**Agenda item:** Discussion on strategies for increasing the numbers of postgraduate researchers at UWA

This document focuses on Indigenous postgraduate researchers

**The National Context**

**Comparison of Indigenous & non-Indigenous Enrolments**

According to DEST, in 2004, across all Australian higher education providers there were a total of 8,895 Indigenous students enrolled, as compared to a total of 716,442 domestic students enrolled - the total Indigenous enrolment is 1.2% of total Domestic enrolments and is not commensurate with the general population. The June 2001 Census of Population and Housing estimated the Indigenous population to be 460,140 or 2.4% of the total estimated resident population of Australia.

Of the 8,895 Indigenous students enrolled, only 338 were undertaking postgraduate degrees by research

**The Western Australian Context**

In Western Australia no university has Indigenous participation rates that are commensurate with the general population of the State.

Curtin University of Technology, which has around 40% of total Indigenous state enrolments, offers the most comprehensive Indigenous-specific postgraduate courses at all levels, including a Doctorate and Master's by Research in Indigenous Research and Development. Curtin's Centre for Aboriginal Studies offers Indigenous (and non-Indigenous) students several pathways to engage in Higher Degree's by Research, either through the completion of the Graduate Diploma or the completion of the Honours program.

Presently at UWA, which has around 11% of total state Indigenous enrolments, there are 13 Indigenous students enrolled in post graduate degrees, and of these only 7 are involved in research (2 PhD – Social Work, 3 PhD – Anthropology/Social
and Cultural Studies, 1- PhD Education, 1- PhD English). This is very low and it is critical that as a leading research university UWA take a principal role in providing research and research training to Indigenous people.

**Needs of Indigenous postgraduate students**

Indigenous postgraduate students can face unique issues that require different kinds of preparation and support.

**Some of these issues relate to:**
- Supervision (can involve cultural issues related to gender)
- Financial (many Indigenous students come from families with no inherited wealth)
- Cultural issues related to knowledge and custodianship and incorporating intellectual property issues
- Research and cultural protocols; research methodology appropriate to Indigenous communities
- Assessment of the importance and impact of the research (especially given that some theses can have a huge impact on what are relatively small, specific Indigenous populations)

**Possible Strategies**

The School of Indigenous Studies has applied to the University Strategy Fund to investigate the development of future postgraduate opportunities for Indigenous people at UWA.

*If this application is successful the following will be addressed:*
- What preliminary preparation do Indigenous students wanting to engage in Higher Degrees by research need?
- What types of support are required?
- What are the best options for postgraduate pathways for Indigenous students?
- What are the gaps in the market?
• Can a specialist niche be developed in the Indigenous postgraduate area within the School of Indigenous Studies?
• Should a summer school similar to what is currently offered in partnership by the Academy of Social Sciences of Australia and the Australian Indigenous Studies program at Melbourne University be established?
• Is there flexibility within the University, within its alternative qualifications entry criteria to give appropriate recognition to Indigenous Knowledge?
• Identifying what Scholarships are currently offered that Indigenous Students can access, and determining if Indigenous-only Scholarships can be provided for Indigenous postgraduate students. Currently the University has one scholarship designated for Indigenous people.
• Proactively identifying ways in which the School can/should facilitate and maximise timely completions of Indigenous postgraduate research students.
• Examining the issue of supervision both academic and cultural – the latter would mean identifying if the University can/will recognise external Indigenous Supervisors when appropriate for a students' research.
• Identifying how the School should prepare itself to build its supervisory capacity. What professional development is required for current staff? What are the financial implications for the School if it does not have the internal capacity to supervisor?
• Identifying and articulating appropriate research protocols, particularly for non-Indigenous researchers that will guide postgraduate student research projects.
• Examining how the demographics of the Indigenous population may impact on the type of postgraduate program being offered, and the type and nature of support given to postgraduate students. Generally the Indigenous people who currently undertake postgraduate studies are mature-aged students, usually more females engage in higher education than do males, and most all have families that they care for and support financially.