

Core business: Understanding the institutional needs of Indigenous Australian doctoral students

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Indigenous Australians represent 2.2% of the working age population, yet account for only 1.4% of all university enrolments. In relation to higher degree research (HDR) students, Indigenous Australians accounted for 1.1% of enrolments, but only 0.8% of all HDR completions (Behrendt et al., 2012). These disparities become more visible at the doctoral level. This significant under-representation highlights a need for institutional strategic investment to support talented Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to pursue and succeed in research degrees and subsequent research careers. High quality supervision is crucial to the success of all higher degree research students (Zuber-Skerritt, 1987, Green 2005). The need for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander postgraduate and doctoral students to have high quality supervision, that is also culturally appropriate and safe, is heightened given the current educational inequities (Trudgett 2011). Through our Australian Research Council funded qualitative research project we have examined the experiences of Indigenous Australians who have successfully completed a doctorate, as well as their supervisors. As a result of this research, we expect to develop a model of best-practice for the supervision of Indigenous Australian doctoral students. The paper will discuss findings from our research, including the importance of the relationship between student and supervisor, the role of the university in contributing to the student's success, and other mechanisms crucial to the success of Indigenous Australian doctoral students.