

# Naming Convention Guidelines for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples

## Section 1 - Purpose

(1) This document establishes a clear, respectful and consistent approach to naming and referring to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and communities within all communications and documentation at the university produced by ACU students and staff members. It connects to a suite of documents regarding Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples under the guidance and authority of the Office of the Pro Vice-Chancellor (Indigenous), including the Towards 2033 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Plan, the [Vision 2033](#) Plan, the Indigenous Cultural and Intellectual Property Protocol, and the Cultural Responsiveness Framework.

## Section 2 - Principles

- Uphold respect for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples' self-determination and cultural identity.
- Avoid the use of acronyms (eg 'ATSI') and derogatory or outdated terms.
- Promote accuracy, dignity and cultural safety in naming practices.
- Ensure consistency across academic, administrative and public-facing materials.

## Section 3 - Background

(2) For years, there has been an ad hoc approach within the university regarding the naming of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in numerous pieces of documentation, webpages and in-house teaching presentations and materials. ACU currently does not have a nomenclature or standard naming convention in place to guide the university community when referencing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in written or verbal form.

(3) While the term 'Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander' is often referenced, at times the problematic use of the acronym ATSI has been used instead – often with the justification of minimising space and time. The term 'First Peoples' has been predominately used in the naming of the First Peoples Directorate; however, this term has not been proactively used in other spaces across the institution and appears to be used almost specifically for this purpose. Other terms such as 'First Nations' and 'Indigenous' have been used intermittently as well. This confusion with language is a uniquely specific issue within ACU due to its campus footprint nationally.

## Section 4 - Aims and Objectives

(4) ACU aims to produce a clear and concise set of nomenclature guidelines around naming and referring to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and communities. This is to be used as a directive and policy framework, supporting all staff, students and visitors to the university, and providing both an educative stance that aligns with our mission and values as well as a strategic document to add to a suite of developing works under the Office of the Pro Vice-Chancellor (Indigenous) and the broader university community, including the Towards 2033 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander plan.

## Section 5 - Consultation

(5) Previous work has been undertaken within this area to build an understanding from various stakeholders as to what is expected of the university. This includes the work of Aunty Dr Doseena Fergie and a small team of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employees working on an informal audit of the webpage usage of the term 'ATSI', which began in 2018. In 2021, differing communities – including Indigenous and non-Indigenous staff and student representatives, and external Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community organisations – aligned to ACU's campus footprint were consulted as part of other work regarding engagement (consultation) to develop an ACU Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Values and Principles Statement. A component of this consultation related to the nomenclature regarding Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander peoples.

(6) In 2023, the First Peoples Learning and Teaching Event coordinated by Dr Jess Russ-Smith, Academic Developer (First Peoples Curriculum) and Centre for Education and Innovation, and run by ACU's First Peoples Directorate, held an exhaustive consultation. It was undertaken with specific aims, including:

- a. Summarise the key discussions and themes that arose from the inaugural First Peoples' Learning and Teaching Event 2023;
- b. Assess First Peoples curriculum at ACU to understand where it is supported and where it can be strengthened; and
- c. Identify key recommendations to support the university and staff in this work to better support both Indigenous and non-Indigenous students.

(7) A report, written in 2024, summarised some key points:

- a. Develop ACU's foremost First Nations pedagogical and curriculum framework that is culturally informed and enhances ACU's teaching and learning policies and educational experiences;
- b. Create a comprehensive First Nations nomenclature to establish a language guide for the entire ACU community, fostering respect and inclusivity by promoting the use of culturally sensitive language;
- c. Conduct a comprehensive review of First Nations staff representation on key governance committees to ensure decision-making is inclusive of First Nations perspectives;
- d. Examine and strengthen professional development and promotional support for First Nations staff to contribute meaningfully to First Nations learning and teaching initiatives for all students;
- e. Strengthen internal funding streams and resources for First Peoples learning and teaching to ensure long-term sustainability of First Nations curriculum initiatives; and
- f. Develop clear objectives and delegations of responsibility regarding First Peoples learning and teaching to support First Nations leadership and prevent disproportionate workload for First Nations staff.

(8) With the establishment of the Office of the Pro Vice-Chancellor role in 2024, an opportunity arose to solidify these previous ideas and documents into a stronger, more concise package that affirms and outlines various directions with regards to Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander peoples, communities and organisations that may interact with the university.

(9) The work of establishing a nomenclature to be used as a culturally inclusive and respectful language guide is ongoing and may require, in time, some adaptability. Therefore, this framework will need to be revisited throughout ACU's life to ensure both academic integrity and rigour, as well as cultural engagement with external stakeholders. Groups such as the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Committee (ATSIEC) and the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Research Committee (ATSIRC) should be included in future consultation, and student, partner and staff consultation sessions should be run across ACU campuses to conclude the consultation.

## Investigation

(10) Investigating what is used elsewhere and throughout government agencies has been part of the ongoing discussion around nomenclature. Below is a list of what is used as an initial guide.

Government	Source material
Queensland Government	<a href="#">Glossary of First Nations terms</a> *Specific resources/comprehensive
New South Wales Government	<a href="#">Learn culture, terminology and Languages</a> *Diverts to the external website of Deakin University
Victoria Government	The Victoria Government references the Australian Government Style Guide
Australian Capital Territory Government	The ACT Government references the Australian Government Style Guide
Australian Government	<a href="#">Australian Government Style Guide</a> *Specific resources/comprehensive

## Section 6 - Preferred Terminology

### Part A - Individual Identification

Use specific cultural identity where it is known and relevant.

Example

“A Worimi person”, “a Yorta Yorta woman” or “a Bundjalung Elder”.

Always capitalise group names.

### Group Identification

When referring to more than one individual or a general population:

- Use “Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander peoples”;
- The phrase “First Nations peoples” is also acceptable when contextually appropriate; and
- The word “Indigenous” may be used only when part of a formal title or preferred by an individual or community.

### Part B - Colloquial or Community Terms

(11) Terms such as “Blak”, “Deadly” or “Mob” may be used in informal communications, social media or community contexts – where their usage is led or supported by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff, students or stakeholders.

## Section 7 - Naming Convention Framework

(12) Below is our respectful naming hierarchy for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

Level	Usage example	Notes
Specific tribal/cultural group	A Worimi person A Warlpiri Elder	Always preferred when identity is known and relevant.

Level	Usage example	Notes
Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander	Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander peoples	Use when referencing plural groups or general identity.
First Nations/First peoples	First Nations peoples of Australia	Acceptable in formal writing, speeches and academic contexts.
Indigenous and non-Indigenous (conditional)	Indigenous higher education policy	Use only when contextually or institutionally required.
Colloquial (community-led)	Blak arts collective Deadly stories Aunt/Aunty/Unc/Uncle/Brother/Sister/Sib	Use when community-led, informal or culturally endorsed.

## Section 8 - Implementation

(13) All university departments must adopt these naming conventions in official documents, websites, policies and promotional materials. An institution-wide implementation plan is a necessity regarding these guidelines, with information sessions and/or online resources made available to staff and students. These guidelines should also be embedded within induction and cultural awareness training within the university.

(14) It is the responsibility of staff within all ACU faculties and departments to investigate what terms have been used to name Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander peoples in the past and amend any documentation that uses derogatory or incorrect terminology. Audits may be undertaken to assess appropriateness in the future.

(15) As a staff member, you are encouraged to ask individuals you encounter in your work how they wish to identify, particularly in personal or formal introductions.

(16) Ongoing cultural competency training will support adherence and understanding.

## Section 9 - Review

(17) This convention will be reviewed annually in consultation with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff and community partners. Reputable sources for Indigenous terminology in Australia

- [Narragunnawali Terminology Guide](#) – Provides guidance on using respectful and inclusive language when referring to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.
- [Australian Indigenous HealthInfoNet Guidelines](#) – Offers terminology recommendations to ensure culturally appropriate language in health and community settings.
- AIATSIS Guides and Resources – [Frequently asked questions](#) – A collection of research materials and resources related to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures, histories and languages.
- ACU Centre for Education and Innovation – [Teaching in the ACU Context](#) – Information on supporting diverse cohorts of students throughout their learning journey.

## Status and Details

<b>Status</b>	Current
<b>Effective Date</b>	20th May 2026
<b>Review Date</b>	20th May 2031
<b>Approval Authority</b>	University Learning and Teaching Committee
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<b>Responsible Executive</b>	Kelly Humphrey Pro Vice-Chancellor (Indigenous)
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