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Racism continues on campuses

Despite unambiguous university policies to the contrary, indigenous academic and professional staff continue to experience direct discrimination and racist attitudes. In fact, more than 70 per cent do.

That's the main finding from a recent survey by the National Tertiary Education Union (NTEU). The results, released last week, show that for those indigenous people who experienced the discrimination, less than 20 per cent said their university employer had positively addressed it. "Our report is timely given the federal government's review of higher education access and outcomes for indigenous people," said the chair of the NTEU's indigenous policy committee, Jillian Miller.

"Less than 1 per cent of university staff is indigenous, well down from the population parity figure of 2.5 per cent. Policies aimed at increasing indigenous participation, no matter how well intentioned, will not work unless steps are also taken to tackle racial discrimination." The survey also found about 60 per cent of indigenous staff had experienced "lateral violence" in the workplace — that is, harmful and undermining actions by other indigenous employees, thought to occur because of marginalisation.

"Racial discrimination, including incidents of lateral violence between indigenous staff, is of great concern because it undermines the ability of indigenous academic and professional staff to do their job and has an impact on the ability of institutions to retain qualified indigenous staff," Miller said. The survey was conducted between March and August. The resulting 36-page report, *I'm not a racist, but ...*, states the majority of non-indigenous university staff and students are not racist and do not hold prejudices towards Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

A corresponding survey also delved into the anti-racism, anti-discrimination and equal opportunity policies and procedures in the nation's 38 public universities. All were found to have adopted such policies, with many implementing stand-alone policies, and about 70 per cent of universities had also employed equal opportunity employment officers. The NTEU said a national research project on lateral violence, possibly involving Universities Australia and the Australian Research Council, would be among its next steps to counter racism and discrimination within universities. The full report can be downloaded from the NTEU's website.

In related news, Medical Deans Australia and New Zealand has renewed its commitment to improving indigenous health by signing an agreement with the Te Ohu Rata O Aotearoa Maori Medical Practitioners Association of Aotearoa.

Building on a 2005 agreement with the Australian Indigenous Doctors Association, the agreement was signed at an international education conference in Auckland last week. Professor Justin Beilby, president of Medical Deans Australia and New Zealand, told CR the deals represented long-term commitments by Australia's 18 university medical schools and two New Zealand schools.

"This is about the future, the partnership building as we go forward, in a sense of building momentum around indigenous training and indigenous involvement in our medical schools," said Beilby, who is executive dean of health sciences at the University of Adelaide.

The most significant advancement in Australia had been the introduction of a national indigenous health curriculum into all medical training, he said. And the peak body was increasingly focused on developing new pathways to attract more indigenous students into that training. "We're just getting to the cusp of indigenous students who are graduating and moving into new career pathways and specialist pathways," Beilby said.

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