

A future for Indigenous-led thinking at the Centre

ESTABLISHING THE CENTRE

The first Indigenous-led Australian Research Council (ARC) Centre of Excellence has been established to transform Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander futures through uniquely collaborative and multidisciplinary research endeavours. This pioneering initiative is poised to transcend conventional research paradigms, placing Indigenous perspectives and leadership at the forefront of transformative knowledge and study.

The establishment of the ARC Centre of Excellence for Indigenous Futures (IFC) represents a long-awaited acknowledgement of the inherent value and wisdom embedded within Indigenous knowledge systems. For too long, Indigenous perspectives have been marginalised within the academy, failing to capture the richness, diversity, and valuable contributions of Indigenous cultures and experiences.

By centering Indigenous perspectives and leadership, the IFC not only seeks to redress historical injustices but also strives to cultivate a more inclusive and equitable research landscape. This endeavour embodies a profound commitment to decolonising research methodologies and fostering genuine partnerships built on mutual respect, reciprocity, and shared goals of advancing Indigenous well-being and self-determination. As such, the IFC serves as a beacon of opportunity, heralding a new era of collaboration, understanding, and empowerment for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

CENTRE FORMATION AND VISIONARY LEADERSHIP

From June 2021 to June 2022, the ARC Centre of Excellence application process was led by a team of predominantly Indigenous academics from The University of Queensland (UQ), who partnered with numerous community and government organisations from across Australia, along with 18 Chief Investigators from 7 national universities, and 5 Partner Investigators from New Zealand, Canada, and Australia. Following this extensive application process, The ARC Centre of Excellence for Indigenous Futures (IFC), administered by UQ, was awarded \$35 million over the span of 7 years.

IFC's Director, Professor Brendan Hokowhitu said the Centre's vision is an equitable Australia for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples by 2050.

"The most important thing is that the Centre is completely Indigenous-led and it's the first of its kind in Australia... and it's the first of its kind in the world as it is completely focused on social inequality," Professor Hokowhitu said.

Prior to the application, the Centre was envisioned by UQ Deputy Vice Chancellor for Indigenous Engagement, Professor Bronwyn Fredericks, and Emeritus Professor Aileen Moreton-Robinson. They devised a plan to build a safe and transformative space entirely led by Indigenous researchers to redress national Indigenous disadvantage as a matter of priority. They then assembled a team to drive the application, which included Professor Hokowhitu, Director of UQ Poche Centre for Indigenous Health, Professor James Ward, and Associate Professor in History, Law, and Justice at the University of Melbourne, Dr. Crystal McKinnon.



L-R: GREGORY EGERT, PROF BRENDAN HOKOWHITU, PROF BRONWYN FREDERICKS, SHANE BOSELEY, PROF TRACEY BUNDA



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The visionary leadership provided by Professor Fredericks and Emeritus Professor Moreton-Robinson, demonstrates the importance of Indigenous leadership within the academy and exemplifies the evolutionary potential of Indigenous-led initiatives in catalysing systemic change. It is their perspectives and guidance that highlighted a critical need for supporting Indigenous-led research.

As the IFC embarks on its journey, it stands as a testament to the strength of Indigenous leadership and the enduring spirit of resilience that continues to shape the course of Indigenous futures.

EVOLVING RESEARCH METHODOLOGIES: FROM VISION TO REALITY

IFC's Elder in Residence, Gregory "Uncle Cheg" Egert pointed out that establishing the Centre is a pivotal moment in Australian history for Indigenous peoples to ultimately design their own research approach and methodology and be able to directly impact policy reform.

"Research was always done with a particular lens which wasn't ours. This is an opportunity for Indigenous-led research, which means our lens on particular issues and projects that is going to be totally different to the way research has happened in this country before," Gregory Egert said.

This insight underscores the profound significance of the IFC's establishment. By empowering Indigenous-led research methodologies, the IFC heralds a shift towards decolonising academic discourse and reclaiming Indigenous agency in shaping research agendas. Gregory Egert's explains the imperative for Indigenous peoples to assert ownership over their narratives, knowledge systems, and research methodologies.

According to Professor Hokowhitu, until now, most research has been performed in separate academic disciplines with little input or leadership from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. It is expected that the IFC will help reshape research and generate new knowledge through collaborative, multidisciplinary "Indigenous thinking" that breaks down silos and treats the many persisting issues as complex and interconnected.

Professor Hokowhitu explained, "We've been made to fit into disciplines that don't represent our worldviews... western academia breaks down the world into fields like science, business, the humanities, arts and social sciences, medicine and then further into subdisciplines... Indigenous peoples don't divide up knowledge like that. We think, act and research across all of them. So, it's really exciting to be creating an Indigenous intellectual space."

Professor Hokowhitu's critique of the existing academic paradigms highlights the extensive limitations of disciplinary silos and captures the holistic and interconnected nature of Indigenous knowledge systems. By embracing a collaborative and multidisciplinary approach grounded in "Indigenous thinking," the IFC aspires to transcend these artificial boundaries, fostering a more inclusive and expansive intellectual space.

The shared vision of Professor Fredericks, Emeritus Professor Moreton-Robinson, and Professor Hokowhitu articulates a profound reimagining of research practices, one that honours diverse Indigenous perspectives and catalyses innovation by bridging separate disciplines.

In embracing the complexity and interconnectedness of Indigenous perspectives, the IFC embarks on a transformative journey towards generating novel insights and solutions that resonate with the lived realities of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.

TOWARDS AN EQUITABLE FUTURE

With recruitment efforts surging ahead, the IFC is showing a strong start to implementing generational change for how we look at inequities in Australia and around the world.

Ultimately, by fostering genuine collaboration and authority, the IFC provides a safe space for Indigenous scholars and empowers Indigenous community members to reclaim agency over research endeavours, instilling a sense of ownership and pride in shaping their narratives. Moreover, the next generation of Indigenous researchers stands to lend their unique perspectives, enriching our collective understanding of intergenerational inequity. Thus, the IFC promises to transcend academic discourse, offering tangible options for a more just, inclusive, and equitable future for all.

The IFC both demonstrates and embodies new opportunities by enabling Indigenous community members to co-design and drive research, while also empowering the next generation of Indigenous researchers to provide their "own lens" and enhance our understanding of the complex nature of intergenerational inequity.