



AUSTRALIAN BUSINESS DEANS COUNCIL

12 February 2020

By email: IndigenousAffairs.reps@aph.gov.au

Dear Committee Secretary,

Re: Pathways and Participation Opportunities for Indigenous Australians in Employment and Business

The Australian Business Deans Council (ABDC) welcomes the opportunity to make a submission to the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Indigenous Affairs inquiry into Pathways and Participation Opportunities for Indigenous Australians in Employment and Business. This submission focusses on the role of business education in opening up opportunities for economic development, including recent ABDC initiatives.

The ABDC represents 38 university business faculties and schools, which graduate one-third of all university students and more than half the international university students who study in Australia. ABDC is the collective voice of university pro vice-chancellors, executive deans, and heads of Australian business faculties and schools.

In preparing this submission, the ABDC sought feedback from participants in ABDC's National Indigenous Business Summer School (NIBSS) initiative. NIBSS is a collaborative initiative between ABDC member business schools and industry. It was developed in recognition of the need for business schools to leverage shared resources to engage with Indigenous students, industry and community. The ABDC also received feedback about other programmes run by ABDC-member faculties and schools. These included pre-enrolment and preparation programmes for Indigenous students, executive education with articulation into Graduate Certificate and MBA qualifications, and procurement policies and accelerators.

Graduates of Australian business schools have strong employment outcomes relative to their peers, with higher median starting salaries and employment in full time roles.¹ Business graduates are well-represented in business leadership, with one-quarter of ASX200 CEOs having an MBA qualification.²

¹ Department of Education and Training, 'Completion Count' by 'Management and Commerce' Field of Education' Higher Education Statistics Data Cube (uCube) 2015 – 31% of all university completions in 2015 were from a management and commerce discipline

² Robert Half. 2017. CEO Tracker. Available at: <https://www.roberthalf.com.au/research-insights/ceo-tracker>

While the benefits of business education on lifetime earnings and employment opportunities are well documented, Indigenous Australians are underrepresented in business education — just 10 per cent of Indigenous university students study management and commerce courses.³ The ABDC recognises that engagement with future Indigenous students should start at the secondary school level to raise numbers of undergraduate applications from 15 to 19-year olds, where share of enrolment is significantly lower than the total Indigenous population.⁴ It is in this context that the ABDC has supported the development and implementation of NIBSS.

National Indigenous Business Summer School

NIBSS is a week-long, on campus study programme for Indigenous high school students to spark their interest in studying business and build entrepreneurial skills. The programme is co-designed and delivered with Indigenous entrepreneurs and business leaders. In 2019 and 2020 NIBBS was held in New South Wales, Victoria, and Western Australia with around 100 students from urban, regional and remote communities taking part. Based on the success of these inaugural programmes, it is intended that NIBSS be delivered in other states and territories in the coming years.

A central aim of NIBSS is to demystify business for students by providing an immersive experience in business studies and the opportunity to explore employment opportunities. The application of entrepreneurial skill and business nous to existing cultural assets is a critical part of self-determination.⁵ During NIBBS, students are mentored by Indigenous business owners and entrepreneurs, and by alumni, academics and current students in order to build awareness of the career and entrepreneurial opportunities open to business graduates.

Each NIBBS programme includes an entrepreneurial challenge to give students hands-on experience as a business professional. For example, at the recent NIBSS held in WA students worked through the week in teams on a case study based on the problem statement 'In what way would you enhance the experience of Optus Stadium?'. During the 2019 NIBSS held at UNSW students participated in a Sprint Challenge to develop and pitch an initiative for one of three communities: Campbelltown, Bathurst or Woorabinda.⁶

³ Universities Australia (UA). 2019. *Indigenous Strategy First Annual Report*, p. 13

⁴ *Ibid*, p. 16

⁵ ABDC interview with Dr Emma Lee, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Research Fellow, Swinburne Business School, Centre for Social Impact. Available at: <https://vimeo.com/386442804/7faf180511>

⁶ <https://www.business.unsw.edu.au/news-events/news/indigenous-students-given-a-taste-for-business>

Data on the impact of NIBSS on Indigenous business school enrolments is limited, however early feedback from participants is encouraging. For example, students from the recent NIBSS WA programme indicated that their perception of the value of business education was changed by the experience. Previous NIBSS participants have proceeded to undergraduate study in business programs, such as Raymond Tilmouth, who participated in the first NIBSS program at the University of Melbourne.⁷

Further information

Further information about the NIBSS programmes is available from:

- NIBSS NSW (hosted by UNSW Business School) — <https://www.business.unsw.edu.au/students/indigenous/nibss>
- NIBSS Victoria (hosted by the Faculty of Business and Economics at the University of Melbourne and co-hosted by RMIT and Swinburne University) — <http://nibss.com.au/>
- NIBSS Western Australia (a joint initiative of Curtin University, Edith Cowan University, Murdoch University, and The University of Western Australia) — <https://www.linkedin.com/company/national-indigenous-business-summer-school-western-australia-nibsswa/>

Issues to address

In the past decade the university sector has made progress towards growth in applications and completion rates for Indigenous students; however, work remains to be done both sector-wide and by business faculties and schools. Feedback from business schools that have participated in NIBSS indicates that issues remain with messages given to Indigenous students at the secondary school level about the opportunity to study at university and the value of business education for themselves and for their communities. Several ABDC members have invested in partnerships with Indigenous communities in rural and remote areas in response to this challenge. As the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Higher Education Advisory Council (ATSIHEAC) observed in its final advice to government in 2015, these initiatives risk dissipation or duplication where there are poor connections between policy and programmes across the education cycle.⁸

⁷ <https://fbe.unimelb.edu.au/newsroom/from-mparntwe-alice-springs-to-narrm-melbourne>

⁸ ATSIHEAC. 2015. *ATSIHEAC Final Advice*. p. 3. Available at: <https://docs.education.gov.au/documents/atsiheac-final-advice>



AUSTRALIAN BUSINESS DEANS COUNCIL

It is clear from business schools that have implemented the NIBSS programme that continuing investment and resourcing is required to build sincere relationships with NIBSS students and support their entry into higher education. This investment needs to extend to the building of cultural proficiency and capability among non-Indigenous staff and students. For example, there is an opportunity to embed cultural awareness in graduate attributes or learning outcomes for teaching and assessment across degrees offered by ABDC-member business schools. The ABDC and its member business schools are committed to ensuring that these investments are made.

The ABDC is committed to ongoing support of the NIBSS programme, recognising the role that business schools play in improving the representation of Indigenous Australians in higher education. There is ongoing need to raise the visibility of higher education, and especially business education, in the policy mix to promote Indigenous economic development, through collaboration between Indigenous communities, business, government, and the higher and secondary education sectors. NIBSS was the prototype from which further activities will expand.

The current inquiry is welcome because it highlights the lack of clarity at present about where responsibility to prosecute the role of higher education in the economic development agenda lies. It would be helpful if key players in the Indigenous community, industry, secondary education, and university sectors came together in a more formal and regularised capacity than appears to occur currently through initiatives such as NIBSS. An initial summit involving all interested stakeholder groups would be feasible as a starting point. The ABDC would be happy to engage with this process.

The ABDC thanks the Committee Secretary for its consideration and welcomes further opportunities to engage in the inquiry as it progresses. Requests for further information may be made to the ABDC c/o Caroline Falshaw, Executive Officer: office@abdc.edu.au

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'David Grant', written in a cursive style.

Professor David Grant
President, Australian Business Deans Council