



Yaitya Warpulai Tappa



University of  
South Australia

# **ABORIGINAL & TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER**

EMPLOYMENT STRATEGY  
2015 - 2017



**Front cover image:** Meeting Place

**Artist:** Samantha Snow

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# Yaitya Warpulai Tappa<sup>1</sup>

University of South Australia Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander  
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## Our History

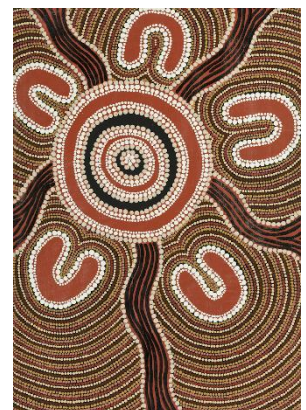
UniSA has a long involvement with the education and employment of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. Our antecedent institutions were pioneers in the provision of tertiary education for Australia's Aboriginal peoples and this became enshrined in the University's Act of establishment. Our commitment has found active expression in many forms and places from being the first Australian university to adopt a formal *Statement of Reconciliation* (1997) to implementing our first *Reconciliation Action Plan* (2014). It is a commitment made manifest today in an increasing array of teaching, research and community engagement activities and projects spread across UniSA.

## Our Vision

UniSA reaffirmed the central importance of Indigenous education and employment in its strategic plan *Crossing the Horizon* signalling that it will *take meaningful steps to strengthen its position as the University of Choice for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders in South Australia and beyond.* (CTH 2013: 13).

Among these meaningful steps is achieving the University's objective that at least 2% of its student population and workforce are Australian Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people<sup>ii</sup>. Our workforce participation target has been informed since 2002 by a rolling triennial employment strategy; *Yaitya Warpulai Tappa* [Indigenous Work Path]. This strategy has evolved over time to embrace a range of recruitment, retention, professional and cultural development initiatives. Among the more noteworthy of these are a professional development fund for Aboriginal staff and an Indigenous graduate program; both of which were highlighted as examples of sector-wide good practice in the 2012 *Behrendt Review of Higher Education Access and Outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People* report.

Achieving the 2% workforce participation target remains a major priority. In 2014, (at 1.2%) the University was ranked equally 12<sup>th</sup> in the higher education sector for participation of Australian Aboriginal staff in its workforce; this involved a rise from 23<sup>rd</sup> place in 2013. Recent gains have been made but significant further steps are required for UniSA to meet and potentially exceed its target. A variety of actions are outlined in this new iteration of *Yaitya Warpulai Tappa*. These are aimed at facilitating attainment of the employment target as well as providing a culturally safe and supportive workplace in which Aboriginal staff, and students, can achieve their best, develop and flourish.



## Our Guiding Principles

Drawing inspiration from work undertaken on our *Reconciliation Action Plan, Crossing the Horizon* and ideas derived from community and other universities' Indigenous employment strategies, the renewal of UniSA's *Yaitya Warpulai Tappa* strategy has been guided by the following principles:

**1. Building understanding and pride in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture achievements:**

We recognise and acknowledge the impact on Australia's Aboriginal people of past policies and practices. We seek to develop an understanding and respect for Aboriginal knowledges and cultures and a pride in the importance and distinctiveness of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander achievements.

**2. Deepening respect for cultural practices of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples:**

We acknowledge that Australian Aboriginal peoples have a unique sense of identity and their own distinct belief systems and cultural traditions that need to be recognised and supported where appropriate in the work place. *(in recognition the University makes special provision for cultural leave for Aboriginal staff).*

**3. Recognising diversity of and a special connection to Country/Place:**

We recognise that our Aboriginal staff (and students) come from a range of communities, families and kinship networks and that each has special connections to Country/Place. We support the induction of new staff into an understanding of the broad traditions and cultural beliefs of the local Aboriginal community. This includes a distinct induction into the specific cultural and spiritual traditions of the local community, provided by appropriate Elders or community leaders, to new UniSA Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff.

**4. Providing a safe, respectful and supportive workplace for all:**

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and others in the community who are not considered part of a traditional Anglo-Celtic background, may be subject to racism or given fewer opportunities because of their backgrounds. The University has no tolerance for such behaviours and aims to provide and promote a safe, respectful and supportive workplace culture that encourages ALL staff to learn, work and develop to their full potential.

**5. Exercising positive discrimination:**

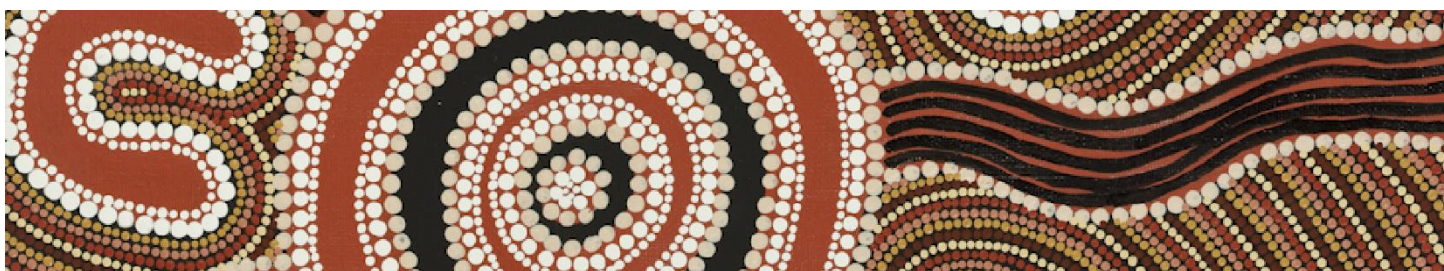
We acknowledge that Aboriginal peoples are amongst the most disadvantaged in Australia and that improved employment participation is central to improving life opportunities and outcomes. The University will utilise appropriate affirmative action measures<sup>iii</sup> to improve the provision of employment opportunities for Australian Aboriginal people within UniSA.

**6. Recruitment and Retention are equally important:**

We seek to ensure that we are not only recruiting Aboriginal staff but that we have in place appropriate measures to enable staff retention. We will seek to understand any drivers of Aboriginal employee attrition and ensure that these are addressed appropriately.

**7. Employment is a whole-of-University responsibility:**

To realise the University's aspiration as an *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander University of Choice*, then Aboriginal people need have a presence across UniSA's academic and professional workforce, and be able to aspire to and achieve any role based on their abilities and passions in professional administration, teaching, research and community engagement.



# Attaining Our Goals

UniSA's current Enterprise Agreement contains clear imperatives to support and increase the number of Aboriginal employees. Clause 24.2 in the Agreement notes that the University:

- a) will use reasonable endeavours to increase Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employment across the University to 2% of the total staff population (i.e. 52 staff members as at the date of approval of this Agreement) by the nominal expiry of the agreement;
- b) shall provide appropriate support and development opportunities to Aboriginal Australian staff members;
- c) as appropriate, shall identify and designate vacant positions in any area of the University at any classification level to assist in the achievement of the principles stated in the clause;
- d) recognises the importance of facilitating respectful relationships between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal staff members and will ensure relevant cultural awareness training is available for staff.

The Agreement also contains provisions related to payment for use of Australian Aboriginal languages and on the enhanced availability of cultural leave.

Consistent with the recommendations of the Behrendt Review and the *On Stony Ground* report, the current Enterprise Agreement identifies a numeric target to help give a focus to recruitment efforts over the life of the Agreement.

## A Commitment Shared

To provide additional impetus to attaining the 2% target in Aboriginal employment, the University will embed responsibility across all its academic divisions and administrative portfolios. The employment target will be cascaded to divisions and portfolios and progress towards the target will be overseen by and be the responsibility of each senior manager. Plans for how they will contribute to achieving the employment target and performance indicators will be established to monitor and measure progress.

The University's Indigenous Participation, Education and Employment Advisory Group (IPEEG) will monitor and report annually to the Senior Management Group on whole-of-institution progress against the employment target.

### Best Practice Recruitment

Consistent with the recommendations of the Behrendt Review and Universities Australia (UA)'s [National Indigenous Higher Education Workforce Strategy \(NIHEWS\)](#)<sup>iv</sup>, the University is developing good practice strategies for sourcing and recruiting Aboriginal employees including

- all panels will be provided with information on any (self-identified) Aboriginal applicants so that appropriate affirmation action can be taken;
- appropriate and consistent rules will be applied to determine Aboriginal and Torres Strait identity;
- the University's Enterprise Agreement allows us to identify, designate and fill vacant positions to improve Aboriginal employment outcomes. The South Australian *Equal Opportunity Act* has two provisions that give exemptions that can assist in improving targeted Aboriginal employment; sections 56 and 65. Human Resources will provide advice and training to all work areas on the legal and policy foundations for affirmative action and monitor their application in practice.

UniSA's new Recruitment centre will provide managers (and applicants) with collaborative, innovative and supportive advice and processes that underpin and enable our aim to recruit and retain excellent Aboriginal staff. HR also provides a dedicated Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Employment Consultant to guide and support recruitment, retention and cultural development programs.

## Other Special Initiatives

### Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Graduate Program

Through the Graduate Program, UniSA provides its students with opportunities to build on the knowledge and skills they have acquired at university and to gain a solid foundation for their career. Each year, two students who have excelled in their studies are offered a two-year graduate contract and rotate through a range of business areas. The graduates are also provided with a professional development fund and are supported to apply for longer term positions within UniSA. Building on this program, the University is also exploring the potential for cadetships.

### More Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Academics

Building once more on Behrendt and UA's NIHEWS, UniSA is developing a special fund, the *More Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders Academics* initiative, to be used as seed funding to help engage new Aboriginal academic staff in disciplines and research areas that contribute to improving the life opportunities of Aboriginal Australians or that reflect trends in Aboriginal student enrolments. UniSA has made some headway in the area of public health, law and education. The scope and formal parameters governing how this initiative will be managed are being developed.

### Professional Development Fund

Funding is allocated to support a customised development program for new Aboriginal staff on continuing or fixed-term contracts of three years or more. A one-off allocation is calculated as 20% of the employee's salary plus on-costs at the time of appointment and is used to support activities for up to three years. This fund assists new staff to acquire and refine skills and knowledge that will benefit them in their career within and beyond UniSA.

### Mark Your Identity

To achieve the University's aim of increasing the numbers of Aboriginal staff and to provide effective support and assistance to staff, UniSA needs to have accurate details of its employees of Aboriginal heritage. The *Mark Your Identity* campaign encourages Aboriginal staff to self-identify to assist the University in targeting support and assistance. The campaign has already been a contributor to the growth of our workforce.

### Cultural Safety and Awareness

To support UniSA's goal of developing as an *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander University of Choice*, we need to provide a respectful, culturally safe and harmonious workplace that has Aboriginal participation and culture embedded in its essential fabric. This includes the provision of appropriate support services and the development of an understanding of the culture and lived experiences of Aboriginal peoples. The University has progressively expanded its cultural awareness training programs and this pattern will continue. Across 2015 and 2016, senior staff will be required to undertake a cultural awareness leadership program as we strive to ensure that all work areas are making an active contribution and have local level practices that help recruit and retain Aboriginal staff. Cultural Awareness programs are offered to all staff and a similar program is being developed and will be offered to all UniSA students.



## Summary

UniSA has an ambitious goal to become an *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander University of Choice*.

This goal has its roots in our foundation document and is expressed across a number of initiatives.

*Yaitya Warpulai Tappa* [Indigenous Work Path] lays out our strategies for the next three years.

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- i. *Translates as 'Indigenous Work Path'.*
  - ii. *Consistent with agreed protocols (see for example this from the National Aboriginal Controlled Community Health Organisation <http://www.naccho.org.au/aboriginal-health/definitions/>) this document will use **Aboriginal** as a short form to refer to both Australian Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.*
  - iii. *The 2% is based on the Aboriginal Torres Strait Islander population parity target for South Australia.*
  - iv. *Consistent with State and Federal law.*
  - v. *This clear and explicit numerical employment target underpins and strengthens UniSA's commitment.*
  - vi. *[Governance and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Participation in Australian Universities: On Stony Ground \(2011\)](#).*
  - vii. *Universities Australia's [National Indigenous Higher Education Workforce Strategy \(NIHEWS\)](#) (June 2011).*

