Transcript: Building Legacy and Capacity Webinar Three: Indigenous Perspectives on Evaluation in Indigenous Higher Education

*Note: This transcript reflects a verbatim webinar context where there was limited capacity for dialogue/exchange between the participants; and that this is one data source (of many) that can be used to frame what success looks like within this context. Content is reproduced as accurately as possible.*

NADINE: Hello, everyone. This is Nadine Zacharias at the National Centre for Student Equity in Higher Education. We are almost at time but we are still waiting for a few participants so we're giving everyone a few more minutes to come into the session before we start. I hope you can all see on your screens myself and then James Smith at the Menzies School of Health Research. Want to give a wave, James? And Kim Robertson at Charles Darwin University.

KIM: Hello, everyone.

NADINE: And you will notice we're live captioning this session so we have Kerrie here as our live captioner but I will reintroduce everyone when we make a formal start. I will just watch the numbers come through.

OK, I think we have reached critical mass. Welcome again. My name is Nadine Zacharias and I'm representing the National Centre for Student Equity in Higher Education. I'd like to introduce Professor James Smith from the Menzies School of Health Research and Kim Robertson from Charles Darwin University. I would like to do an acknowledgement of country which is unusual in a webinar situation because we're meeting all over the country. I am on Wurundjeri land in Melbourne and acknowledge that we’re under the people of the Kulin Nation and the Elders past, present, and emerging. I'd also like to extend a special welcome to all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders who are participating in the webinar today. I appreciate a webinar is a slightly constrained format of communication as it limits the ability to have free‑flowing conversations; however, there will be time for a question and answer session at the end and possibly some discussion following the presentation, technology permitting.

In addition, we would really appreciate your feedback on the draft document that we have circulated prior to this webinar which had our draft definitions of success, some draft good practice principles and also recommendations for future practice to policymakers and other actors in this space. You can return them to us via email or you can give any of us a call if you want to discuss these.

This is the third webinar in the Building Legacy and Capacity Series which is a strategic initiative launched by the Centre last year. I'm going to introduce it quite briefly later on.

The title of today's webinar is Towards Data Sovereignty: A National Conversation about Strengthening Evaluation in Indigenous Higher Education Contexts in Australia. It draws on James' recently completed Equity Fellowship on that topic in which Kim was a key collaborator. The webinar also presents the outcomes and insights from discussions from a workshop which we held in Sydney earlier this month and was attended by a group of subject matter experts in evaluation in Indigenous higher education.

You will see we have Kerrie live captioning this session for us and this should be coming up on your screens. There's also a question pod at the bottom of your control panel which you will find on either side of your screen. So it's on my left‑hand side but it's potentially on your right‑hand side. Have a play with that. There's various ways of resizing screens and making some elements bigger than others. There's also an opportunity for you to ask questions of us. There's a drop down arrow towards the bottom of the control panel where you can leave your questions and they will come through to us during the session so that we can respond to them towards the end of the webinar.

There's also the opportunity, if the technology doesn't work for you at all, to get in touch with Jane who is supporting us on our technical matters for this webinar. Her email address is admin@adcet.edu.au just in case you have any technical glitches.

The format for today's webinar, we're planning to present for 30 to 40 minute and then open up for a question and answer and/or discussion and we'll see how the time and technology works for us.

I'm going to launch into it and I will start with a bit of an introduction of the Building Legacy and Capacity workshop series. The logic behind the concept was a conversation with the NCSEHE Board which wanted a project to build legacy and capacity beyond the current funding period which would leverage the really great research done and funded by the NCSEHE. The Board certainly ‑ the Board also wanted to pick up on and deepen the discussions from the Ten Conversations that were raised during a national forum in late 2016 and that raised some really interesting and important challenges on how we advance equity policy practice and research but we didn't necessarily have a ready-made mechanism to progress those conversations. So we came up with what was a format that enabled productive conversations about reasonably complex issues and that brought together people who approached a complex issue from different perspectives and they came together in a targeted conversation.

The objective of the workshops are to define a collective knowledge base which is informed by both research and practice. We want to engage in strategic and action planning so that we can learn from this insight to guide institutional practice and future research. And we also want to inform policymaking with the evidence that was generated from both research and practice. So we really wanted to pull together and close the loop between equity research, policy and practice which is the mission of the National Centre.

The structure of the workshops is pretty much the same. We had one in Canberra, the next one in Perth and then there was this one earlier in the month. The last one will be in mid-June and we look forward towards 2040 to ask what kind of equity framework do we need going forward? These workshops are structured around six fairly high‑level questions that you see on the slides which frame the group discussion. So we're starting off with exploring a bit of the problem and then very much notions of success. What does success in this space look like?

We are trying to unpack what we are observing and why we are observing it and the drivers behind some of the barriers that we are encountering. We are also looking at what we already know from current research and practice, what has worked, what didn't work, and why. This is really where we draw on the work of the experts that are around the table who have joined the conversations as researchers or practitioners or policymakers.

We are talking a little bit about ‑ or early in the session we talked about must‑have elements, but we've reframed this as good practice principles. We also talk about common challenges and potential pitfalls, so what is it we want to avoid? You will know that some of the solutions may not look too difficult but the implementation is often where we see challenges around equity matters.

We also talk about the role of government in this space, so how can government policy contribute to the solutions and support effective evaluation in this case? And this structure ‑ and finally, you know, are there any gaps in knowledge that we want to address to promote more positive change? So this structure has been fairly consistent across the series.

So as I said, there's expert workshops and then there is dissemination that is multichannel. The object is to advance a national conversation at the intersection of equity research, practice and policy that benefits the sector. The webinar today is the first element of that dissemination. We also sent you the pre-reading document that participants of the workshop had in front of them and we will further update this following this conversation any feedback that we receive from this group. We are also working on a professional illustration to complement the text and make insights more accessible, again, through a different medium. We would also note that PowerPoint slides and a captioned recording of the webinar onto the NCSEHE website in the next week so you don't need to take ferocious notes.

The focus of today's workshop is on strengthening evaluation in an Indigenous higher education context in Australia. On your screen is a list of the workshop participants who came to Sydney earlier in April. I would like to thank them again because they were a terrific group who were really prepared to delve into the issues and be constructive and come up with some really good recommendations on how to take this forward. I would really like to thank James and Kim who co-facilitated the workshop and did all of the work on the content for the workshop and this webinar. This topic took knowledge, expertise and insight that was certainly outside my skill set and comfort zone and I've certainly learned a lot in the process. I'm sure you will too as Kim and James take us through this important and complex topic. So I'm handing over to James now to start us on some of the core insights from his equity fellowship. Over to you, James.

JAMES: Thanks very much, Nadine. I'd like to start today, if I can, by acknowledging the land that both Kim and myself are meeting on, that of the Larrakia people and pay respects to elders past, present and emerging. I'd also like to acknowledge the lands from which everybody is located on today and pay respects to Elders past, present and future as well and acknowledge all the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander participants from all over Australia here today as well.

The next slide, please, Nadine. Thanks. So today what I'm hoping to do is give you a snapshot of what we know about evaluation in Indigenous higher education and that was part of my NCSEHE Equity Fellowship last year. It involved a few different things but primarily research with Indigenous scholars but also with policymakers working in that space. So what do we know about evaluation in Indigenous higher ed. As you can see from the quote there, that's drawn directly from the Behrendt review in 2012 and that was a review of higher access outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and the expert panellists at that stage said they found difficulty in finding good quality evidence, good quality evaluation data in particular to be able to assess how things were going within the sector and that we needed to refocus the work in that space and one of those recommendations was specifically around ‑ that came out of that report was specifically around developing and monitoring an evaluation framework within the Indigenous higher education space.

Over to you, Kim, for this slide.

KIM: Hello, everyone, thank you, Nadine and James. Just to continue on from there. Why is evaluation in higher education important? As James referred to the review in the previous slide, it has been difficult to gather quality information relevant to this space and this has been acknowledged several times in several reports probably over the last decade and it's acknowledged by Indigenous people themselves in the sector calling for better frameworks and more robust frameworks. Some of the key things out of the reports that you see listed on the screen there include a call for better governance structures, monitoring and evaluation and this is particularly important, and probably a really good time given the new national strategy released by Universities Australia, the new Indigenous strategy there. So it's quite a timely topic. Over to you, James, I believe, for the next one.

JAMES: So what else do we know? We know in a broad context within the evaluation and Indigenous education ‑ Indigenous affairs context in Australia that there's been a lot of scrutiny around evaluation and evidence and I guess the Indigenous higher education space is one part of a much broader national picture. We also know that the Indigenous advancement strategy which funds a lot of Indigenous affairs work through the Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet have developed an evaluation framework recently and the paper that was provided as pre-reading, which you can see pictured there, touches on some of that as well.

We also know that there's existing models, the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health performance framework is one example. We know that there's fragmentation of Indigenous policies and programs in higher education at the national level. Many of the research participants I spoke to reinforced that, particularly the split between the Department of Education and the Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet.

Many of the participants in the study also spoke about the differences between equity and Indigeneity. I’ll talk a little bit more about that later on. We know Indigenous leadership, that Indigenous standpoints, knowledges, epistemologies, ontologies etc. are really, really important in this space and form part of what there has been a national and international conversation around data sovereignty in recent times and that notion of Indigenous people being in control and making decisions about how data is used both by them but for them as well.

During the workshop we had a presentation around the Universities Australia Indigenous Strategy 2017‑2020. During the last year, Universities Australia have worked with a number of key stakeholders including the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Higher Education Consortium, NATSIHEC, and other government departments and a few key stakeholders in developing a reporting framework against the strategy and universities are being asked to complete that reporting process at the moment. Some of the Equity Fellowship work has contributed to the development of that framework.

I won't go through each of those individual points there, but they're issues that were raised either by Nathan Cassidy who presented at the workshop, and/or by participants from the workshop.

I guess this is coming down to the nuts and bolts of some of the findings from the Equity Fellowship and what I found in working with both Kim and another colleague, Kelly Pollard, when I had a look at the interview data with the 24 Indigenous participants from across all States and Territories in Australia that had worked on average for 17 years within the higher education sector, that there were these key enablers and drivers for strengthening evaluation in Australia. You will see there that I've got those grouped into three different areas. The blue ones are very much around the importance of Indigenous control. The black one is very much around government control and the green one is more about university control. I won't go into each of those today other than to say that they underpin some of the thinking and discussion that occurred at the workshop a few weeks back.

What I suggest there is that it's actually the combination of these three elements, the Indigenous control, the government control and the university control that's really important to unpack within this space if we want to strengthen evaluation in Indigenous higher education in Australia.

The next couple of slides I will talk about the discussion from the workshop specifically. So we've called it Yarning about Evaluation because that's very much the style that was used at the workshop. It was very iterative in nature, it was listening to the viewpoints of various stakeholders across the sector including multiple Indigenous scholars working in policy, practice and research contexts in Australia and at various levels within the higher education system. I guess, first and foremost, drivers and enablers that I mentioned previously, they are not things considered to be unique to the evaluation context. They're things that are consistent to other Indigenous higher education business across Australia.

I've already mentioned that data sovereignty is really important, that notion of Indigenous control and decision making at all stages, not just at an end point but right in the early planning stages.

Something else that was mentioned was around executive decision making and in particular, it was noted that just because we have Indigenous Pro Vice‑Chancellors of which there is a growing number in Australia now, it doesn't mean that they're always sitting around the table making the decisions, so they're not necessarily in the right place at the right time and that that's a real barrier to improvements in the sector.

Again, I've acknowledged the difference between equity and Indigenous landscape and in particular, when I say Indigenous landscape, the notion of sovereign rights and human rights is part of that as well and that there are differences there and we need to consider those when we're thinking about evaluation in this space.

There was consensus that we do need cultural experts to guide evaluation work, that if we don't have Indigenous people sitting around the table things can go a bit ‑ can become a little bit misguided and that it is really important to have people that understand culture and context. It was acknowledged that evaluation is, unfortunately, often the poor cousin to planning and implementation that often university systems, and, I guess, program funding within a government context, often value the planning and implementation side much more than the evaluation side and that this is a narrative that needs to change over time.

We also heard that there are very complex lives behind the numbers and that whilst we value the numbers particularly around student enrolment, retention and completion within Australia, that they're only part of the picture and that we need stories, deeper stories that are informed by qualitative forms of evidence and that we really need to pay attention to those, and that that's particularly important for context, particularly between urban, regional and remote contexts and the like.

We also acknowledged, all the workshop participants acknowledged, that there's different information that's being used and that we've got greater capacity to coordinate some of that and the examples that were given were the Indigenous Students' Success Program and the Universities Australia reporting that's happening at the moment and that that, I guess, increases the capacity to think of that institutional snapshots. What we know at the institutional level versus what we know at a national level.

We've also seen, in some universities, a tendency to segregate black business, the Indigenous elements of a university become the business of an Office of Indigenous Student Support, Office of Indigenous Leadership, or Office of Indigenous Engagement or similar and often not seen as core work and that's playing a key role in changing that narrative and they have a report due to be released shortly, I believe, which really emphasises the importance of a whole of university approach.

We ‑ there was some discussion as well around the need for evaluation tools that measure commitment, not just compliance. So yes, a lot of universities are expected to comply with the funding that they receive and they report against that but we also need to try and assess the commitment that universities are showing in a diverse range of ways as well. We need to be cognisant of what the end game is, what will be the outcome of the data being collected and that that's actually a really important thing in the decision making among Indigenous scholars across the country. If they can't understand how information is going to be used longer term, then they may not want to collect information in the first place.

There was some discussion around cross‑cutting evaluation and how do we get evaluations to inform each other and examples included equity vs. Indigenous. An example would be ISSP funding versus HEPPP funding in the Australian context. Also differences across the sectors, schools and universities, how are we learning from each other, how are we tracking students longitudinally in the way we understand their trajectories into and out of higher education, and also how does this work dovetail with evaluation occurring in other sectors, whether that be health and I've mentioned the health performance framework previously, whether it be in relation to housing, welfare, etc., and that we can actually start to think about data linkage in more sophisticated ways than we do at the moment.

Last but certainly not least, in terms of understanding what is the problem, how do we evaluate the contribution that Indigenous people are making to the mainstream higher education agenda, recognising that Indigenous scholars working in practice, policy, research roles within higher education institutions, all are playing really important roles in reshaping what Indigenous higher education looks like in Australia.

On that note, I will hand over to Kim to go through the next few slides.

KIM: Thank you. So we're just going to shift now into a couple of slides around — we know what the problem is, what are some of the elements that have come out from the research and from the workshop to define what success or what meaningful evaluation in this space might look like.

So there's ‑ I won't read through all the dot points on the screen there, but I will probably just unpack a couple of them that may not be as straightforward as some of the others. Again, up front, reiterating the need for Indigenous worldviews and ways of knowing, being and doing as paramount to any success in this space. Another really critical one there is the importance of having Aboriginal people not just in positions but in proximity to influence. As James mentioned earlier, we do have growing numbers of Indigenous scholars working at the very senior levels of the institutions and are we seeing that ‑ those positions reflected in the decision making in those institutions? And again, that's probably another area that can also be evaluated in itself. A new area.

One of the things that has come up several times through the workshop is around that evaluations need to be used in a productive way so defining up front not just how we're doing the evaluation but why we're doing it, who's doing it and to what end in terms of, you know, using that evaluation to inform good practice, rather than using it as a punitive measure.

In terms of what came out around, you know, Indigenous people recognise the evaluations have previously been used in ways that they have felt were punitive, and what I mean by that is where evaluations have been used to cut programs, to cut funding to programs, to cut positions, or even to remove individuals and so these were things that are very real and have been raised. So just acknowledging those sorts of complexities in the evaluation space.

We'll go to the next slide, please. And the next one. Thank you. Benchmarking against mainstream indicators is not always useful. So whilst it can be useful and certainly this is what we're used to using, benchmarking against mainstream indicators is usually quantitative but sometimes that can perpetuate the deficit discourse and this is an area where Indigenous scholars seriously want to move away from in not just the way we design and deliver our programs but in the way we evaluate those programs to make changes for the future.

I already mentioned how some of the evaluations can be used punitively so we need to be very careful about avoiding that.

We talked about Indigenous leadership positions being utilised to drive evaluation and look at different ways of doing things. So that includes really making sense of the qualitative approach to evaluation, including longitudinal outlooks. So the kinds of change in reform that we're trying to introduce into universities and to deliver are likely to be, as in other sectors, that require long‑term solutions and these need to be considered when designing the evaluation from beginning.

There was a strong recognition that we need to privilege Indigenous student voices in program design and evaluation. So obviously, if we're serious about making evaluation student-centred because we need to focus on outcomes, student outcomes, not just academic outcomes but potentially a whole range of others in terms of where students are at, you know, post-graduation as well, so we need to actually get Indigenous students' voices into that practice. And that also includes postgraduate students. Often we're looking at just numbers, particularly enrolment and participation at the undergraduate level but we need to include postgraduate students as well.

Move onto the next slide, just as a summary now from the quite complex discussions that were held and we've tried to come up with a few dot points around what good practice principles might look like in Indigenous higher education. So recognising the sovereign rights, who is speaking for whom? Demonstrating and celebrating Indigenous expertise. Again, we recognise that there are a lot of Aboriginal scholars working intensely in this space and how is that knowledge being harnessed.

One of the other things that came up regularly was around developing skills in evaluation and that was both within the sector and within government. So really more opportunities to develop skills and quality evaluation, recognising, again, that it's a cross‑cutting as in crossing across the sectors and also across the education spectrum.

Also the use and impact. So really focusing on why are we doing this evaluation, who is it for, and what are going to be the impacts both in terms of positive change but also always remembering to consider any negative implications and trying to manage and address that up‑front.

And the final one there, just around striving for innovation that builds on Indigenous knowledge and practice. So how can we use Indigenous methodologies or practice methods to actually inform the way we do evaluation into the future?

So I think we're up to the next one. So going onto recommendations then. So moving forward, we're talking about creating structures of responsibility and accountability that support the whole-of-university approach. So you may recall James spoke about, you know, the three domains of control that will be influencing evaluation. So within those it's not just about control, it's about who has responsibility and who is going to be accountable for those changes and improvements.

Leveraging the policy shift, that's currently in place where government is looking to be measuring outcomes, not just access or recruitment into universities. How do we then leverage that?

Including Indigenous consciousness and practice at the centre of decision making. So this was, you know, one of our informants talked about being conscious about, you know, I'm doing the evaluation in the Indigenous space, do I have Aboriginal people sitting at the table with me? Are they running it? Are they actually feeling safe enough to be contributing and leading this? Leveraging staff across the sector, and also across the universities. So rather than just knowing that you have Indigenous staff working in the Indigenous Studies Unit, that hey, they might have some really important and valuable contributions to make at a strategic and policy level in your institution.

There was a very practical suggestion around holding a strategic‑focused higher education conference to discuss these and related issues and there was also discussion about the need to ensure that there are Indigenous peak bodies that are able to be speaking on behalf of Indigenous people in this sector around this business and one of those suggestions was universities contributing to the NATSIHEC that exists already, financially to keep that happening and to support, I guess, that Indigenous leadership in the space.

And then, I think we're going to move into recommendations for policy, James.

JAMES: Thanks, Kim. And we've split this up into recommendations for government initially and then I will look at some other policy recommendations as well. But certainly there was a strong discourse and focus around paying attention to recommendations from past reports. There was an acknowledgment, as Kim mentioned earlier, that there have been a range of reports where recommendations have been made around monitoring, evaluation and performance that have not been implemented and that we need to acknowledge that and we, more importantly, that those recommendations need to be responded to and sooner rather than later.

There was also a recommendation that government could actually bring together the Indigenous higher education policy making program and funding into one Australian Government department. There was some distaste or dislike, if you like, for the split between Department of Education and Training and the Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet in managing Indigenous higher education and that was seen as a significant barrier to improvement in this space.

Alongside that, there was a recognition that enhanced cross‑portfolio communication and direction, particularly across silos of the Indigenous advancement strategy could be useful. So that's linking health, education, housing, legal issues, welfare issues, etc., to generate actionable insights from annual reports to government and by that reviewing synthesising, feeding back to the sector and all stakeholders and we had TEQSA in the room as well and they were very interested in what was being said around particularly cultural standards and accreditations in that space but essentially government having a role in feeding back the information that it collects and actually showing that it's accountable in that way.

And there was also some brief discussion around a legislative commitment to Indigenous higher education, as has been the case in Victoria and I don't know a lot about the Victorian landscape but that was certainly something that a few participants felt very strongly about, that that was a good example.

The final recommendations for policy have been split up into institutions and other players. So institutions, that higher ed. institutions take Indigenous work force issues much more seriously, that urgent action is required there so that yes, we have seen many universities increase their Indigenous workforce, but at what level? Where are they located in the university? Are they clustered in particular areas or are they spread across the university that will promulgate a whole of university approach? And that they play a really important role as well. I think we've just skipped back a few slides.

And, I guess, one of the key aspects of that is around ensuring that Indigenous people are involved in decision making at all levels right through from planning implementation and also the evaluation, how that data gets used and within that, making sure the people who are at the top, the Pro Vice‑Chancellors, the Deputy Chancellors and Vice‑Chancellors are engaging with senior Indigenous scholars within the higher education space as well.

We've heard quite a bit about NATSIHEC already, I mentioned TEQSA before and Universities Australia but certainly the continued consultation and development between Universities Australia and NATSIHEC around refining measures for Indigenous evaluation and I guess one of the key mechanisms that's going to be used in the first instance to facilitate that will be the reporting framework that's currently being implemented and UA are certainly aware that many universities have requested to have feedback on the information that they're providing, so that there is that level of accountability. And that NATSIHEC provide guidance to TEQSA on what the expectations are to support Indigenous evaluation. Again, particularly in relation to the standards, cultural standards and accreditation, and it's really pleasing to hear that they're already in the process of developing a Memorandum of Understanding with each other to progress some of that work and are very interested in sort of project‑based work that they might be able to fit within that at the moment.

Then there was a couple of participants that also mentioned around reviewing the way that TEQSA chooses its experts and thinking around Indigeneity within that. So how do we make sure there's more Indigenous scholars and thinkers that are part of those university accreditation processes?

So that, I think, pretty much wraps up what we had planned to present from the workshop. Before we do go to questions and answers, I did just want to acknowledge and thank one, all the workshop participants, two, all of my research colleagues that supported me on the Equity Fellowship journey, three, all the participants in the Equity Fellowship, and four, all of the key stakeholders, including the National Centre for Student Equity but also Universities Australia, NATSIHEC, the Department of Education and Training and the Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet in terms of the contribution they've made in thinking about this space and to move forward in terms of strengthening evaluation in higher education in Australia. So over to you, Nadine, to look after the questions and answers, thanks.

NADINE: Thank you both so much for this really terrific conversation. I've heard it for the second time but there's so much in this and the issues are that complex that, you know, like I think we have to come back to this over and over almost, to really move it forward and to pick up the things that are really the priority issues and run with those and then come back, you know, to other recommendations and insights to keep this going. It doesn't strike me as an issue that can be resolved overnight, too many players.

Look, I have a question here from ‑ a question and a comment from Diane Smith and I'm going to start with this but while we are looking at that particular question and comment, I encourage you to use the question pod or just to raise your hand in the panel. I can see people who have their hands raised and I will unmute your microphone and you can ask your question, you know, like of James and/or Kim, or if you don't want to speak in front of a largely anonymous audience you can type it into the question pod and we'll do it that way. So Diane's question is what were the practical strategies for creating a whole-of-university approach within tertiary institutions? Who wants to take that? Some practical strategies.

JAMES: Did you want me to start, Kim, and then you go?

KIM: Yes.

JAMES: Listen, I think the Indigenous workforce issue was one that came up in having an Indigenous workforce that's located throughout universities and to recognise Indigenous leadership, not just within an Indigenous space within universities, but look at Indigenous leadership across colleges and faculties and there was some discussion around thinking about Deans and associate Deans. There was also some discussion around that many Indigenous people get locked in ‑ Indigenous higher education thinkers get locked in to the Indigenous space when they've actually got expertise that sits out of that space and can contribute to a broader conversation. So that's one key practical strategy, I guess, that I know NATSIHEC has focused on and that was mentioned. Kim, I will hand over to you to see if there are others that you can think of that were mentioned.

KIM: I mean, I think the workforce issue is a really huge one and that also links with a lot of work that was also done by NATSIHEC recently last year around increasing Indigenous academic workforce and it's come up several times in our presentation already.

Other things related to that are around cultural safety of institutions and how that will create the spaces for collaboration, if we work towards implementing frameworks around cultural competency, or whatever you choose to call it, cultural safety, cultural intelligence. Building these things as the foundation of institutions will then be an enabler to, again, as I said, collaboration across complex issues and difficult issues. And another one would probably be really honing in on the governance and this is also related to what we're talking about here around the evaluation is really focusing in on how university is governing itself around policies and procedures, what mechanisms are in place for Indigenous people to be involved in those and then really capitalising on the opportunity through just being a lot more open and transparent around governance mechanisms.

JAMES: There's probably one other thing, or a couple of other things I could mention there, too. One is going back to the student centredness. So making sure Indigenous students are involved. They are engaged in education across universities, so they're a logical group to tap into and, you know, I know at the end of the workshop Kim, myself and some of the workshop participants had a really interesting conversation with one of the University of Sydney students around his views around what was happening in his university, etc. And the other one is to really value and reposition the importance of qualitative evidence in the work that we are engaged in because that is so important for understanding context and is significantly underdone in most universities. So if you've got the opportunity to draw on qualitative evidence case studies, stories from students and others working in the system then that's a really good starting place as well.

NADINE: Dianne, I have unmuted your microphone so if you want to respond to anything that James and Kim have said please go ahead.

SPEAKER: Thanks very much for putting this webinar on, firstly. It's a fantastic opportunity for us sitting in, you know, the remote locations like Canberra, to be able to listen in to, you know, stuff that's really cutting edge, I reckon, cutting edge discussion. And I was really interested, in terms of say, you know, a university like ANU with lots of big colleges and dispersed that I think that it's the issue of the governance of the university, I think, that plays a critical issue in where's the space and the room for Indigenous academics and Indigenous HDRs at that top level governance, not just in a PVC position, but across the whole spectrum of the institution otherwise it seems so easy for Indigenous education to become a sheltered workshop. So I appreciate your practical strategies and I also really appreciate the focus on stories and scenarios and real world examples of these situations because I don't think the data, whenever we get data, I don't think it tells the real story. I don't think it tells us all of the story. So I'm at the National Centre for Indigenous Studies and we'd be really keen to support that idea of some kind of national get-together to continue to talk about these issues.

JAMES: Excellent.

NADINE: Thank you, Dianne. Next on our list is Judy Anne Osborne who has submitted a long question. But I've just unmuted you too. You have an echo. I might just ‑ it's because I think you're in the room with multiple people and I think that throws our technology, so I might just read the question and try to come back to you at the end of it.

So Judy Anne is saying, in the room with me I have five math stats people who are part of a grant which brings together some Indigenous people and some mathematicians and statisticians using Indigenous pedagogy in maths and stats classes. Some of those classes have few or no Indigenous students enrolled. Do you have advice on how to evaluate the effectiveness of the strategy given so few Indigenous students directly affected, though many more might eventually since many of the maths students are teaching Indigenous students? We do know the importance of also affecting non‑Indigenous students. We would love advice on how to measure and what to measure.

JAMES: It's a difficult one and I hesitate to provide sort of direct advice around that as a non‑Indigenous researcher working in this space and I guess the best advice I can give, and it goes across any evaluation irrespective of what space it's in, is to partner with Indigenous colleagues that you respect, build those relationships, so that you can have those voices around the table, even if they're not represented in the group or the work that you're trying to do. You know, it's hard. But we've seen it done quite successfully, for example, in the higher degree research space. There's been a real proliferation of Indigenous students in postgraduate research positions in Australia in recent times, it continues to grow and it's a really great thing to see and that's really happened through engaging in partnerships with key Indigenous organisations, we've got NATSIHEC, so linking to people involved in those spaces to provide that advice is probably the best place to start. Kim?

KIM: Yeah, I mean, I guess there has ‑ there is currently, and has been recently, a fair bit of work around engaging Indigenous people into the STEM disciplines and, yeah, congratulations on doing this work. I'm really excited about getting more Aboriginal people into statistics. I am not a statistician but I love to have access to that quality of, you know, data analysis. So again, I know that NATSIHEC has done some work on the STEM. I would be following up with them and encouraging yourselves and your students to be creative about how you might be able to use ‑ because I mean the statistical data is incredibly important as well. We're not advocating by any means that we only want to focus on qualitative but I would be encouraging students to think more outside the square of how they might use statistics as well and gather baseline data and things like that.

NADINE: Thank you, both. Further comments from Judy Anne that they're already doing some of what you suggested, James, and that all of them, including the Indigenous colleagues would like some advice and I think that sort of reads to me as if this is an invitation for a conversation after this conversation, you know, to maybe connect and talk through in some more details in other specifics of that evaluation because I appreciate, you know, that it's a bit hard to give advice remotely with the level of detail that we have.

JAMES: Happy to do that.

NADINE: Questions are really starting to come in now but I’ll go to the brave person who put her hand up first and then come back to some more questions.

SPEAKER: Thank you, I'm the Director of the First Peoples Health Unit at Griffith University and say thank you very much for your presentation. That was so timely for the university, but in particular the unit and the faculty here at Griffith. The First Peoples Health Unit has been established for 3 years and we're starting to development and framework for the work across the faculty. So anecdotally we know we're having a significant impact but we want to now measure the impact that we're having. But one of the things that we've done, which is new and I was surprised that we weren't actually looking and interrogating the data that's already collected through the university, so a good example of that is the student experience data. So we get the broad data of the student experience and I have to actually request the Indigenous identifier to see what is the Indigenous student experience, the same again for the staff experience. I've got to request the Indigenous identifier to go and interrogate what's their experience. So we've got a win with that one. We've now had the Vice‑Chancellor, the Deputy Vice‑Chancellor for engagement has mandated that the Indigenous identifier is included on any of the surveys that are collected across the university.

So the work that we're doing at the health group level is informing up across the university. We, unfortunately, at this point in time, don't have a Pro Vice‑Chancellor. I'm the Professor of First People's Health, the executive at the table and it has a significant impact on the direction in targeted pieces of work in this area but just to say thank you very much again, we will certainly take on what's come out of all the work that you've done and say congratulations. Thank you.

KIM: Thank you very much.

JAMES: Congratulations in return for developing an institutional strategy in this area as well and off the top of my head a few things that you mentioned then. One was around the student experience and it's really interesting because there's a number of research projects across Australia looking at Indigenous student experiences at the moment and part of that has been because there's been anecdotal knowledge around what has and hasn't been working but it hasn't been documented very well and the other thing I would say for Griffith University is my understanding is that you have done a lot of work around Elders and the role of Elders within higher education institutions and if you can do any evaluation work around that, that would be brilliant because, as far as I'm aware, there is very little formal evaluation work that's been done despite a number of universities starting to invest in that space.

NADINE: Terrific. Look, we are very close to time. I will do one more quick question because this may be ‑ it's from Ryan Cornwall but it may be top of mind for many others. Are there any examples of Indigenous methods, methodologies and evaluation? Do these conflict with any requirements under the governance of universities as public institutions?

KIM: I will just mention quickly. There are and we can probably get back to you with some references on the first question. The second one in terms of conflicting with compliance, I really don't think so. I mean, James can correct me if I'm wrong but it's just something I was thinking about around when institutions that are essentially non‑Indigenous institutions start to look at doing things in this space and the need to do it differently, this is often a question that comes up around, you know, if we're going to do it differently, is it going to impact our ability, you know, is it going to restrict us, is it going to create conflicts with compliance? I genuinely don't believe that's the case. I believe that really good, well‑designed evaluation, particularly the type that will be comprehensive enough to evaluate Indigenous higher education outcomes will build into it the compliance mechanisms as well and then everything else is in addition to that, will add to that deeper narrative about success.

JAMES: The only thing I would add there, just briefly, if I can, is that within the Indigenous methodologies there is certainly a privileging of narratives and stories which I've sort of already mentioned and, unfortunately, a lot of reporting frameworks at the moment do not support providing that information back to whoever the funding body is and sometimes when case studies are requested they're restricted to word counts and that sort of thing and the more that we push around that and start to think creatively, I think we can start to see some change in that space and there's a large section on that in the Equity Fellowship report that should be released, hopefully within the next month or so, all going to plan, and happy to share that with all the participants when that is released as well.

NADINE: Terrific. Look, thank you. Thank you both, and thank you all for a really terrific and engaged conversation that clearly, you know, addressed a need in the sector at the moment for some advice and guidance and just sharing of what we're already doing. We're very close to time so I will wrap it up here. Quickly next steps, there are still a handful of questions that we haven't addressed. We picked them up as part of the PowerPoint presentations that we will be circulating after this webinar and just try to answer them briefly there. As I said, we will upload the PowerPoint and the captioned transcript of today's session on the NCSEHE website. The National Centre has an email list to those of you who are not already on it. Please go to the website and subscribe. There's a monthly eNews that gets circulated for people interested in equity and Indigenous issues and as James said, you know, his fellowship report will feature prominently as well.

In closing, I would really like to thank you all, in particular James and Kim for putting their hand up to co-facilitate the workshop and co-present this webinar and to really lead the charge on evaluation in an Indigenous context. You have struck a chord. Like this is a conversation to continue for a lot of time yet. Thanks a lot to all of you as the participants for making the time to tune in. I look forward to seeing you again, potentially for the next webinar which will be held in July and the topic there is very much the future of equity policy, research and practice in Australia as we look sort of into the medium and longer term.

That's it from us today. Thank you all. Have a really good day. Bye‑bye.