitally important for UniSQ in connecting with a population which is relatively young and growing fast. The 2016 Census (see next table) shows that the median age of Indigenous Queenslanders (22 years) is significantly younger than the whole of Queensland population (38 years).

Indigenous age profile in Queensland, 2016



Source: ABS 2002.0, Census of Population and Housing, 2016, Table I03

Educational

In spite of this young and fast growing population, university participation in the Darling Downs and south-west is relatively poor when compared to Indigenous Queensland as a whole. According to data produced (below) by Regional Development Australia Darling Downs, First Nations university participation in the Darling Downs and south-west is lower than the rate of Indigenous higher education participation in Queensland overall. Paradoxically, Indigenous participation rates in the schooling sector in Darling Downs and South-West are comparatively strong compared to the rest of Indigenous Queensland.

At both national and state levels, university study among First Nations peoples has grown strongly over the past decade, notwithstanding that it remains fundamentally inequitable. According to the 'Widening Tertiary Participation in Queensland 2021 Annual Review' by the Eight Universities consortium, "Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples' interest in undertaking university study has shown strong growth both nationally and in Queensland". (p.15) The same report shows "between 2012 and 2020 the proportion of applications from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples has doubled nationally. In Queensland the proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander applicants doubled between 2013 and 2020. Young and growing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander populations are driving some of this growth." (p.15)

Whilst the higher education picture across Queensland and Australia is improving, it is far from equitable. Indigenous participation across Australian universities is relatively low, both in terms of the proportion of Indigenous people studying or working at universities. The rate of university participation is well below First Nations share of the Australian population, and completion rates are far poorer than those of non-Indigenous students. Furthermore, First Nations' participation in higher degree awards is poor.

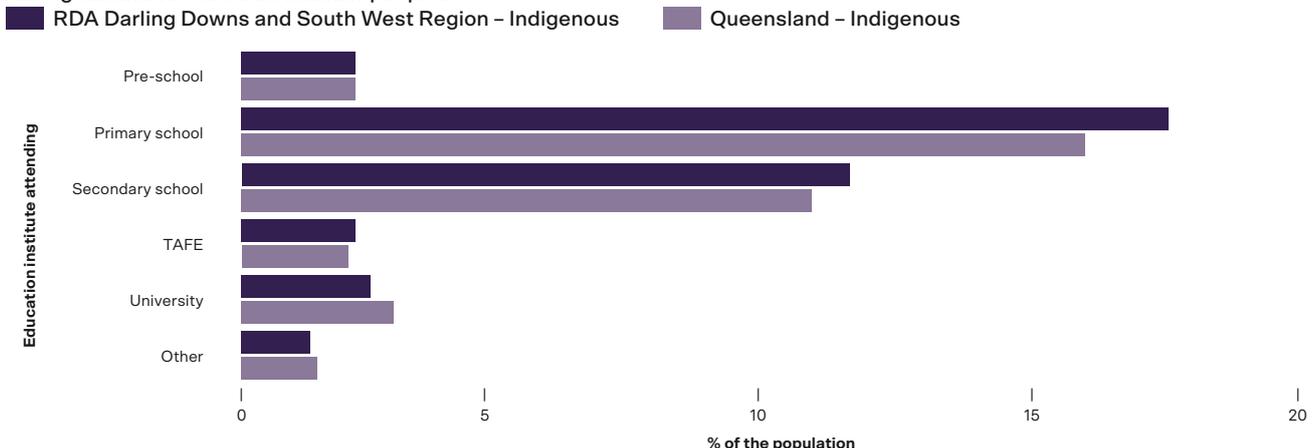
With regard to retention and success rates for Indigenous students, UniSQ is improving its performance in this space following disappointing outcomes in 2016 and 2017. In his *Data Insights Project* report, Benjamin Dexter from UniSQ reported that in 2016, "UniSQ was ranked 40/40 of all Universities with a 58.46% average success rate of Indigenous students across all courses in 2016, however was ranked 10/40 for Indigenous participation". According to UniSQ performance data, the average Indigenous retention rate between 2012 and 2018 at UniSQ was approximately 59 per cent compared with an average rate of 76 per cent for all students over the same period. With regard to success rates, Indigenous students recorded an average of about 58 per cent between 2012 and 2018, while all students recorded a success rate of approximately 71 per cent for the same period.

When compared to other universities within the Regional Universities Network, retention rates among First Nations students at UniSQ between 2015 and 2018 were approximately between 7 and 12 per centage points behind other universities in Queensland. Encouragingly, Indigenous retention and success rates at UniSQ have improved over more recent years, with internal UniSQ data indicating that the rates have returned to similar levels to those achieved around 2013, with retention sitting at over 61 per cent in 2019 and a success rate of over 63 per cent in 2020.

Bolstering Indigenous retention and success rates represents a major challenge for UniSQ over the coming years. In addition to lifting levels of success among First Nations students, the University also has considerable challenges and opportunities in front of it in the key areas of research, engagement and partnerships, workforce development, and curriculum and education. As earlier noted, UniSQ has developed several strategies (some recently expired and others current) to drive outcomes in Indigenous education and research. This Blueprint takes stock of existing and recent Indigenous strategies at UniSQ which remain important in moving forward in the First Nations space.

Education institution attending, 2016

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples



Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics, Census of Population and Housing, 2016 (Usual residence data) Compiled and presented in profile.id by .id (informed decisions).

Blueprint: Goals and Priorities

Set against the aforementioned national commitments, regional drivers, the University's Strategic Plan, and work to date at UniSQ, the Blueprint communicates the University's strategic directions in First Nations education, research, and engagement from 2022 to 2025.

The Blueprint articulates:

- Our Pledge
- Our People
- Our Partnerships
- Our Performance
- Our Places





Goals and Priorities

Our pledge

UniSQ will become renowned as a place of learning and intercultural exchange, truth-telling, and embracing 'Country'. We will empower Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples to take their rightful place and reach their full potential at UniSQ.

This will be delivered by:

- Ensuring First Nations voices are on UniSQ's peak decision-making bodies
- Convening an Indigenous staff consultative group
- Hosting First Nations student forums
- Taking the UniSQ RAP to the next level – "Stretch"
- Hosting orations, learning festivals, and seminars
- Embedding Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspectives, histories, cultures, and philosophies across the curriculum.

Our partnerships

UniSQ will become a focal point of continuous collaboration with First Nations communities, and with industry, government, and other research institutions by co-designing and co-producing research and learning that leads to positive change in the region.

This will be delivered by:

- Lifting engagement with communities across our footprint to support First Nations distinctive cultural, spiritual, physical, and economic relationships with their land and waters consistent with the 2020 Closing the Gap National Agreement
- Working with organisations that support Indigenous secondary school students such as the Artie Academy and the Queensland Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Foundation
- Strengthening our national and international networks in Indigenous research and teaching
- Developing a First Nations Engagement and Marketing Strategy
- Designing and implementing an Indigenous Procurement Policy to increase First Nations economic participation and procurement in the University supply chain, and
- Partnering with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community organisations in southern Queensland to meet the needs and aspirations of First Nations.

Our performance

Proactively use data to drive performance, improvement, and insights in Indigenous higher education. Elevate First Nations-led research, including by working in partnership with communities through co-design and co-production of research.

This will be delivered by:

- Developing a Performance Measurement Matrix for teaching and learning, research, and engagement with First Nations
- Implementing the UniSQ Cultural Capability Framework
- Tailoring an online teaching and learning model for First Nations external students
- Designing and delivering micro-credentials that support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander professionals and non-Indigenous people working in First Nations spaces
- Increasing the number of Indigenous students and staff at the University.

Our people

UniSQ will secure and nurture more First Nations talent, including by investing in talent pipelines. We will increase and retain the number of Indigenous peoples studying, working, teaching, visiting, researching, and collaborating at UniSQ.

This will be delivered by:

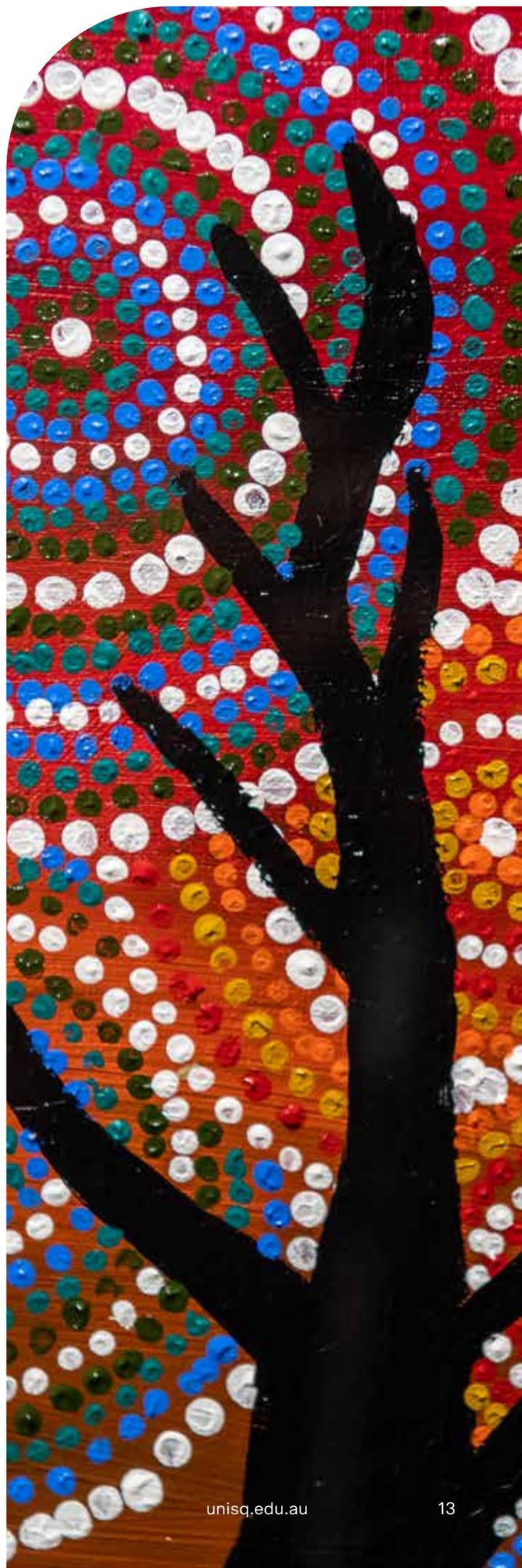
- Refreshing UniSQ's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Strategy
- Reconvening outreach programs such as 'Deadly Ways' in the living with COVID era
- Creating new pathways in partnership with TAFE
- Working with our First Nations alumni to create opportunities in academia
- Growing cultural capability across the University
- Adopting a 'grow your own' approach to talent acquisition, including by creating Research Associate positions that simultaneously support First Nations PhD candidates and provide them with employment opportunities.

Our places

Provide all students with a sense of place from First Nations perspectives. Celebrate First Nations languages, histories, peoples, and cultures on all of our campuses. Embrace 'Country' in delivering curriculum and pedagogical innovation.

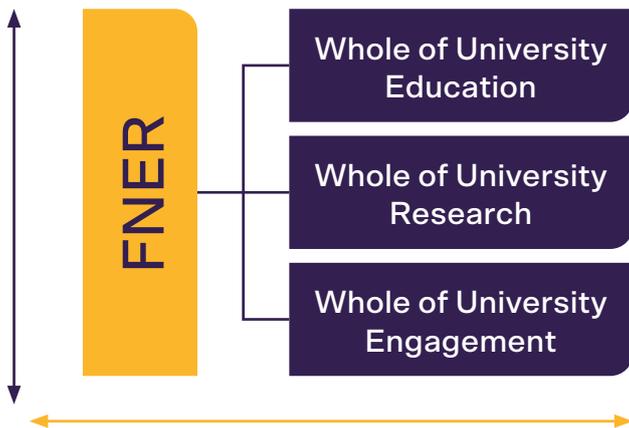
This will be delivered by:

- Constructing a new purpose-built First Nations teaching, learning, and community place attached to the Gumbi Gumbi Gardens
- Weaving Indigenous content into the University's Master Plans for all three campuses plus our online campus
- Showcasing First Nations languages on our campuses
- Investing in Indigenous artists to create major public art installations on our campuses
- Boosting First Nations participation at Regional University Centres
- Collaborating with international partners in First Nations education and research
- Creating culturally welcoming learning environments for our students
- Developing and delivering 'on Country' teaching and learning experiences
- Employing First Nations team teachers and guest lecturers
- Investing in capital that strengthens partnerships with First Nations communities
- Hosting learning festivals and other events to deepen relationships with First Nations peoples
- Providing nature-based learning environments on and off our campuses.



Delivering on the Blueprint: A backbone approach

Meeting the goals of this Blueprint will require a whole of university effort. Inspired by ‘collective impact’ conceptual models, the First Nations Education and Research portfolio will serve as a new ‘backbone’ entity that drives whole of university agendas in education, research, and engagement. This backbone approach will be spearheaded by the Pro Vice Chancellor First Nations Education and Research.



The role of the new portfolio subsumes the current functions of CISER – principally in the areas of teaching Indigenous education courses and providing culturally customised learner support - as well as adopts the following functions to drive whole of university efforts in Indigenous research, education, and engagement:

- Create and maintain a common agenda in the First Nations space
- Convene platforms for communication, collaboration, and mutually reinforcing activities
- Catalyse new initiatives
- Collect, analyse, and report on performance data
- Mobilise and align both public and private funding to support goals.

To deliver on these backbone functions, a new structure will take shape, comprising three streams:

1. **College for First Nations** led by a Professor (Head of College) to design and deliver pathways and cultural studies programs for First Nations learners (including learner support, curriculum design, online learning, and pedagogical strategy), working closely with faculties through collaboration agreements
2. **First Nations Research Alliance** led by a Director (First Nations Research) to spearhead a research agenda across the University and in partnership with government, industry, communities, and other research institutions
3. **Murri Engagement Team** led by a Team Leader to design, coordinate, and drive community engagement and marketing measures across the south-west, Darling Downs, and West Moreton regions, as well as online to national markets.

What and where next?

As stated at the top of the Blueprint, this paper serves as an ‘umbrella’ document, aimed at providing a backbone and cogency and synergy between several important plans and strategies (both Indigenous-specific and generic) at UniSQ.

The Blueprint is aligned to the University’s overarching Strategic Plan, especially in seeking to advance the macro goal of empowering First Nations peoples at UniSQ. This document provides the broad brushstrokes for our future co-design and work in First Nations education, engagement, and research. Finer brushstrokes and details about implementation, timeframes, and milestones will be outlined in the following key planning and implementation strategies:

- the UniSQ Strategic Plan 2021-2025
- the University’s integrated planning framework
- Campus Master Plans
- the next iteration of an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples’ Education Strategy
- the next iteration of an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Workforce Strategy
- a refresh of an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Research Strategy
- the UniSQ Reconciliation Action Plan.

Four Working Groups will be formed in 2022 to drive reform and improvements in First Nations education, research, and workforce outcomes, along with UniSQ’s next Reconciliation Action Plan (RAP).

UniSQ Strategic Plan

First Nations Blueprint

Integrated Planning Framework

First Nations
Education Strategy
Working Group

First Nations
Workforce Strategy
Working Group

First Nations
Research Strategy
Working Group

Campus
Master Plans

UniSQ RAP
Working Group

Where to go for more info

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 **unisq.edu.au**



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