University of Southern Queensland

First Nations Education Strategy

2024 - 2028
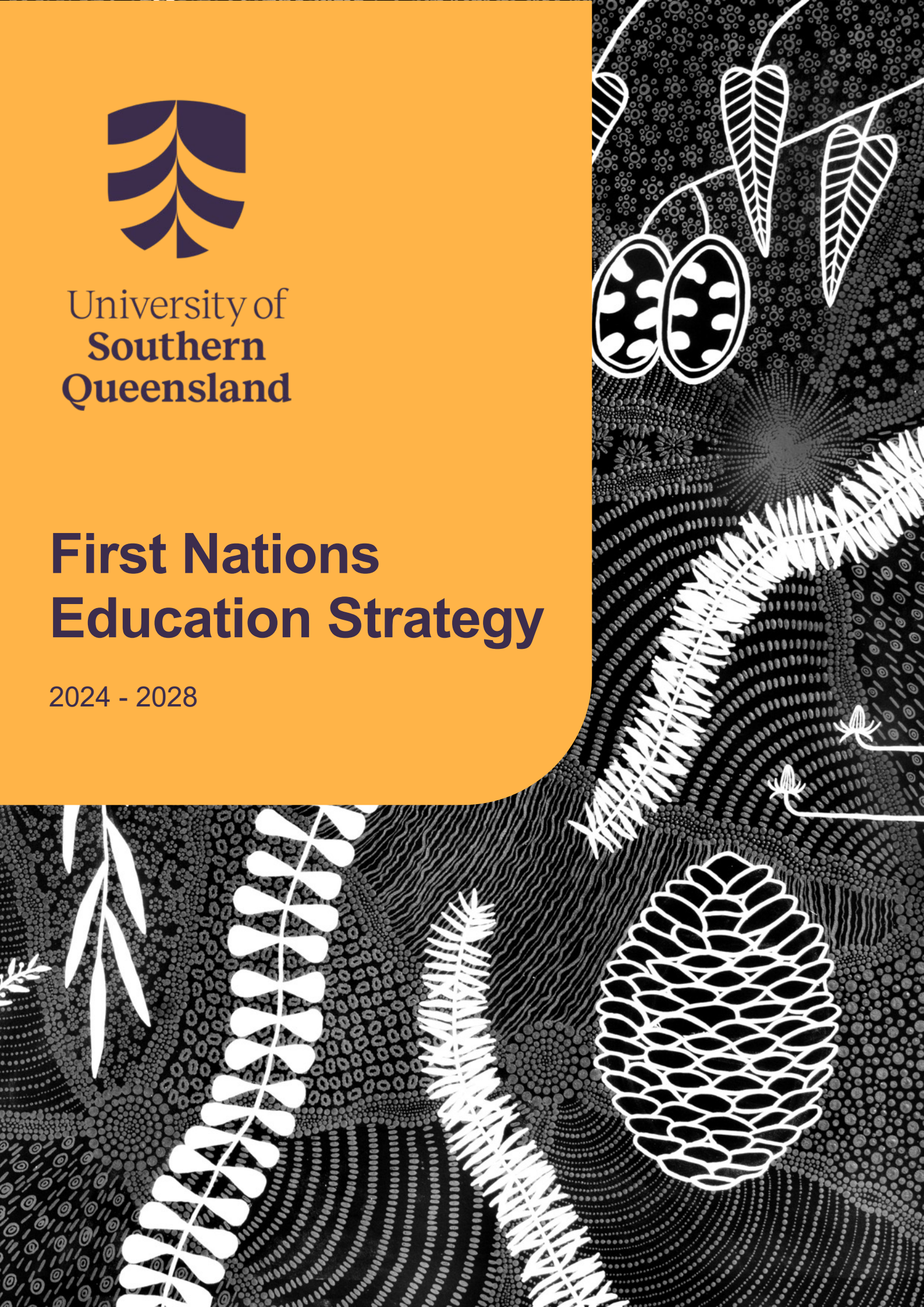
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Introduction

Foreword

The University of Southern Queensland (UniSQ) acknowledges and pays respects to First Nations Elders both past and present, across all the lands upon which UniSQ is located.

This document uses First Nations as a unified term. UniSQ observes where known, non-First Nations peoples should use the language name identifiers provided by First Nations people, e.g., Giabal, Jarowair peoples, Jagera, Yuggera and Ugarapul peoples; Kambuwal peoples; Bidjara people of Charleville, the Yamatji peoples of Geraldton, or Gadigal peoples of the Eora nation.

In reading the Strategy, it is noted that the Strategy recognises the term – Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education is inclusive of, but not limited to:

- The education of First Nations peoples at the University of Southern Queensland through pathways, undergraduate and postgraduate programs.
- The education provided around First Nations peoples, histories, cultures, and societies for all at the university.
- Learning and teaching that draws on First Nations knowledge systems for culturally safe engagements with First Nations peoples and communities.
- Engagement with First Nations' Traditional Owners, Elders, community leaders and members, and students and staff that promotes and nurtures Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander education, self-determination, and sovereignty.

Acknowledgement of Country

The University of Southern Queensland acknowledge and honour the Giabal and Jarowair peoples of Toowoomba; the Jagera, Yuggera and Ugarapul peoples of Springfield and Ipswich; the Turrbal people of the Brisbane region, Kambuwal peoples of Stanthorpe, the Bidjara people of Charleville the Gadigal people of the Eora Nation, Sydney, and the Yamatji peoples of Geraldton as the Traditional Owners of the lands and waterways where the University of Southern Queensland campuses are located. Further, we acknowledge the cultural diversity of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and pay respect to Elders past and present. We celebrate the continuous living cultures of First Australians and acknowledge the significant ongoing contributions of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in Australian society. The University respects and acknowledges Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, staff, Elders, and visitors who come from our many Nations across Australia.

Terminology and Definitions

In developing the UniSQ First Nations Education Strategy, the university has sought to use culturally safe terminology acceptable to First Nations communities. Please refer to the UniSQ Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Cultural Protocols.

First Nations:

Is a term which commonly refers to Indigenous peoples and has a long history of being used in Canada. In Australia, First Nations peoples are comprised of two geographically and culturally diverse groups including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. Both groups
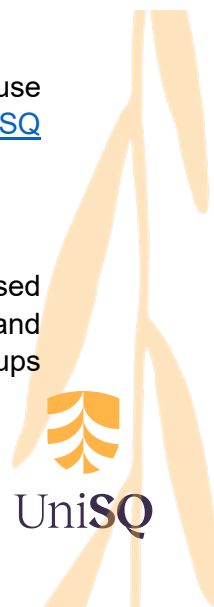
are the original inhabitants of Australia and the term 'First Nations' acknowledges and respects the unique cultural, historical, and sovereign status of these Indigenous communities.

First Nations Knowledges:

Refers collectively to the diverse and comprehensive (systems of) understanding, and ways of knowing, being and doing that are informed by the wisdom, practices, and teachings of First Nations peoples. This knowledge is rooted in the experiences, traditions, oral histories, and relationships of the First Nations peoples with Country, and the distinct cultural practices, spiritual beliefs, languages, stories, and ways of understanding the world that have been passed down through generations.

Cultural Safety:

Refers to an approach that recognises and respects the cultural identity, values and perspectives of First Nations individuals and communities. It involves creating an environment free from discrimination and lateral violence where individuals feel safe, respected, and understood in their cultural context including but not limited to ethnicity, sexuality, gender, and spiritual affiliation. Cultural safety goes beyond cultural competence, by challenging power dynamics and privilege, and promoting self-reflection among all individuals.

Kinship:

The term Kinship refers to the First Nations way of being and identity. Kinship is a way of defining relationships to Country (land, waterways, and sky), and the community groups, to which a First Nations person may belong.

Mini Modules:

Is a process of earning and recognising short term specialised credentials or certifications that focus on acquiring specific skills, knowledge, or competencies in a particular area of study. In the context of the UniSQ First Nations Education Strategy, mini modules may involve the development and recognition of short, targeted learning modules and courses designed to enhance skills and understanding related to First Nations traditional knowledges, cultural safety, or other relevant topics. Mini modules provide a flexible and accessible way to acknowledge and build expertise in specific areas within the broader landscape of First Nations education for both students and staff.

Opening Statement

The University of Southern Queensland (UniSQ) First Nations Education Strategy reflects our steadfast commitment to fostering inclusive learning environments that honour and celebrate the rich diversity, wisdoms, and cultures of First Nations peoples.

Our strategy is aligned to UniSQ's foundational values of respect, integrity, and excellence, which serve as cornerstones for our commitment to educational empowerment and cultural safety for all First Nations communities. This alignment ensures that our journey is not only transformative, but also deeply embedded in the principles that define our university. By integrating First Nations knowledges, perspectives, and aspirations into the fabric of our educational practices, we commit to fostering an environment where these values are honoured and advance First Nations educational goals.

Through collaborative governance structures, such as the Indigenous Student Success Program Committee and the College for First Nations, we pledge to uphold accountability, transparency, and meaningful engagement with First Nations communities. Together, we will work tirelessly to achieve the objectives outlined in this strategy, with a focus on cultural safety, First Nations learning and teaching, educational pathways, excellence and leadership, and respectful relationships.

As we embark on this journey, we invite all stakeholders to join us in our commitment to advancing First Nations education, building bridges of understanding, and fostering a future where every individual is valued, respected, and empowered to succeed. Together, we strive to create a more inclusive and equitable landscape for all through the power of education.

Professor Odette Best

Pro-Vice Chancellor

First Nations Strategy

Professor Karen Nelson

Provost

University of Southern Queensland

It is our aspiration that UniSQ will serve as a model for other institutions, particularly within the rural and regional Australian education context.

Our Commitment to First Nations Education Excellence

Vision

UniSQ's vision is to stand as a beacon of excellence in First Nations education, setting a standard for universities nationwide. Central to our vision is the cultivation; of deep respect for First Nations land, water, and sky Countries, of knowledge systems and peoples, to foster a sense of engagement and belonging for all within our educational community.

In genuine partnership with First Nations peoples and communities, UniSQ is committed to addressing the educational needs of all its stakeholders. By prioritising collaboration and mutual understanding, we aim to create pathways that support First Nations peoples self-determination and provide meaningful opportunities for professional advancement and social empowerment.

It is our aspiration that UniSQ will serve as a model for other institutions, particularly within the rural and regional Australian education context, inspiring a collective commitment to equity, inclusion, respect, and cultural safety in education.

UniSQ Strategic Alignment

The UniSQ First Nations Education Strategy 2024–2028 is aligned with the following UniSQ documents:

- UniSQ First Nations Blueprint 2022-2025.
- UniSQ First Nations Strategic Workforce Framework 2024–2025
- UniSQ First Nations Research Strategy 2024–2028
- UniSQ First Nations Cultural Protocols
- UniSQ Strategic Plan 2024–2025
- UniSQ Education Plan 2022–2025
- UniSQ Diversity and Inclusion Framework (Not dated)
- UniSQ Graduate Attributes Policy 2023–2028

External Strategic Alignment

The UniSQ First Nations Education Strategy 2024–2028 also aligns with external education sector and government plans, strategies, and guidance, including:

- Universities Australia Indigenous Strategy 2022–2025.
- Australian Universities Accord, Final Report 2024.
- Indigenous Student Assistance Grants Guidelines 2017 and Indigenous Student Success Program (ISSP) Handbook 2020
- National Indigenous Agreement Agency: Away From Base Program (No date as it is a program)
- National Agreement on Closing the Gap, 2020.

Foundational First Nations Practice Alignment

The UniSQ Education Strategy further aligns with foundational First Nations practices that speak to Country, culture, and connection. In turn, these foundational practices align to the University values of respect, integrity, and excellence.

Country

Country is a generic term used by First Nations peoples to explain the physical, social, material, and spiritual relationship to tracts of land, waters and sky defined through kinship. The University acknowledges that a touchstone of this practice of connecting to Country/ies is respect. Country is a living entity and our presence on First Nations lands, waters and sky dictates certain responsibilities that have implications for learning and teaching.

> **The foundational practice of Country is an ancient practice that embodies the value of excellence used to centre this strategy.**

Culture

First Nations peoples have diverse cultures, traditions, and practices. This diversity is reflected by First Nations peoples who engage with the University as staff, students, Traditional Owners across our footprint, Elders, and other members of First Nations communities. The University acknowledges that a touchstone of this practice is the principle of reciprocity. Through the practice of reciprocity, the University is enriched and strengthened by creating space for First Nations cultures to be welcomed and respected, celebrated and valued.

> **The foundational practice of Culture is an ancient practice that embodies the value of respect used to centre this Strategy.**

The diverse cultures of First Nations peoples include ancient practices that both embody and promote the values of respect and reciprocity.

Connection

First Nation peoples have a lived connection to Country (or multiple Countries) through systems of kinship. These systems inform connections to other First Nations peoples and provide the appropriate guidance for how to live and maintain connections. The University acknowledges that a touchstone of this tradition is relationships. Respectful and sustained connections with First Nations Countries, knowledges and peoples makes for richer practices in learning and teaching.

> **The foundational practice of Connection is an ancient practice that embodies the value of integrity used to centre this Strategy.**

Connection to kin, ancestors and Country is a value deeply embedded in First Nations culture that requires we maintain integrity in our interactions and practices.

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Guiding Principles

The UniSQ First Nations Education Strategy is founded on a whole-university approach, with a number of guiding principles:

- It is recognised that First Nations peoples are the oldest continuous living cultures in the world. First Nations peoples are the First Peoples of Australia.
- It is recognised that First Nations peoples are two distinct groups within Australia. This strategy recognises both Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples as the First Nations peoples of Australia.
- First Nations knowledges are recognised for the significant contributions they bring to all other bodies of knowledge. The scholarship and expertise that First Nations peoples bring to the University is valued and acknowledged. The capacity to engage with First Nations communities, staff and students is enhanced through the inclusion of First Nations knowledges.
- The provision of learning and teaching for First Nations peoples is a whole-University responsibility. This acknowledges there is a shared accountability for the Strategy by all members of UniSQ. The success of First Nations students is acknowledged as an important element in the success of the University.
- A critical part of this strategy is that First Nations peoples will actively participate in, and lead governance, decision-making, planning, delivery, and evaluation across education across the University.
- Cultural safety and inclusion are fundamental elements of our educational environment at UniSQ, underpinning a framework that deeply values and respects First Nations peoples and cultures. It is imperative that we create a setting where these principles are not only recognised but actively promoted, to foster a truly inclusive and respectful learning environment.

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First Nations Education Pillars of Excellence

Pillars of Excellence

Overview

UniSQ's commitment to advancing First Nations education is anchored in a comprehensive strategy guided by five fundamental pillars: Cultural Safety, Learning and Teaching, Education Pathways, Leadership, and People and Relationships. These pillars serve as the foundations of our approach, and drive efforts to create an inclusive and supportive educational environment that honours and respects the diverse cultures, knowledges and aspirations of First Nations peoples and their educators. Through this strategy, we aim to not only address the challenges faced by First Nations students, but also to empower First Nations students to realise their full potential.

Cultural Safety

- Provide a culturally safe, and inclusive education environment
- Develop a unique university culture that incorporates and acknowledges the important contribution of First Nations peoples, and their cultures, knowledges, histories, and societies

Learning and Teaching

- Improve the educational attraction, participation, success, and retention of First Nations students and improve completion rates
- Embed First Nations perspectives, knowledges, and pedagogical practices across the university's delivery of education

Education Pathways

- Facilitate access to and participation in education
- Enhance student retention and success
- Foster graduation and career pathways
- Harness mini modules as a pathway to further study

Leadership

- Deepen engagement between First Nations communities and the broader university, for long-term journeying together
- Strengthen national recognition of UniSQ as a leading regional university of First Nations learning and teaching and the development and uptake of innovative techniques, strategies, and technologies for learning
- Support leadership development in learning and teaching of First Nations Academics

People and Relationships

- Enrich the university's understandings of First Nations' rights, cultures, knowledges, and aspirations through respectful dialogues in all fora, recognising that such conversations will, at times, challenge preconceived beliefs and understanding
- Harness the capabilities, and aspirations of First Nations peoples and optimise collective and individual contributions to the university community

UniSQ's First Nations Education Strategy reflects our commitment to diversity, inclusion, and excellence in education. By prioritising cultural safety, enhancing learning, and teaching practices, supporting education pathways, fostering strong leadership, and nurturing meaningful relationships, we aim to create a more equitable and inclusive educational environment.

Pillar One: Cultural Safety

Cultural safety requires an organisational culture that is committed to social justice, human rights, and self-determination.

Objective	Key Success Indicator	Action	Timeframe	Responsibility
Provide a culturally safe, and inclusive environment	The university's physical, digital, and spiritual environment embraces First Nations peoples in a culturally safe, and welcoming manner.	Conduct surveys of UniSQ First Nations Employee Network members to gauge improvement from 2024 annually.	Annually from 2024.	PVC (First Nations Strategy), Director (People Strategy).
	Cultural safety is inherent in the UniSQ Campus Masterplan.	Integrate cultural safety principles into the planning and design of the UniSQ Campus Masterplan.	Ongoing from 2024.	DVC (Enterprise Services).
	UniSQ First Nations students have a sense of belongingness, community, and cultural safety within the university community.	Develop and administer annual surveys to gauge students' perceptions of cultural safety and inclusion.	Annually from 2024.	Dean (Academic Transformations)
Develop a unique university culture that incorporates and acknowledges First Nations peoples, cultures, pedagogies, knowledges, histories, and societies	Cultural safety is a focus across the entire University through staff development.	Develop a cultural safety mini module course available free of charge to staff. Staff participation in Cultural Safety courses and Cultural Safety profession development opportunities are embedded in performance planning frameworks.	Annually from 2024.	PVC (First Nations Strategy), Associate Provost and Director (People Strategy).
	Graduate attributes and program outcomes reflect a commitment to incorporating cultural safety, and First Nations perspectives, and knowledges across the university.	Utilising the academic program review processes and quality cycle, ensure required graduate attributes are expressed as program learning outcomes incorporating cultural safety and respect for First Nations knowledges.	Ongoing from 2024.	Dean (Learning and Teaching Futures), Dean (Academic Transformation) and Dean (Academic)

Pillar Two: Learning and Teaching

Appropriate content and pedagogy may mean the difference between success and failure, especially for First Nations students. UniSQ is committed to ensuring that all teaching being delivered to our students is of the highest quality, and that First Nations knowledges are represented and embedded throughout the curriculum.

Objective	Key Success Indicator	Action	Timeframe	Responsibility
Significantly improve the attraction, participation, success, and retention of First Nations students and improve completion rates	UniSQ First Nations student data is benchmarked against Regional University Network members to establish realistic growth goals.	Compare and report to the ISSP committee on UniSQ's performance metrics against those of Regional University Network members regarding First Nations access, participation, retention, success & completion rates. Undertake benchmarking activity to establish realist annual growth targets.	Annually from 2024.	Dean (Academic Transformation)
	Compare and report to the ISSP committee on UniSQ's performance metrics against those of Regional University Network members regarding First Nations access, participation, retention, success & completion rates. Undertake benchmarking activity to establish realistic annual growth targets.	Review to develop and report plans to address identified areas for improvement and implement initiatives to enhance First Nations student outcomes.	Annually from 2024.	Heads and Deans of Schools/Colleges
	Deliver support strategies that account for diverse student circumstances including scholarships, outreach, mentoring, tutoring and other advice and support mechanisms.	Increase scholarship funding by 10% over time (identified or general).

Expand outreach programs to high schools in underserved communities. | Throughout life of Strategy. | PVC, (First Nations Strategy), Head of College and Dean (Pathways and Education), PVC (Engagement), and College for First Nations. |
| | Deliver tutorial support programs and strategies that encourage First Nations students, especially first-year and scholarship holders, to | Identify sources for additional funding and allocate resources to expand tutoring programs.

Review and develop programs to achieve a 10% annual increase in ITAS usage, ensuring it serves its full potential as an effective retention tool for First Nations students | Throughout the life of Strategy | Head of College and Dean (Pathways and Education), PVC (Engagement) College for First Nations. |

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	utilise and benefit from this assistance			
	Indigenous Support to Success Network has active membership from all UniSQ schools, colleges, and centres (through establishing a community of practice).	The Indigenous Support to Success Network be formed as a subgroup to the Student Success and Retention Committee and provide reports to the Academic Division Executive Identify appropriate members from each school to participate in the Community of Practice.	Throughout life of Strategy	PVC (First Nations Strategy), Head of College and Dean (Pathways and Education), Dean (Learning and Teaching Futures) and Associate Provost

Pillar Three: Education Pathways

Facilitating First Nations students access to education, enhancing retention as students, and fostering new graduation and career pathways through initiatives such as the Indigenous Higher Education Pathways Program (IHEPP) and targeted support services.

Objective	Key Success Indicator	Action	Timeframe	Responsibility
Increase access and participation of First Nations students into pathway programs	Increase in First Nations student enrolment and participation rates by 10% annually in Indigenous Higher Education Pathways Program (IHEPP) throughout the lifespan of this Strategy. Increase in First Nations student enrolment and participation rates by 10% annually in Tertiary Pathways Preparation (TPP) and UniPrep Pathway Program throughout the lifespan of this Strategy.	Develop outreach programs and collaborate with local primary and secondary schools and organisations to provide mentorship and access to IHEPP. Consolidate partnerships with community organisations, businesses, and Indigenous associations to reach non-school leavers. Create flexible pathways programs that acknowledge and give credit for prior learning and experiences.	Ongoing from 2024.	College for First Nations and Head of College and Dean (Pathways Education) Head of College and Dean (Pathways Education) and Dean (Academic Transformations).
Introduce School-based pathways IHEPP for First Nations Students	Increased number of First Nations pathways into discipline specific courses.	Support degree pathways programs such as Deadly Start with integration into the University community. Identifying at least five secondary schools within UniSQ footprint to support IHEPP integration into Year 11 & 12.	Ongoing from 2024.	College for First Nations, Head of College and Dean (Pathways Education) and PVC (Engagement).
Foster career pathways	Successful transition to employment or further education.	Mentoring, professional development opportunities via a mini module suite, promoting post graduate HDR course pathways and developing partnerships with industry employers.	Ongoing from 2024.	Dean (Graduate Research School) and Provost.

Pillar Four: Leadership

Providing leadership in First Nations education is critical for the success of the University. The leadership of the University both champions this strategy and is committed to sharing the responsibility and accountability for First Nations education. First Nations leadership of the University is acknowledged as being pivotal to this educational process. Success of First Nations Peoples contributes to the economic, social and cultural wellbeing of UniSQ's footprint communities.

Objective	Key Success Indicator	Action	Timeframe	Responsibility
Deepen the engagement between the university and First Nations communities for long-term journeying together	Increased engagement with First Nations students, staff, and community.	Establish a least one new MOU with a community focused First Nations organisation annually. Plan and execute at least one cultural events of significance with at least 50% First Nations participation annually.	Continuous.	PVC (First Nations Strategy) and PVC (Engagement).
	Develop and disseminate best practices in First Nations education whilst actively advocating for and supporting the self-determined objectives of First Nations communities.	Include First Nations education and affairs as dedicated agenda items in all relevant high-level discussions e.g., academic management and governance committees.	Ongoing from 2024.	DVC (Academic Affairs) and Provost.
To be a nationally recognised regional University leader in First Nations education through the development and uptake of innovative techniques and strategies	Increased number of First Nations staff in leadership positions and support First Nations academics with promotion round applications via the implementation of UniSQ First Nations Workforce Strategy.	Regularly review and assess progress towards achieving objectives and indicators via relevant academic management and governance committees.	Annually from 2024.	DVC (Academic Affairs) and Provost.
	Promote publications and promotions of pedagogy and praxis for First Nations Academics.	Highlight publications in pedagogy and praxis at annual UniSQ First Nations Research Symposium. Regularly review and assess progress towards achieving objectives and indicators	Annually from 2024.	College for First Nations, PVC (First Nations Strategy) and DVC (Research and Innovation)
	Increased visibility of promoting publications and promotions of pedagogy and praxis for First Nations Academics.	Highlight publications in pedagogy and praxis at annual UniSQ First Nations Research Symposium.	Annually from 2024.	PVC (First Nations Strategy) Dean (Learning and Teaching Futures).

Pillar Five: People and Relationships

The best organisations place people at the centre of their operations. UniSQ is committed to growing the number of First Nations staff at all levels.

Objective	Key Success Indicator	Action	Timeframe	Responsibility
Enrich the university's understanding of First Nations rights, cultures, knowledges, languages, lore, and aspirations through respectful dialogues in all fora	An increase in the number of programs and activities that create opportunities for First Nations and non-Indigenous staff, students, community, and alumni to come together	Organise at least one public lecture and one cultural event annually with at least 50% First Nations participants.	Annually from 2024	PVC (First Nations Strategy) and PVC (Engagement).
		Collaborate with First Nations communities to develop and implement meaningful programs and activities that foster dialogue and understanding	Ongoing from 2024	PVC (First Nations Strategy), PVC (Engagement), DVC (Academic Affairs) and Provost.
Increase visibility and knowledge of support for First Nations students at UniSQ	An increase in awareness and understanding among Schools regarding the functions, programs, and support delivered by the College for First Nations	Meet with all Heads and Deans of Schools / Colleges and present at School Forums on the function, programs, and support available for First Nations students from the First Nations College	Ongoing from 2024	College for First Nations, Associate Head (Learning, Teaching and Student Success) and Heads of School and Dean for all UniSQ Schools.

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Reporting and Governance

As part of our commitment to transparency and accountability, UniSQ's First Nations Education Strategy will undergo annual reporting to track progress and assess outcomes across all pillars. This comprehensive report will detail achievements, challenges, and areas for improvement, which will provide stakeholders with valuable insights into our efforts to advance First Nations education. Through this annual review, UniSQ reaffirms its dedication to fostering an inclusive and supportive learning environment that honours the diverse cultures, knowledges, and aspirations of First Nations peoples.

The UniSQ Indigenous Student Success Program (ISSP) Committee has responsibility for advising on, reviewing, making recommendations about, and monitoring the use of ISPP funding in accordance with the Federal Government's Indigenous Student Assistances Grants Guidelines, administered under Part 2-2A of the Higher Education Support Act. This committee is comprised of qualified individuals inclusive of First Nations peoples, university leadership and other appropriate representatives, and acts as a coordinating mechanism led and informed by contributions from Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander peoples. This group will provide regular and annual reports to the Vice Chancellor's Executive who are the stewards of this strategy.

'We can lead by example – call out poor behaviour and misinformation, take on the role of educator and advocate – recognising that the load of educating others often falls on First Nations' colleagues, and get active in your community and networks by sharing information, investing in First Nations community initiatives and programs, and consider developing workplace policies and principles that are culturally responsive, safe and inclusive.'

– June Oscar Social Justice Commissioner- Chief Executive Women's Leadership Summit September 2023