

---

# education policy analysis archives

A peer-reviewed, independent,  
open access, multilingual journal



Arizona State University

---

Volume 34 Number 52

June 2, 2026

ISSN 1068-2341

---

## Cultural Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion for Academic Tertiary Staff<sup>1</sup>

*Amanda Baker*

*Erika Matruglio*



*Noelene Weatherby-Fell*

University of Wollongong  
Australia

**Citation:** Baker, A., Matruglio, E., & Weatherby-Fell, N. (2026). Cultural equity, diversity, and inclusion for academic tertiary staff. *Education Policy Analysis Archives*, 34(52).  
<https://doi.org/10.14507/epaa.34.9273>

**Abstract:** With the growing internationalisation of education, there is an ever-increasing need to embrace cultural equity, diversity, and inclusion (EDI) in Australian tertiary education and worldwide. While much research has focused on students' experiences in the higher education context, less is known of the experiences of academic staff. The purpose of this data-driven, qualitative study was to explore the strengths and barriers to cultural EDI at one Australian university. Interviews with academic staff from across the university who identify as belonging to one or more cultural groups (e.g., Australian Aboriginal, Australian Caucasian, Australian Caucasian "no cultural background," Asian, Middle Eastern, etc.) provided rich data on both the positive and negative attributes of cultural EDI-related practices at the university, including their recommendations on how to improve in this area. This study highlights the need for further research into cultural EDI from a broader perspective (not limiting to just one cultural group), a

---

<sup>1</sup> This work was funded by the University of Wollongong's Vice-Chancellor's Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Transformational Fund.

need to further explore the genuine strengths that universities already possess in the cultural EDI area, and a need for more in-depth explorations of the barriers to cultural EDI. Based on study findings, several recommendations are made for universities seeking to enhance cultural EDI in their respective institutions.

**Keywords:** culture; equity; diversity; inclusion; academic staff

### **Equidad, diversidad, e inclusión cultural para el personal docente de educación superior**

**Resumen:** Con la creciente internacionalización de la educación, hay una necesidad cada vez mayor de incorporar equidad, diversidad, e inclusión (EDI) culturales en el entorno educativo universitario en Australia y en países de todo el mundo. Las investigaciones sobre EDI se suelen centrar en las experiencias de los estudiantes de educación superior, ignorando las experiencias del personal docente. Este estudio cualitativo pretende explorar las fortalezas y barreras para la EDI cultural en una universidad australiana. Unas entrevistas con personal docente de dicha universidad que se identificaban como pertenecientes a uno o más grupos culturales (por ejemplo, aborígenes australianos, asiáticos) proporcionaron datos valiosos sobre los atributos positivos y negativos de las prácticas relacionadas con la EDI cultural en la universidad; los entrevistados también ofrecieron sugerencias para su mejora. Este estudio subraya la necesidad de investigar prácticas de EDI cultural más a fondo desde una perspectiva más amplia, más allá de un solo grupo cultural; también se subraya la necesidad de explorar las fortalezas que poseen las universidades en este ámbito y las barreras que limitan la EDI cultural. Los hallazgos de este estudio se utilizan para desarrollar recomendaciones para que las universidades puedan mejorar la DEI cultural en su entorno particular.

**Palabras-clave:** cultura; equidad; diversidad; inclusión; personal docente

### **Equidade, diversidade, e inclusão cultural para o corpo docente do ensino superior**

**Resumo:** Com a crescente internacionalização da educação, verifica-se uma necessidade cada vez maior de abraçar a equidade, diversidade, e inclusão (EDI) cultural no ensino superior australiano e em todo o mundo. Embora grande parte da investigação se tenha focado nas experiências dos estudantes no contexto do ensino superior, as experiências do corpo docente permanecem menos exploradas. O objetivo deste estudo qualitativo, baseado em dados, foi analisar os pontos fortes e as barreiras à EDI cultural numa universidade australiana. Entrevistas realizadas com docentes de toda a universidade, que se identificam como pertencentes a um ou mais grupos culturais (por exemplo: aborígenes australianos, caucasianos australianos, caucasianos australianos "sem antecedentes culturais", asiáticos, do Médio Oriente, etc.), forneceram dados detalhados sobre os atributos positivos e negativos das práticas relacionadas com a EDI cultural na instituição, incluindo recomendações sobre como melhorar nesta área. Este estudo destaca a necessidade de investigação adicional sobre a EDI cultural a partir de uma perspetiva mais ampla — não se limitando a apenas um grupo cultural —, a necessidade de explorar os pontos fortes genuínos que as universidades já possuem e a necessidade de análises mais aprofundadas sobre as barreiras existentes. Com base nas conclusões, são apresentadas várias recomendações para universidades que procurem reforçar a EDI cultural nas suas respetivas instituições.

**Palavras-chave:** cultura; equidade; diversidade; inclusão; corpo docente

## Cultural Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion for Academic Tertiary Staff

The internationalisation of education provides both opportunities and dilemmas in higher education. To effectively welcome and retain a broad student population, staff diversity is imperative. Attracting and retaining quality diverse staff is impossible, however, if appropriate support, such as instilling a sense of belonging based on respect, is not provided. Universities worldwide increasingly advertise their commitment to practices related to equity, diversity, and inclusion (EDI); however, to date, little is known about the lived experiences of individuals seen through the lens of culture.

As EDI is such a broad area, this paper limits its focus to culture-specific issues. It explores both the strengths and barriers to achieving *cultural* EDI at an Australian university. Broadly, culture can be viewed inclusively as the “values, customs, beliefs and symbolic practices” by which people live (Eagleton, 2016, p. 1). This may also encompass diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds, for example, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, people who speak English as an Additional Language/Dialect, people from international heritages, and Caucasian Australians.

While much research has focused on students’ experiences in the higher education context, less is known of the experiences of academic staff, that is staff who have a lecturing and/or research role at the university<sup>2</sup>. Before commencing the research reported in this paper, only limited attention had been given to culture-specific issues at the university and there were limited data on workforce cultural diversity. The university’s 2021 Annual Report reported on two groups: academic staff identifying as either Aboriginal (1.1%) or speaking a first language other than English (29%). To address the gap in institutional understanding of cultural-EDI issues, three research questions were investigated:

1. What do academic staff view as the cultural EDI strengths of the university?
2. What do academic staff view as the barriers to achieving cultural EDI at the university?
3. What recommendations do academic staff have for enhancing cultural EDI at the university?

In the following sections, we situate our study with regards to relevant literature before outlining our methodology. We then provide findings, beginning with the supports to cultural EDI, followed by barriers and participants’ recommendations for improving cultural EDI. The final two sections include discussion of the findings and their implications and our own suggestions for enhancing the cultural EDI space.

### Literature Review

The themes explored in this paper intersect with multiple fields, including but not limited to sociology, policy studies, higher education, academic identity, and language teacher identity. These fields draw on multiple theoretical backgrounds, including social constructionist theories such as poststructural theory, critical social realist theory, feminist theory and other eclectic sociological

---

<sup>2</sup> In Australian universities, staff with lecturing and or research roles are employed as ‘academic’ staff and must hold graduate qualifications. Staff with administrative roles are employed as ‘professional’ staff and do not require graduate qualifications. Wage rates, entitlements and conditions are generally different for these two groups of staff.

theories. It is not possible in the space available to give a thorough account of previous research in all these fields. Instead, because this is a data-driven study, we explore the contribution of previous research to the issues arising in our study. We unpack these issues in detail in the findings section; however, in order to contextualise the following literature review, we summarise our research themes broadly as positive reactions to the presence of culturally diverse and or/aware students and staff, and negative reactions to tokenism, limited opportunities for advancement, institutionalised racism, and feelings of lack of belonging. We begin by situating our study as intersecting with a section of the research on identity before considering research directly associated with our research themes.

### **EDI and Identity**

Our research asked participants to discuss their cultural backgrounds and the impacts these had on them in their working environment. As such, it explores an aspect of their identity. This is because identities “develop at the meeting-point of cultures and social practices” (Varghese et al., 2005, p. 24). In our context, several cultures and social practices meet: the cultures of the individual participants, the broader culture of the academy, the social practices in the workplace, and the broader society in which the university is situated. Research into identity is therefore pertinent to this study.

There has been a call for more research into academic identity from different research paradigms, with most of the extant research originating in sociology (Barrow et al., 2022). Another limitation with the current research is the large number of studies including researchers and research participants from the same disciplinary background, which can limit the epistemological scope of understandings of identity (Barrow et al., 2022; Varghese et al., 2005). This present study attempts to address this imbalance, interviewing academics across multiple fields, employing an interdisciplinary research team. Literature is also unevenly distributed across social and cultural groups. International literature often concerns relations of colour (Acker et al., 2012; Arday 2020; Sadiq et al., 2019), and literature from Australia is largely concerned with Indigenous equity (Hollinsworth, 2017; Povey et al., 2023). The literature on language teacher identity (e.g., Burri et al., 2017; Barkhuizen, 2019) is the most diverse across different cultural groups, dealing as it often does with teachers and academics who speak a first language that is not dominant in the culture within which they work. However, there is a need, especially in Australia, to improve our understanding of a broad range of cultures and identities in universities.

Many social theories understand identity to include identity-in-practice, an individual’s practices with regards to a particular social group with which they either may or may not identify (Toomey et al., 2013; Varghese, 2005). The themes in our research resonate with this concept. The EDI strengths and weaknesses raised by our participants can be summarised as involving some degree of tension or harmony between the individual and the social grouping (Barkhuizen, 2016). Throughout the literature dealing with aspects of cultural diversity, a repeated theme was that identity became more of an issue when belonging was in question (Barrow et al., 2022) and when institutional settings appeared to conflict with individuals’ own senses of self (Varghese et al., 2005).

### **Cultural Diversity**

Much of the literature on identity and EDI-related issues is motivated by difficulties, problems, or tensions. Less literature exists directly reporting on EDI strengths in Australian universities. Some researchers contend that Australian society in general is broadly able to embrace difference, including cultural difference (Patel & Govin, 2021). Furthermore, cultural diversity in the tertiary student population is perceived as positive, reflecting the increasing diversity of society at large (Vos et al., 2015). This student diversity requires an increase in diversity of staff to meet

student needs (Arday, 2020; Vos et al., 2015). However, many of the positive outcomes with regard to cultural EDI in the literature directly result from negative aspects which form the focus of the papers. In many cases this involves stories of individual resilience in the face of inequalities (Patel, 2021a) or reforms of systems such as academic promotions (Sadiq et al., 2019). By and large the inequalities and the negative outcomes of diversity in the tertiary sector receive far more attention in the literature and also in our own data.

### **Tokenism**

One recurring complaint in the literature on diversity is tokenism regarding cultural EDI (Hollinsworth et al., 2017; Povey et al., 2023; Tamtik & Guenter, 2019). EDI initiatives can be perceived as virtue signalling, lacking authentic engagement and true impact, a kind of “trickle down empathy economy” (Povey et al., 2023, p. 366). EDI policies may positively impact a university’s public image but create an “echo chamber of little impact” (Ezell, 2021, p. 4 cited in Povey et al., 2023) in terms of real institutional change. Speaking of Indigenous cultural competence, Hollinsworth and colleagues (2017) suggest that the depth and breadth of transformation needed to make a serious difference is underestimated by university leadership. This could fuel perceptions of tokenism if EDI initiatives seem to be tinkering around the edges rather than effecting deep, lasting change. In addition, an “institutional rhetoric of equity and parity” (Povey et al., 2023, p. 365) can conflict with an actual lack of diversity in both leadership and academia generally (Patel, 2021c). This can increase a perception of tokenism, with some researchers suggesting that a “highly exclusive and masculine collective academic identity [...] endangers efforts to increase the diversity of the academic population” (Cidlinska et al., 2022, p. 153). Individuals can experience significant clashes between their own values and those of the leadership, which appears driven by a culture of managerialism and governance based on market principles (Acker & Webber, 2016; Barrow et al., 2022) rather than a strong commitment to effecting lasting cultural change.

### **Limited Opportunities for Advancement**

Literature also addresses the problem of limited culturally appropriate mentorship and limited prospects for advancement (Garrett et al., 2023). Internationally, career advancement has been strongly linked to gender and race (Acker et al., 2012; Sadiq et al., 2019). In Australia, Povey and colleagues (2023) discuss at length how the career trajectories of Indigenous early career researchers (ECR) are impacted negatively by racism in Australian universities. They detail how Indigenous ECRs must contend with gatekeeping resulting from racialised systems and structures. In order to advance, Indigenous ECRs must fulfil research-active criteria based on publication history in White journals (Povey et al., 2023; Sadiq et al., 2019) while also contending with a lack of cultural understanding and with Whiteness, a “set of assumptions, beliefs and practices that place the interests of white people at the centre of what is considered normal” (Gilborn, 2015, p. 278, in Povey et al., 2023). While Indigenous participation figures in academic jobs remain below population parity, 1.7% compared to population parity of 3.1% (Universities Australia, 2020), Indigenous academics will continue to find access to culturally appropriate mentoring and career advancement difficult.

### **Institutionalised Racism**

The lack of advancement opportunities is only one visible aspect of the unconscious or institutionalised racism experienced by many culturally diverse academics (Hollinsworth et al., 2017; Povey et al., 2023; Varghese et al., 2005). Seventy-five percent of Indigenous staff in Australian universities reported experiences of workplace racism (Povey et al., 2023) while, worldwide, staff

from non-majority language backgrounds report professional and social marginalisation (Acker & Webber, 2016; Arday, 2020; Varghese et al., 2005). Repeatedly, researchers call for an understanding of racism as a *structural, collective, and systemic* issue rather than an *individual* issue if we are to make progress in making workplaces safer (Patel, 2021b; Povey et al., 2023). This is important because there is “an asymmetrical interaction between agency and structure” (Barrow et al., 2022, p. 241) and power and agency are unequally distributed (Varghese et al., 2005). Despite the existence, since 2011, of the national Best Practice Framework for Indigenous Cultural Competency in Australian Universities, Indigenous Cultural Competence (ICC) is still superficial (Hollinsworth et al., 2017) and deep issues to do with power, agency, and privilege must be dealt with to address the structural and institutionalised racism experienced by many culturally diverse academics (Hollinsworth et al., 2017; Povey et al., 2023; Varghese et al., 2005).

One impediment to developing EDI is the apparent invisibility of privilege. The academy seems to reward the ‘ideal academic’ (Cidlinska et al., 2023; Thornton, 2013) who is “Anglo-Australian, heterosexual, able-bodied, middle class, not elderly [and espouses] a right of centre politics and a nominal mainstream religion” (Thornton, 2013, p. 128). Apparent inclusive practices can add to the burden people from diverse backgrounds experience, for example when they are expected to perform duties corresponding to their cultural backgrounds (Barkhuizen, 2016; Gordon et al., 2024). The expectations of others may unintentionally lead to conflicts between people’s *claimed identity* (how they understand their own identity) and their *assigned identity* imposed upon them by others (Varghese et al., 2005). Additionally, people from mainstream social groups may feel underconfident in their own cultural competence (Hollinsworth et al., 2017) because cross-cultural awareness programs can be superficial (Patel & Govin, 2021). Cultural competence is a continuum of mastery across components of knowledge, attitudes and skills and continual development opportunities are often necessary to help staff gain expertise and confidence in culturally safe practices (Hollinsworth et al., 2017).

### **Lack of Belonging**

The tensions culturally diverse individuals may feel between their claimed and assigned identity, and the tension they may feel between the self and the group identity (Barkhuizen, 2016) can lead to a lack of belonging (Cidlinska et al., 2022; Toomey et al., 2013) and a sense of otherness due to language, race or culture (Varghese et al., 2005). The failure to recognise diversity *within* groups, that is, seeing people from a particular cultural or language background as homogenous when the group is internally diverse or hybrid, can intensify the othering felt (Hollinsworth et al., 2017). Sites of struggle emerge when there is a perceived tension between the values of individuals and the organisations within which they work, and belonging, identity, and engagement are challenged in such circumstances (Barrow et al., 2022; Patel, 2021c). This can lead to academic career attrition, disproportionately affecting women and ECRs (Cidlinska et al., 2023).

### **Methodology**

A qualitative research study was employed to investigate the three main research questions of this study. A semi-structured interview protocol was developed to investigate these three questions and related data. This paper will focus solely on the data relevant to these main research questions.

## **Interview Protocol**

Individual Zoom interviews were chosen to better accommodate the schedules of busy academics, many of whom frequently work from home. We, the three co-authors of this paper, are no different, living more than an hour from campus, and thus work primarily from home. Therefore, conducting interviews via Zoom was deemed most convenient for participants despite potential disadvantages of such interviews (see Anthony et al., 2025, for further discussion). In addition, as highlighted by our university's ethics committee, the topic of cultural EDI might be considered extremely sensitive by some individuals, and thus we chose to conduct one-on-one interviews instead of focus group interviews. This decision would enable participants to more easily retract any potentially sensitive statements they might make during the interviews when given the opportunity to review the transcript afterwards as only the interviewee and interviewer (a research assistant) would have access to this information.

The interview protocol was initially drafted based on a literature review and the authors' expertise. A cultural advisory group of seven academics identifying with one or more of Aboriginal heritage, English as an additional language, and international heritage provided advice on the interview questions leading to finetuning. The appendix provides the full interview schedule, but this paper focuses specifically on barriers to and supports for cultural EDI and recommendations for improvement. The study was approved by the university's research ethics committee. Each interview lasted approximately one hour and was transcribed verbatim using Otter.ai. The accuracy of the transcripts was verified by the research assistant.

## **Participants**

As the university has 25,000+ students and 1000+ academic staff across four faculties, we hoped to recruit up to 60 academics from across all four of the university's faculties through the university's internal newsletter and peer contacts. Grant funding enabled us to pay a research assistant to conduct up to 60 interviews. However, recruitment proved to be challenging. Few academic staff chose to participate and volunteers tended to be early-to-mid-career academics. Only one, a professor, was above the level of senior lecturer. Additionally, most participants were from the same faculty. We issued a call for participants three times in the university's internal newsletter, requested all Heads of School and Associate Deans of EDI forward our invitation to their academic staff to gather more participants but with limited success. Some potential participants suggested they would be more likely to participate anonymously via an online questionnaire; however, we felt we would gather richer data through interviews. Ultimately, a total of 14 academics were interviewed, but one withdrew shortly thereafter (for reasons outlined below). The final 13 participants came from three of the four university faculties, representing five schools. They self-identified as indicated in Table 1. These self-identifications are not limited to ethnicity but may also include the culture in which a person lives or has lived and identifies with. They represent the terms used by the participants themselves, but to ensure anonymity, sometimes a broader region (e.g., European) as opposed to a specific country is used.

During the interviews, several participants became emotional and many shared distressing experiences. The original 14<sup>th</sup> participant became deeply distressed during the interview and withdrew from the study. They expressed concern as to whether they would be identifiable and did not want to leave the university on a sour note when, prior to their experiences over the last year, they had generally enjoyed their work. Another treated our interview as an exit interview. One participant stated, "I don't know if you knew that all of these cans of worms lay ahead of you" (Participant 1B).

**Table 1***Participant Details*

<b>Category</b>	<b>Details</b>
Gender	Female: 7 Male: 6
Age Range	32-50
Cultural Backgrounds	Aboriginal: 2 Asia: 3 Australian: 3 Australian – “No cultural background”: 1 European: 6 Latin/South American: 1 Middle Eastern: 1 Multi-cultural “not very deep roots into one nationality/culture”: 1 New Zealander: 1 North American: 1 White: 2

*Note:* Regarding cultural backgrounds, participants self-identified one or more of the qualities listed in the adjacent column as how they viewed their respective cultural background.

**Researchers**

The three authors are strongly driven to promote positive and empathetic-oriented outcomes in education. Author 1 (Caucasian Canadian) and Author 2 (Caucasian Australian) are experts in issues related to cultural diversity as specialists in Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages. Both have either lived or worked overseas (Author 1: Japan, China, Canada, USA; Author 2: Indonesia, Germany). Author 3 (Caucasian Australian) is an expert in initial teacher education and teacher resiliency. All three authors are well published in our respective fields and well known in local, national, and international communities as advocates for culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) peoples, of social justice, and of mental health-related initiatives (e.g., Baker, 2025; Matruglio, 2021; Weatherby-Fell et al., 2021). For participants who may know us personally or know of our work, they would likely feel safe participating in this project. Alternatively, as mentioned by some participants, they might feel strongly about advocating for those who are in vulnerable situations and passing on “critical remarks” on their behalf. Finally, it’s important to note that, in relation to this project, we understand that our professional and personal experiences and knowledge may impact how we perceive the research data and consequently may influence or limit the types of analyses and interpretations that we draw from the data especially given the diversity of cultural identities represented in this project.

**Data Analysis**

The first author conducted initial data coding, focusing on excerpts relating to the three research questions, following the work of Miles and Huberman (1994) who note that initial themes or “start list of codes” may derive from the list of research questions. A thematic analysis was then employed, following the guidance of Boyatziz (1998) who describes thematic analyses as

the process for encoding qualitative information. The encoding requires an explicit ‘code.’ This may be a list of themes; a complex model with themes, indicators, and qualifications that are causally related; or something in between these two forms. A theme is a pattern found in the information that at minimum describes and organizes the possible observations and at maximum interprets aspects of the phenomenon. (p. 4)

Although the initial data coding was conducted by the first author; the process was highly collaborative with the other two co-authors. Specifically, over the course of a year, we met together for four weekends as a part of a series of writing retreats where we individually read and re-read the interview transcripts, each focusing on different aspects of a larger project. For this paper on strengths/barriers, the first author identified the initial codes. For example, for the finalised theme “culturally diverse or minded students” (a strength), four codes were identified as follows: Culturally diverse student population (Participants 1F & 1H); Respectful and/or inclusive-minded students (Participants 1C & 1G); Cultural clubs (Participant 1H); Students interested in Aboriginal culture (Participant 1A). These codes were developed based on relevant participant quotes from the interview transcripts and then reviewed and discussed by all three authors. Codes were then subsumed under themes that were initially suggested by the first author and further fine-tuned through subsequent discussions as a whole team. Some minor modifications were made to the themes based on these conversations. Following the thematic analysis, we identified three main themes relating to the first research question, five for the second, and five for the third research question.

## Findings

The following findings are the result of a data-driven thematic analysis of the interview data, focusing specifically on the three research questions. The most dominant themes are presented along with the number of participants who made statements relevant to each. The number of participants for each theme is provided to ensure greater transparency of the prominence of each theme, in consideration of the small number of participants involved in the study.

### Strengths – Cultural EDI

In relation to the Cultural EDI strengths at the university, there are three main themes. Each is unpacked and discussed below.

#### *Culturally/Linguistically Diverse or Informed Staff in Specific Units*

This first theme celebrates the cultural awareness and diversity of specific units or schools at the university that are recognised to be genuinely culturally inclusive (8 participants). In these spaces, there is a sense that staff felt valued for their diversity and what such diversity could add to the collective whole. Evidence of this sentiment can be derived from how participants focused on non-tokenistic numbers of CALD staff and supportive colleagues and shared experiences and/or backgrounds. In particular, five participants highlighted that their schools and/or units embraced culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) staff. This assessment was, from their perspective, based on strong, actual numbers in their units as opposed to tokenism or quotas, that is, where there was a genuine mix of CALD and non-CALD staff instead of a token one or two CALD members of staff. Participant 1G, for example, explained that “The diversity in the staff and the students is a really good place to start. [...] Having that diversity in numbers is important. [...] like actual numbers [...], they're not arbitrary, [the numbers] actually make a difference.” Having such strong numbers

subsequently contributes to a feeling of belonging to an inclusive space within which shared experiences exist. For those seven participants in such a space, they highlighted the strength of supportive and inclusive-minded colleagues within their School or smaller unit. Participants noted the importance of shared experiences such as the “struggles [experienced] having lived overseas” (Participant 1H) or having a Head of School who was proactive in promoting a culturally inclusive space, working alongside CALD staff. Participant 1E explained that their “Head of School understands that [they] will never live our experience [but...they] will make sure that Aboriginal people are authentically involved [...] and that no one else is speaking on behalf of us.” This data demonstrates the power of having colleagues who are actively invested in creating a culturally inclusive space, as achieved through a combination of both substantial numbers of CALD staff and culturally aware and proactive non-CALD staff who are working to create such a space. Overall, this genuine combination of CALD and non-CALD academic staff who are culturally aware, informed and supportive of each other are one of the main cultural EDI strengths of the university.

### ***Leadership Promoting EDI***

The second strength highlighted by participants was a leadership promoting EDI (6 participants). Throughout the interviews, participants frequently pointed to university leadership as having a significant impact on the degree to which they felt (or not) a sense of belonging or being valued by the university. Leadership clearly has a strong impact on cultural EDI practices at the university as it can open or close doors in this space depending on whether or not they promote or feed more university resources into this area. To this point, as a university strength articulated by some, three participants valued a new university executive leader who strongly emphasised EDI. For example, Participant 1A noted, “I think the new VC's approach to social justice, equity, and inclusion is probably the biggest strength that we have.” Participants were positive about senior leadership using inclusive messaging expressing a desire to have a university that was culturally diverse and inclusive (2 participants) and “accepting all cultures” (Participant 1L). This positive attitude toward cultivating cultural EDI at the university was a notable strength of executive leadership, at least for these participants.

While having a positive attitude toward cultural EDI is a strength, action to achieve this is equally important. In the interviews, participants accredited several initiatives to such supportive leadership, such as greater dialoguing about EDI and EDI committee creation as a first step, including EDI advocates within schools (2 participants) as well as working more closely and authentically with the Indigenous Centre on campus and including Aboriginal language and artwork (1 participant). Participant 1E felt that “the university is working much more closer and authentically with the Indigenous Centre. [In the past], when we had [Executive X], we were told to remain in our box. [...] At the moment, there's a little bit of hope.” Such strong advocacy for and implementation of EDI initiatives by current university leaders is a clear second strength of the university, signifying notable efforts to improve upon historical practices.

### ***Culturally Diverse or Minded Students***

The cultural diversity and/or mindedness of students is another strength of the university (5 participants). As the university community consists primarily of student members, it is unsurprising that they would be named as a potential strength, and it is particularly promising that they are named as a cultural EDI strength at the university. Specifically, participants noted the overall culturally diverse student population (2), and the generally respectful or inclusive-minded student body (2) to be strengths. Participant 1M reported, “I think a lot of people from wherever. Students or even staff come from different countries it's very good.” Participant 1F further stated “the extreme diversity of

the university, not only in the academic staff, but also in the student population.” The presence of cultural clubs across the university (1) and students’ interests in Aboriginal culture (1) were also discussed as having a positive impact on cultural EDI at the university. Bringing together CALD and non-CALD students, both internationally and from within Australia, and providing centres, clubs, and activities that foster opportunities for greater interaction between them, is a good starting point for making additional gains in cultural EDI into the future.

### **Barriers – Cultural EDI**

In relation to the Cultural EDI barriers at the university, there are five main themes, some of which overlap or even conflict with the strengths discussed above.

#### ***Corporatization, Cultural EDI Tokenism, and “Non-Listening” Leadership Culture***

The overarching theme that threaded throughout most interviews was the impact of the corporate business model dominating the university, tokenistic efforts to promote cultural EDI, and the overall “non-listening” culture of leadership (9 participants). A great deal of interview data focuses on aspects of this theme with many participants providing multiple examples to illustrate their viewpoints. In essence, interviewees felt that, for an institution claiming to be a place of higher learning open to diverse perspectives and values, the opposite was closer to the truth. They felt that the university had just become a business motivated primarily by profit. To illustrate these points, participants described the poor business-oriented model of the university and the focus on money-making (2 participants), which was exacerbated by a dramatic shift toward centralisation (1 participant), and a model that demonstrated a notable lack of understanding of Aboriginal ways of doings, albeit due to staff feeling overworked and fatigued and thus not having the capacity to learn something new (1 participant). Participant 1H lamented that “it’s all about the bottom line. And I think that is a real barrier, if you’re just, if you’re after the money, that overrides just any sort of anything actually. [...] It’s just a poor business model.”

Participants also highlighted the lack of listening culture at the executive leadership level (4 participants). This sentiment, in fact, runs contrary to one of the strengths discussed earlier where several participants celebrated the more supportive leadership at the university in recent years. Participant 1K argued that such a “non-listening” culture leads to the killing of innovation due to hegemonic ideas or punishing people for pursuing innovative ideas, in an effort to maintain the status quo. Along similar lines, four participants pinpointed the lack of CALD leadership. That leadership, however, was not isolated to clearly defined executive positions, but rather ranged across the entire continuum of regular academic positions. To illustrate, Participant 1E explained “We have lots of low A’s,<sup>3</sup> level B’s, few level C’s. We don’t have any of the high-level [Aboriginal] people.” There was a sense that participants felt the university was more interested in maintaining the status quo and thus only making tokenistic gestures toward achieving cultural EDI in order to maintain the illusion that cultural EDI was highly valued at the university. Participant 1K explained that the university suffers from a predominantly white Australian leadership that does not want to exert effort to understand the issues of those who come from other cultural or linguistic backgrounds. Furthermore, five participants made links between “non-listening” leadership and the notion of tokenism. Participant 1E illustrated this point, commenting that certain committees on-campus would apply for EDI-type awards for the work they did, but when people needed support in the EDI space, that support was not there. Essentially, the sentiment was that the university wanted to be seen as “doing” something, but when problems arose affecting those in the minority (e.g., CALD

---

<sup>3</sup> In Australian universities, Level A = Associate Lecturer, Level B = Lecturer, Level C = Senior Lecturer, Level D = Associate Professor, Level E = Professor.

staff), a blind eye was turned. To further illustrate, three participants talked about superficial initiatives, “box ticking”, and tokenism in terms of cultural diversity and/or Aboriginal consultations, arguing that initiatives have no deep impact because changes are never made. Such tokenism leads to staff disengagement and feeling that the leadership doesn’t care. As noted by Participant 1K, “it decreases morale.” Disengaged and demoralised staff are consequently likely to be less productive. In turn, this would impact the profits of the university which, as the participants have articulated, seems to be a driving force at this time.

### ***Limited Culturally Appropriate Mentorship and Support Leading to Limited Prospects for Advancement***

Several interrelated issues related to culture, mentorship, and advancement were also mentioned as barriers to cultural EDI, particularly in relation to excessive workload, being disadvantaged for promotion and insufficient cultural mentoring (10 participants). Each single issue has the potential to contribute to participants’ feelings that the university executive does not genuinely care about their workforce as mentioned above, and, in particular, heavy workloads appears to be a prominent subtheme. Seven participants cited excessive workloads due to cultural background. “When it comes to culture, background, you have to kill yourself, [to] show them you can do it!” (Participant 1C). Four participants discussed the necessity to work harder than their counterparts if they came from either an Aboriginal or a non-English speaking background. To illustrate, Participant 1G commented: “I feel like I actually have to try three times harder than, you know, a white woman, I have tried 10 times harder than the white man.”

This heavy workload, however, may be due to a number of reasons. There is a steep learning curve involved engaging in academia, but most especially when coming from a cultural background that is different from that of the dominant culture. Some participants noted that there was a significant learning curve needed to learn an Australian-dominated environment and additional work was needed to become accustomed to a variety of accents (e.g., Australian as well as Chinese, Indian, etc.) in the workplace. For Aboriginal participants, this workload burden appeared particularly significant. As the university advocates for more respectful and meaningful engagement with Indigenous community members but fails to notably increase the number of Aboriginal academics among university staff, there is a new and increased burden placed on these staff. Participants explained that there were insufficient Aboriginal staff to help embed Aboriginal content into curriculum (1 participant) and that there were such limited numbers of Aboriginal academics that they had higher workloads as a result. Participant 1E described their experience as serving as the “Google engine [...] for all Aboriginal questions” and receiving numerous requests for working on more committees. In essence, their CALD backgrounds equated to greater workloads than their non-CALD background counterparts.

In a similar vein, when opportunities for promotion arose, academic staff felt disadvantaged due to their CALD backgrounds (6 participants). Four commented on difficulties getting promoted due to aspects of the process working against them. Highly scoring teaching evaluations were hard to acquire if students didn’t take staff seriously and some staff reported difficulty attracting honours or higher degree research students from the local population. Participant 1 D explained: “Students don’t take us seriously. [...] I struggled to get honours students [...] And due to that [...] I lost my promotion because I didn’t have enough honours students and PhD students.” The necessity to remove their cultural way of communicating and adopt that of the dominant culture to get promoted also contributed to their feelings of being disadvantaged. Participant 1K noted how one colleague, despite obtaining more grants than the typical academic plus many of the benchmarks required for promotion to the next level, “was prevented from applying for promotion” due to his

accent, physical appearance, demeanour, and “cultural ways of doing things.” Furthermore, the sentiment of Australia’s cultural valuing of research over teaching further contributed to feelings of being disadvantaged. One participant discussed experiencing difficulties transitioning from a country where teaching is more valued in the academic context than in Australia, where more value is placed on research. Participant 1J noted, “In Australia, I’m an early career academic. Somewhere else in the world, where teaching is [...] more valuable in the academic context, I will be a mid-career researcher.”

Insufficient cultural mentoring was another main subtheme highlighted by six participants. As mentioned earlier, having the opportunity to interact with supportive colleagues with shared experiences and/or backgrounds is very important to staff. Being mentored by someone who has walked a similar path before you is invaluable in advancing individual career aspirations at a university. Participants, however, expressed that this was problematic. One specified there was insufficient mentoring available to support people to get promoted from lower levels (A, B) to higher ones (C, D, E), including Aboriginal staff. Another highlighted the need for more language support and career finding workshops for CALD staff. Two participants added that there was insufficient mentoring for Aboriginal people in general at the university and another two mentioned that mentoring that focuses specifically on culture was non-existent; and perhaps due to such lack of support, some people from culturally diverse backgrounds do not feel safe to speak up. One academic who did speak up, however, noted the futility of doing so, ultimately resigning themselves to leaving the university due to lack of cultural support. Participant 1D said:

I told an Associate Dean [...] that I've been facing struggles for the last three years, [their] first advice, [their] go-to was, maybe you should get a job somewhere else. [...] I talked about how culturally I was being suppressed. [...], they were like, we're not doing anything about this. [...] And I said, okay, that's fine. [...] I will quit.

Overall, these culture-related issues resulted in feelings that prospects for advancement or promotion were limited, leading ultimately to some, like Participant 1D, “quitting” the university as a result. This is a shame as cultural diversity was noted as one of the strengths of the university. Losing that diversity takes away from that strength.

### ***Experiencing Racism and/or Negative Stereotypes***

Personal encounters with racism and negative stereotypes on campus was a third dominant theme (7 participants). Although such behaviour is not acceptable and the university has numerous policies to guard against it, and people who stand up against it (including participants in this study), it would seem racism still occurs. Five participants directly encountered racism due to their ethnicity. Illustrations of this racism ranged from accusations about China’s connection to the COVID-19 pandemic a few years ago to comments about the Nazi Germany regime more than 70 years ago. Participant 1M, for example, experienced considerable distress due to her German heritage. She explained:

The most memorable and hurtful, was in relation to someone who made a comment about Nazi Germany and the Holocaust, and [...] they stated outright that my relatives must have escaped Germany to avoid dealing with the implications of what they've probably done during the Holocaust. [...] It impacted me greatly, because I've never realised that anyone would jump to that, because of my German heritage.

Participants also detailed negative experiences due to skin colour (2 participants) and ways of speaking (4 participants). Three talked specifically about their pronunciation and how differences in

how they use vowels, rhythm, stress, and/or intonation might make it difficult for others to understand them. Another participant spoke more generally about their accent suggesting that their overall way of speaking might be different to Standard Australian English, but not necessarily in a way that might interfere with their comprehensibility. Dealing with such racism further highlights the importance of having strong EDI leadership and cultural mentoring. Although it should not take place in an institution of higher learning, racism can be better addressed when sufficient and proactive cultural support and mentoring is available.

### ***Limited Understanding of and Experience with Cultural Diversity***

A fourth barrier was an overall limited understanding of and experience with cultural diversity at the university (5 participants). Despite staff heralding CALD students and staff as one of the cultural EDI strengths of the university, at least in some units/schools, there remains a deeper issue of understanding and appreciating that diversity. This may be due to the university's status as a regional university, with less cultural diversity than those within Australian capital cities and, for those who have lived in these areas all or most of their lives, less opportunities to travel abroad; thus a larger number of people may have less exposure to people from diverse cultural contexts and the distinct ideas they may bring to discussions. To illustrate this point, Participant 1I asserted, "they just don't have any conception of what it's like to do things differently." Furthermore, two participants claimed that most staff had limited or no culturally diverse living or working experience. Equally, insufficient culturally diverse professional staff (1 participant) or academic staff (1 participant) further contributed to this limited understanding. Another participant identified that the loss of Aboriginal staff and lack of more senior academic Aboriginal staff also contributed to this limited understanding (1 participant). Participant 1A suggested, however, that this lack of understanding was not due to racism, but rather due to fatigue from excessive workloads: "It's not that they think it's ridiculous or stupid, or they're racist. It's just that they're tired, and they're overworked." Across the university, there are feelings of fatigue among staff members, thus limiting their capacity to think more deeply about the perspectives of CALD people and how to integrate diverse ways of thinking and doing with their own.

### ***Lack of Belonging/Feeling Not Good Enough due to CALD Background***

The final theme focuses on the cultural and/or linguistic background of participants having a negative impact on their sense of belonging and/or feelings of inadequacy at the university (5 participants). While in some units or schools, academic staff's cultural diversity is celebrated and valued, other CALD participants feel quite differently. Some participants expressed a feeling of not being good enough (2 participants) or not genuinely belonging (1 participant) at the university due to their cultural background, or in the case of another participant, due to the socio-economic status of their family as working class. One academic felt pressure to assimilate into the "white Australian culture" because without doing so they would experience a feeling of not belonging. Two participants felt undervalued due to their citizenship, specifically due to their visa status (2 participants) or a stated requirement to have citizenship or permanent residency to have access to advertised jobs (1 participant). This sense of lack of belonging appeared to be most prevalent in the case of participants who were more culturally isolated, either not having sufficient mentorship or support from their colleagues or leadership.

### **Recommendations from Participants**

With regard to cultural EDI at the university, the participants made five main recommendations. All of these recommendations were made by interviewees directly either in

response to interview question #12 (see appendix) or immediately after detailing one or more of the barriers to cultural EDI they discussed. These findings will be detailed briefly here and discussed more deeply in the Discussion and Implications section afterwards.

### ***Develop an Executive Leadership Culture of Listening and Valuing of People, No Matter How Small this Group May Be***

The most prominent recommendation by academic staff was to develop an executive leadership who genuinely value people and listen to their perspectives, regardless of the size of that group (7 participants). This concept of valuing people underlies many of the themes discussed in this paper. In some parts of the university, people already feel their cultural diversity is valued; it's an asset. But, clearly, this is not the case for many. To that end, more needs to be done in this area. In part, this entails creating and developing a "brave" (Participant 1F) leadership model, one that cultivates a community where staff feel safe to have open conversations about institutional culture, to create a better working environment (4 participants).

Enhancing the cultural diversity of members in leadership positions is a key part of this process (3 participants). Importance was given to developing an executive culture of listening that leads to real improvements (2 participants), that values the perspectives and ways of doing of people from non-Caucasian backgrounds (1 participant), and that genuinely wants to see both staff and students succeed (1 participant). Participants noted that addressing institutional racism is important and could be accomplished through programs aimed at developing literacy around institutional racism (1 participant) as well as a support entity for people facing institutional racism (1 participant). With a greater number of CALD staff in leadership positions, many of these suggestions can be realised as cultural diversity lends itself to increased exposure to multiple viewpoints.

### ***Develop More Culturally Competent Induction and Mentorship Programs and Support Mechanisms in General***

Participants highlighted the necessity to develop culture-oriented programs to better support CALD staff throughout their academic journeys and to assist non-CALD staff to better understand and value their CALD peers (6 participants). This recommendation by participants is made based on their earlier identification of a lack of cultural mentorship and support at the university as a barrier to cultural EDI. The onus, however, cannot be solely the responsibility of CALD staff to adjust their perspective, but of non-CALD staff and leadership as well, and this needs to be taken into consideration for any program that is developed. As part of this entire process, induction programs are important, particularly those that provide overviews of university and school level structure for people who come from different academic cultural backgrounds, including Aboriginal backgrounds (3 participants). Developing more mentorship and training to enable all staff to be more understanding, respectful, and inclusive of people from diverse cultural backgrounds is also recommended (2 participants). Participants requested more mentors from both similar cultural backgrounds (1 participant) and diverse cultural backgrounds (1 participant). Further suggestions included developing equity programs to support lecturers to enhance their intelligibility (if they wish to do so), including how they can educate others to listen better (1 participant), and providing counselling for international staff who are experiencing isolation or depression due to being away from friends and family (1 participant). Altogether, participants suggested a wide array of potential programs that, when combined, could provide a solid foundation for enhancing cultural EDI at the university.

### ***Develop a Culture of More Inclusive Practices across Academia (Growing Beyond Tokenism)***

Participants encouraged genuinely embedding practices throughout a wider network, going beyond messaging, and investing in more action (5 participants). Essentially, they are eager for university leadership to move beyond paying lip-service to cultural EDI or implementing time-limited, tokenistic initiatives. Participants emphasised avoiding “one off” initiatives (committees, working groups) that seemed to be formed mainly to create the impression that “issues” are being addressed (2 participants). One participant suggested the inclusion of people who are being researched as active consultants in the development of new initiatives or projects, not just as an afterthought. Another encouraged pedagogy focused on enhancing the learning of diverse groups of students in the classroom. Yet another advised going beyond just recognizing human cultural capital to actually building it up. “We need executives to really look at not just different cultures, because it's nice and diverse, but actually raise human capital in those areas to build” (Participant 1D). In alignment with previous recommendations made, the idea of valuing people serves as a principal motivator for this recommendation as well.

### ***Develop More Inclusive Cultural Hiring Practices***

The fourth recommendation was to develop more inclusive cultural hiring practices (4 participants). This recommendation stems from the need to develop a more culturally diverse staff and leadership and offer greater work stability to new staff. As such, two participants suggested making international staff feel more valued by offering more than just a three-year contract to at least coincide with the length of their work visa. Another participant recommended employing more Aboriginal people, thus making both Aboriginal academics and students feel culturally safe. Greater diversity at the early career researcher level, in particular, was suggested would help create a culturally safe space (1 participant). Furthermore, employing culturally diverse staff not just to fill a quota but out of respect to address needs throughout the university was key (1 participant). Essentially, all of these recommendations point to the need for the university to have a culturally safe and inclusive environment already established when they hire new CALD staff.

### ***Develop More Culturally Oriented Support Programs/Initiatives Specifically for Promotion***

A final overall recommendation was the need to develop support programs and initiatives that are more culturally oriented (3 participants). In essence, support is needed to transition junior academics into more senior academic positions, and in turn, those senior academics can mentor new staff, helping them to navigate successfully and become a part of their new academic community. Several suggestions were made for accomplishing this. One participant argued that more professional development programs are needed to enable Aboriginal people to move from lower levels to higher levels of academia to give them a stronger voice in the academy. Another participant suggested that greater workload adjustments are required to account for the additional burden inherent in Indigenizing subject/curriculum content. Finally, more support and mentorship from diverse cultural backgrounds is needed, especially for people from cultural backgrounds where self-promotion is not normal or disfavoured culturally to assist them in going for promotion and progressing in their careers in an Australian university (1 participant).

## Discussion and Implications

The data were exceptionally rich, providing a diverse range of perspectives about the strengths and barriers to cultural EDI at the university and how to enhance cultural EDI at the university. Participants were both forthcoming and passionate about sharing their thoughts in the interviews. This section further discusses several key points from the study, including recommendations for enhancing cultural EDI at tertiary institutions based on the participants' perspectives.

First, this research is one of the first studies to focus specifically on positive attributes of cultural EDI from the perspective of academic staff in an Australian university. Specifically, these attributes included both students and staff who are either culturally/linguistically diverse and/or have a strong appreciation of other cultures (in the case of non-CALD peoples) as well as leadership promoting cultural EDI. The cultural diversity of the university's student population is highlighted as a positive cultural EDI aspect in both our research and previous studies (Tamtik & Guenter, 2019; Vos et al., 2015). This is important because students are a motivator of university policy and meeting their needs is critical for quality education. Having culturally diverse staff who can understand their needs is integral to achieving this goal (e.g., Arday, 2020; Vos et al., 2015) and a strength of the university is its culturally and/or linguistically diverse or informed staff. Adding to these points, our research also highlighted the importance of working with like-minded colleagues who come from both CALD and non-CALD backgrounds. Participants stressed the essential role of supportive, inclusive colleagues to create an effective academic community. In particular, our research showed the important role that peers play within specific discipline-based units or schools to ensuring the establishment of such a culturally safe space, regardless of what may occur at the executive leadership level. However, expanding on these strengths to achieve the same across all units and levels of the university is the next step. Critical to this is support from higher levels of the university, including a leadership that genuinely promotes EDI practices (Marchiondo et al., 2023). As noted by Covey (1990), an authority in leadership and business culture, "seek[ing] first to understand, then to be understood" (p. 235) is essential for effective interpersonal communication. As such, leadership engaging in authentic communications with the aim of enhancing understanding and meeting the needs of staff from a variety of diverse cultural backgrounds can create an environment of belonging among staff. Identifying these strengths is critical because it highlights what works well and thus to be further nurtured into the future. Other universities, both nationally and internationally who may equally struggle with cultural EDI-related issues, can draw on these findings and use them as a starting place for their own initiatives to enhance cultural EDI across their institutions. Ideally, such work would be complemented by an identification of what the institution's cultural EDI strengths are and building on those strengths, alongside tackling barriers to cultural EDI, especially if, as demonstrated in our study, the barriers outnumber the strengths.

The breadth of barriers to cultural EDI highlighted by participants indicates that the scope of the problem is bigger than perhaps we fully comprehend (Hollinsworth et al 2017). Most of the barriers discussed by participants were raised again in their recommendations. Many of the themes highlighted in previous research were also identified in our research, such as feelings of tokenism (e.g., Hollinsworth et al., 2017; Povey et al., 2023), limited culturally appropriate mentorship (e.g., Acker, et al 2012; Sadiq et al., 2019), institutional racism (e.g., Hollinsworth et al., 2017; Povey et al., 2023; Varghese et al., 2005) and a lack of cultural belonging (Cidlinska et al., 2022; Toomey et al., 2013), highlighting the enduring nature of the problem. To address these issues, universities need to work harder to nurture CALD staff, supporting them to overcome many of the barriers they face that their non-CALD peers may not. Initiatives which tackle parts of the issue but without

understanding the larger structural problems may thus be seen as tokenism, window dressing, or a culture of non-listening. Initiatives that focus on the wellbeing of staff may provide some solutions. To that end, Ainsworth and Oldfield (2019) have noted two critical factors, namely context and the individual capacity to thrive. Mentoring and professional development signal to staff that they are valued, enhancing belonging and resilience. Belonging has been acknowledged as one of the wellbeing domains for academics and educators as well as students in the higher education learning context (Lemon et al., 2025). As the present study has mirrored some of the findings of previous research, it is clear that the cultural barriers discussed in this study are not isolated to just one university in Australia but are found in numerous universities around the world, and these issues are ongoing. As such, as recommended by participants in our study, it is important that universities develop the following: an executive leadership culture that values listening to its people; long-term, culturally informed induction, mentorship, and promotion programs for CALD staff; and a culture of long-term, genuinely inclusive/culturally sensitive practices, including hiring practices, across the institution to foster a greater sense of belonging and community.

In short, these recommendations demonstrate that, while we continue to not fully understand the challenges of cultural diversity and thus any initiatives undertaken to address cultural EDI-related “problems” may be viewed as tokenistic at best, there is hope for positive change. To achieve such change, a comprehensive understanding of cultural EDI-related challenges is needed, including but not limited to the nuances underlining perceptions of identity, including cultural identity, and how this operates within a particular culture, such as an academic community. Said differently, how people perceive their own identity, or how others view them can shape their sense of belonging, and a lack of belonging can equally challenge one’s sense of identity (Barrow et al., 2022) and lead to disharmony in a community grouping (Barkhuizen, 2016). Therefore, until we understand just how big, deep, and complex these issues are, we cannot realistically make the changes required to fix it. We need more research like that presented in this study to ask different questions of different people to find out what the problems are and to better understand ‘cultural diversity.’ Doing so will enable us to create a university culture that is genuinely and authentically inclusive of all cultures. Based on these points, and as explicitly expressed by Participant 1F, “brave” leadership is needed. University executive staff need to be courageous, ask the tough questions of what does not work in the cultural EDI space, and be willing to discuss these challenges openly and inclusively with staff to address these issues.

## **Conclusion**

This paper presents a rich examination of academic staff perspectives on cultural EDI in one Australian university, providing potential insights that may be helpful to other institutions who may be tackling the same or similar issues. The perspectives and experiences shared here, despite being limited to a small group of academics at one university whose interview data was analysed by three researchers from Caucasian backgrounds, provide us with a strong starting point to both understanding and consequently enhancing cultural EDI in workplace communities. A strength of this research is that the recommendations originate from academics who have experienced first-hand the impact of barriers to cultural EDI at the university. However, more research is needed. If we wish to genuinely embrace cultural EDI, more research into both the broader perspective of cultural diversity as well as into different cultural subgroups is needed. Exploration from the perspectives of professional staff, students, and executive leadership is also needed from both an intra- and inter-institutional perspective. Such research will enable universities to move beyond tokenistic, superficial initiatives to better address the long-standing impact of institutional racism.

As noted in this paper, many academics clearly care about the university and its people, as the richness of the information they've shared demonstrates. We thus acknowledge the bravery of these academics, many of whom are early to mid-career academics, to share their opinions and experiences in interviews and not in a safer anonymous survey format. We would like to express our thanks and gratitude to the 13 participants whose views and experiences are described in this paper. This research would not be possible without their desire to see enhancements made to cultural EDI at the university and to contribute positively to its future growth and development.

Finally, this paper presents overarching results from a thematic study focusing very specifically on the strengths and barriers to cultural EDI at the university. Additional analyses of other components of the data are already underway, focusing on notions such as staff cultural identities and the development of resilience among staff of diverse cultural backgrounds. As the results of this study have shown, the university is privileged to serve as the home to many staff of diverse and rich cultural identities. This rich cultural diversity is particularly notable at a regional university and such diversity should be celebrated.

## References

- Acker, S., & Webber, M. (2016). Uneasy academic subjectivities in the contemporary Ontario university. In J. Smith, J. Rattray, T. Peseta, & D. Loads (Eds.), *Identity work in the contemporary university. Educational futures: Rethinking theory and practice* (Vol. 1). Sense Publishers. [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-94-6300-310-0\\_5](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-94-6300-310-0_5)
- Acker, S., Webber, M., & Smyth, E. (2012). Tenure troubles and equity matters in Canadian academe. *British Journal of Sociology of Education*, *33*(5), 743-761. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01425692.2012.674784>
- Ainsworth, S., & Oldfield, J. (2019). Quantifying teacher resilience: Context matters. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, *82*(1), 117-128. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tate.2019.03.012>
- Anthony, K., Miller-Day, M., Dupuy, M., Ventura, J., Hodges, A. L., Alonso-Pecora, D., & Dimas, H. (2025). Is there really a difference? A comparison of in-person and online qualitative interviews. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, *24*. <https://doi.org/10.1177/16094069251349580>
- Arday, J. (2021). No one can see me cry: Understanding mental health issues for Black and minority ethnic staff in higher education. *Higher Education*, *83*(1), 79-102. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10734-020-00636-w>
- Australian Institute for Teaching & School Leadership. (2011). *Australian professional standards for teachers*. AITSL.
- Baker, A. (2025). ELT teacher cognition. In N. A. Nazari (Ed.), *Empowering the English language teacher in a multipolar environment* (pp. 141-155). Springer. [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-96-4839-9\\_9](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-96-4839-9_9)
- Barkhuizen, G. P. (2016). Language teacher identity research: An introduction. In G. P. Barkhuizen (Ed.), *Reflections on language teacher identity research* (1st ed., pp. 1-11). Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315643465>
- Barkhuizen, G. (2019). Teacher identity. In S. Walsh & S. Mann (Eds.), *The Routledge handbook of English language teacher education* (pp. 536-552). Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315659824>
- Barrow, M., Grant, B., & Xu, L. (2022). Academic identities research: Mapping the field's theoretical frameworks. *Higher Education Research and Development*, *41*(2), 240-253. <https://doi.org/10.1080/07294360.2020.1849036>

- Burri, M., Chen, H., & Baker, A. (2017). Joint emergence of teacher cognition and identity through learning to teach L2 pronunciation. *The Modern Language Journal*, 101(1), 128-142. <https://doi.org/10.1111/modl.12388>
- Cidlinska, K., Nyklova, B., Machovcova, K., Mudrak, J., & Zabrodska, K. (2023). “Why I don’t want to be an academic anymore?” When academic identity contributes to academic career attrition. *Higher Education*, 85(1), 141-156. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10734-022-00826-8>
- Boyatzis, R. E. (1998). *Transforming qualitative information: Thematic analysis and code development*. Sage Publications.
- Covey, S. R. (1990). *The 7 habits of highly effective people: Powerful lessons in personal change*. Simon & Schuster.
- Eagleton, T. (2016). *Culture*. Yale University.
- Garrett, S. D., Williams, M. S., & Carr, A. M. (2023). Finding their way: Exploring the experiences of tenured Black women faculty. *Journal of Diversity in Higher Education*, 16(5), 527-538. <https://doi.org/10.1037/dhe0000213>
- Gordon, H. R., Willink, K., & Hunter, K. (2024). Invisible labor and the associate professor: Identity and workload inequity. *Journal of Diversity in Higher Education*, 17(3), 285-296. <https://doi.org/10.1037/dhe0000414>
- Hollinsworth, D., Carter, J., Gilbey, K., & Raciti, M. (2017). Indigenous cultural competence in Australian universities: Challenges and barriers. *Journal of Australian Indigenous Issues*, 20(3), 27-43.
- Lemon, N., O'Brien, S., Later, N., Britton, S., & Prendergast, J. (2025). Pedagogy of belonging: Cultivating wellbeing literacy in higher education. *Higher Education*, 90, 199-213. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10734-024-01317-8>.
- Liu, J. (2012). Examining massification policies and their consequences for equality in Chinese higher education: A cultural perspective. *Higher Education*, 64(5), 647-660. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10734-012-9517-4>
- Marchiondo, L. A., Verney, S. P., & Venner, K. L. (2023). Academic leaders’ diversity attitudes: Their role in predicting faculty support for institutional diversity. *Journal of Diversity in Higher Education*, 16(3), 323-332. <https://doi.org/10.1037/dhe0000333>
- Matruglio, E. (2021). What two teachers took up: Metalanguage, pedagogy and potentials for long-term change. *Language and Education*, 35(5), 463-478. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09500782.2020.1825477>
- Miles, M. B., & Huberman, A. M. (1994). *Qualitative data analysis: An expanded sourcebook* (2nd ed.). Sage Publications.
- Patel, F. (2021a). Case study 3. Staying whole and grounded in the neoliberal university. In F. Patel (Ed.), *Power imbalance, bullying and harassment in academia and the glocal (local and global) workplace* (pp. 187-199). Nova Science.
- Patel, F. (2021b). Case study 6. Insidious plots: Executive leadership incompetence, bullying and victimization. In F. Patel (Ed.), *Power imbalance, bullying and harassment in academia and the glocal (local and global) workplace* (pp. 217-230). Nova Science.
- Patel, F. (2021c). Case study 7. Bullying and harassment in academia: Reclaiming voice and visibility. In F. Patel (Ed.), *Power imbalance, bullying and harassment in academia and the glocal (local and global) workplace* (pp. 231-251). Nova Science.
- Patel, F., & Govin, K. (2021). Case study 2. Go back where you came from. In F. Patel (Ed.), *Power imbalance, bullying and harassment in academia and the glocal (local and global) workplace* (pp. 173-186). Nova Science.

- Povey, R., Trudgett, M., Page, S., & Locke, M. L. (2023). Hidden in plain view: Indigenous early career researchers' experiences and perceptions of racism in Australian universities. *Critical Studies in Education*, 64(4), 355-373. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17508487.2022.2159469>
- Sadiq, H., Barnes, K. I., Price, M., Gumedze, F., & Morrell, R. G. (2019). Academic promotions at a South African university: Questions of bias, politics & transformation. *Higher Education*, 28(3), 423-442. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10734-018-0350-2>
- Tamtik, M., & Guenter, M. (2019). Policy analysis of equity, diversity and inclusion strategies in Canadian universities – How far have we come? *Canadian Journal of Higher Education*, 49(3), 41-56. <https://doi.org/10.47678/cjhe.v49i3.188529>
- Thornton, M. (2013). The mirage of merit: Reconstituting the 'Ideal Academic.' *Australian Feminist Studies*, 28(76), 127–143. <https://doi.org/10.1080/08164649.2013.789584>
- Toomey, A., Dorjee, T. & Ting-Toomey, S. (2013). Bicultural identity negotiation, conflicts, and intergroup communication strategies. *Journal of Intercultural Communication Research*, 42(2), 112-134. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17475759.2013.785973>
- Universities Australia. (2022). *2022 higher education facts and figures*. <https://universitiesaustralia.edu.au/publication/higher-education-facts-and-figures-2022/>
- Varghese, M., Morgan, B., Johnston, B., & Johnson, K. A. (2005). Theorizing language teacher identity: Three perspectives and beyond. *Journal of Language, Identity, and Education*, 4(1), 21-44. [https://doi.org/10.1207/s15327701jlie0401\\_2](https://doi.org/10.1207/s15327701jlie0401_2)
- Vos, M., Çelik, G., & de Vries, S. (2016). Making cultural differences matter? Diversity perspectives in higher education. *Equality, Diversity and Inclusion: An International Journal*, 4, 254-266. <https://doi.org/10.1108/edi-11-2015-0092>
- Weatherby-Fell, N., Neilsen-Hewett, C. & Duchesne, S. (2021). Building resilience for early years teachers. In C. F. Mansfield (Eds.), *Cultivating teacher resilience* (pp. 51-67). Springer. [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-15-5963-1\\_4](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-15-5963-1_4)

## About the Authors

### **Amanda Baker**

University of Wollongong

abaker@uow.edu.au

<https://orcid.org/0000-0001-5806-4419>

Amanda Baker is an associate professor in Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL) at the University of Wollongong in Australia. Amanda's research interests focus on the dynamic relationships that exist between L2 teachers' knowledge, beliefs and teaching practices, especially in the areas of L2 pronunciation, speaking and listening pedagogy.

### **Erika Matruglio**

University of Wollongong

erikam@uow.edu.au

<https://orcid.org/0000-0001-5800-5398>

Erika Matruglio is an associate professor in the School of Education at the University of Wollongong, Australia. Her research explores connections between language, knowledge, and values and the disciplinary bases of these connections using the complementary theories of Systemic Functional Linguistics and Legitimation Code Theory. Her publications engage with topics such as the nature of classroom discourse, conditions which enable cumulative knowledge building, disciplinarity and the demands of writing in the disciplines.

**Noelene Weatherby-Fell**

University of Wollongong

noelene@uow.edu.au

<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-1876-1735>

Noelene Weatherby-Fell is an adjunct associate professor at the University of Wollongong and was the Associate Dean of Student Life in the Faculty of Arts, Social Sciences and Humanities. Having led initiatives supporting student wellbeing and academic progress while teaching and coordinating curriculum and pedagogy courses, she has presented nationally and internationally through the Response Ability Project, contributed to the BRiTE resilience project, and continues this work with Staying BRiTE. Noelene also represents schools and universities on state and national bodies overseeing teacher education standards and accreditation.

---

## education policy analysis archives

Volume 34 Number 52

June 2, 2026

ISSN 1068-2341



Readers are free to copy, display, distribute, and adapt this article, as long as the work is attributed to the author(s) and **Education Policy Analysis Archives**, the changes are identified, and the same license applies to the derivative work. More details of this Creative Commons license are available at <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/4.0/>. **EPAA** is published by the Mary Lou Fulton College for Teaching and Learning Innovation at Arizona State University. Articles are indexed in CIRC (Clasificación Integrada de Revistas Científicas, Spain), DIALNET (Spain), [Directory of Open Access Journals](#), EBSCO Education Research Complete, ERIC, Education Full Text (H.W. Wilson), QUALIS A1 (Brazil), SCImago Journal Rank, SCOPUS, Socolar (China).

About the Editorial Team: <https://epaa.asu.edu/ojs/index.php/epaa/about/editorialTeam>

Please send errata notes to Jeanne M. Powers at [jeanne.powers@asu.edu](mailto:jeanne.powers@asu.edu)

---