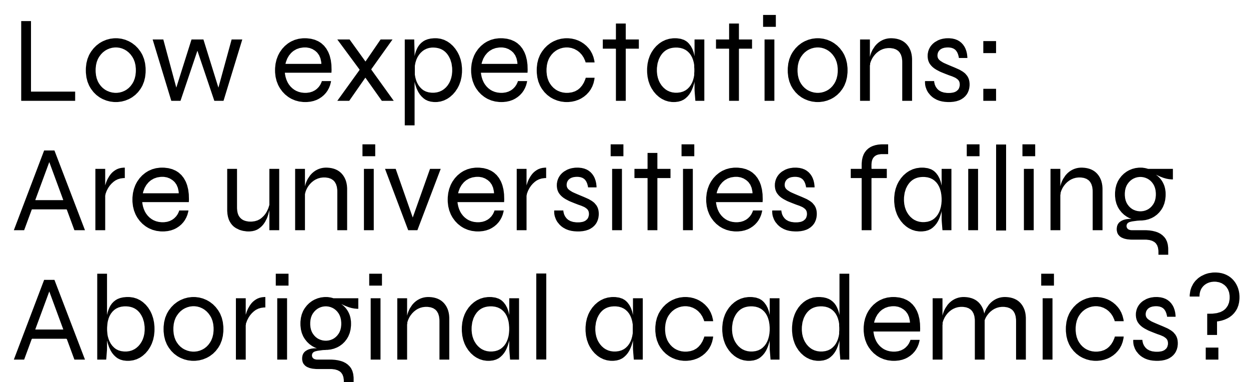

Low expectations: Are universities failing Aboriginal academics?

Dr Samara McPhedran

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CLOSE THE GAP RESEARCH

Introduction

In late 2023 and early 2024, two seemingly unrelated events on opposite sides of the world raised serious questions about the impact universities' embrace of 'diversity and inclusion' has on their expectations about the academic workforce.

In Australia, the Queensland University of Technology attracted national attention over its decision to move away from "the merit principle" towards a "more inclusive suitability assessment" in its hiring policies. Despite media reports that staff were "appalled" by this decision, the university publicly stated that the changes would "modernise and contemporise" their policy to ensure they "attract and select the best candidate for the role".[1]

Vice Chancellor Margaret Sheil denied that the decision had anything to do with "contemporary politics." She stated that it was an attempt to remove bias from hiring decisions, asserting that when "people say things like '[w]e do this on merit', they're actually reflecting the bias of their own experience."[2]

In the United States, Harvard University president Claudine Gay – the first black person to hold that position – resigned following her perceived failure during Congressional hearings to condemn "hate speech" on campus. She had been in the position for less than a year. While Professor Gay made the claim that she was the victim of racism,[3] concerns were raised about how and why she had been promoted to such a senior position.[4]

Gay became an Associate Professor at Stanford University in 2005 and a full Professor at Harvard in 2006, eight years after being awarded her PhD in 1998. A string of senior administrative positions followed. Despite Professor Gay's advancement to president, her academic track record was sparse. It comprised fewer than 15 peer-reviewed publications[5] and an "impact" index of eight.[6] In contrast, the interim president who stepped into the role following Professor Gay's resignation has over 190 peer-reviewed publications[7] and an impact index of 55.[8]

How, exactly, do universities decide who to hire and promote?

Assessing academic performance

Australia does not have a national academic performance standard or framework. Each university has broad discretion about its expectations, but many Enterprise Agreements stipulate minimum expectations at each academic seniority level. Internal policies and guidelines about performance and promotion criteria augment these.

Exact details vary between institutions, but the overarching expectations are similar.

For appointments at senior levels – Level D (Associate Professor/Principal Research Fellow) or Level E (Professor) – those expectations consistently emphasise:

- Holding a doctorate or equivalent level qualification/experience
- Being nationally/internationally recognised as making an outstanding contribution to their field
- Attaining a high level of achievement in their field.

Level D scholars are expected to be recognised as making an "outstanding contribution" to research, scholarship, and teaching and administration activities. In contrast, Level E scholars are expected to meet this standard and be recognised as an "eminent authority" who has achieved "distinction" in their field.

It is difficult to quantify terms such as outstanding or distinction, but an indicator of particular importance is a scholar's record - especially peer-reviewed publications.

Metrics can also include producing a minimum number of peer-reviewed publications across several years, being awarded several grants or funding amounts, and the number of PhD students supervised.

A further measure is the "h-index", which shows how often others have cited an individual's work. This is generally viewed as an indicator of influence or impact.[9]

A criticism of these indicators is that they do not necessarily reflect quality. For example, some scholars can produce high quality work at a low volume, while others can produce low quality work at high volume. This criticism is entirely reasonable, but it is a fact that output-oriented records are widely used in academia as a way to assess performance, including during appointment and promotion processes.

If two scholars have equivalent track records, what other factors may influence decisions about appointment?

Diversity and inclusion employment policies

Australian universities have adopted diversity and inclusion policies that include commitments to employing and promoting a percentage of academics who are (to name just a few groups) women, Aboriginal, or from non-English speaking backgrounds.

Appointing Aboriginal staff appears to be a particular preoccupation, with some universities establishing webpages highlighting how many Aboriginal-identifying academics have been appointed to senior levels.

Many universities have Aboriginal-specific employment policies. For example, the University of Melbourne Aboriginal Employment Plan 2023–2027 aims for "Aboriginal staff numbers to reach 350 by 2025". It requires "faculties and Chancellery to establish Aboriginal academic and professional staff targets beyond Aboriginal specific roles."

The Griffith University First Peoples Employment Action Plan 2021–2025 commits to establishing a First Peoples Employment talent pool that moves its members "through to shortlisting for positions that match their interests and qualifications" as well as moving "unsuccessful First Peoples applicants from other roles into [the] First Peoples Employment talent pool."

These policies suggest that if a person's track record is insufficient to qualify for a position, their identity may be. Are the same academic performance expectations applied to Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal scholars, especially those in senior roles who play a crucial part in administration, leadership, training, and mentoring?

Why do these questions matter?

The "soft bigotry of low expectations" has long been acknowledged as a barrier to closing the gap in outcomes between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Australians.[10] Challenging negative beliefs that Aboriginal Australians are not capable of meeting the same standards as other Australians has been highlighted as crucial to achieving improvements in Aboriginal education and employment.[11] To date, however, little research has considered whether the diversity and inclusion policies adopted by the tertiary education sector may be driving a culture of low expectations for Aboriginal academic staff.

Purpose of this project

This report explores the academic track records of senior Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal scholars at public Australian universities. It asks: are senior Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal scholars judged by equivalent standards?

Methods

Search strategy and inclusion criteria

University search engines were used to find level D and E academic staff members who identified as Aboriginal. Search terms were Aboriginal, Indigenous, Torres Strait Islander, First Nations, First Peoples, and First Australians. Adjunct/honorary title holders were not included.

Comparison group

Within the same university, different schools, departments, and centres may have different expectations of staff. To take this into account, for each scholar who publicly identified as Aboriginal (the “focal individual”), a staff member who did not publicly identify as Aboriginal was selected as a comparison.

The focal individual’s school/department/centre staff list was located, and the first staff member on that list, who was at the same level as the focal individual and whose profile did not contain any information to indicate that they identified as Aboriginal, was selected as the comparison.

Attempts were made to match by sex as well as a specific field of study (e.g., “teaching pedagogy” or “population health”) so that in diverse areas such as health and medicine, similar fields of study were selected rather than (for example) comparing “social determinants of health” scholars with “biomolecular chemistry” scholars.

When a focal individual held a particular distinction (e.g., Australian Research Council (ARC) Future Fellow), attempts were made to find a comparison who held the same distinction (this was not always possible).

If staff lists were unavailable, broader university search engines were used to locate staff from the same school/department/centre at the same level. In some instances, such as Aboriginal-specific units with few senior staff, it was not possible to find a comparison individual. In those cases, the procedure described above was used to select scholars from a higher-level structure – such as a school of health containing an Aboriginal health research centre.

If that was not possible, such as when the focal individual sat within a structure that did not have a higher administrative division (e.g., a Pro Vice-Chancellor’s portfolio), then a broadly comparable school/department/centre was used.

In cases where a focal individual held an Executive role, such as Pro Vice-Chancellor, efforts were made to find a comparison in the same type of role. If there was no comparison at the same level of appointment, the comparison was based on the focal individual's past positions/field of study (e.g., if they had a background in education, the comparison was drawn from education).

Fine arts disciplines were excluded because different metrics (creative works/exhibitions) are used relative to other fields. A few focal individuals had a background in fine arts but worked in other disciplines. Efforts were made to match those individuals with comparisons who also had fine arts backgrounds before moving to other disciplines.

Academic track record measures

Initially, this study sought to assess academic employment history and track records against metrics including the number of publications (journal articles, book chapters, books), number and value of competitive research grants held, number and value of commissioned research projects, number of PhD supervisions/completions, academic service (such as sitting on journal editorial boards) and other service (such as sitting on advisory boards or other professional activities).

Information was obtained from:

- University academic profiles: the accuracy of these often relies on individuals providing information. Determining whether profiles were complete/up to date was not feasible. It was assumed that missing information was randomly distributed across academics, and nothing emerged to contradict this assumption
- ORCID and Scopus databases: these repositories may not contain complete lists of outputs. However, there was no reason to consider that Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal outputs would not be equally likely to be omitted or that there would be any bias towards under-detecting Aboriginal academic outputs
- Full CV's (if available)
- Publicly available LinkedIn profiles.

The quality and quantity of available information varied substantially between individuals.

Where a large amount of data was missing, additional sources, such as the ARC grants database, were searched. However, this did not provide sufficiently robust information to overcome the gaps.

Due to missing data, a more focused range of metrics was developed:

- The individual's highest qualification level
- Year of obtaining PhD (if applicable)
- Year appointed to level[12]
- Number of publications (journal articles, book chapters, and books combined)
- h-index (from Scopus).[13]

Results

A total of 118 senior Aboriginal academics were identified across 37 universities. The number of senior Aboriginal academics at individual universities ranged from 0 to 14, with an average of 3.

Around one-third (38 or 32 per cent) were Level D, and the remainder were Level E. The majority (77 or 65 per cent) were female, 40 (34 per cent) were male, and one person identified as non-binary.[14]

Aboriginal academics were most frequently based in Executive divisions, followed by Health/ Social work and Aboriginal-specific units/centres (Table 1).

Table 1: Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal academics by administrative division

	Aboriginal		Non-Aboriginal	
	Num	**%**	**Num**	**%**
Aboriginal-specific[15]	30	25.4	7	5.9
Business / Economics / Law	4	3.4	6	5.1
Education	7	5.9	12	10.2
Executive	32	27.1	28	23.7
Health / Social Work	31	26.3	35	29.7
Humanities[16]	5	4.2	19	16.1
Other / Multidisciplinary	2	1.7	4	3.4
STEM	7	5.9	7	5.9
Total	118	100.0	118	100.0

Note: percentages may not sum to 100 due to rounding

The different number of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal academics in each division reflects the number of focal individuals in Aboriginal-specific units/centres and the lack of non-Aboriginal

scholars within those units/centres. In addition to academics working in Aboriginal-specific centres, 18 academics (17 Aboriginal and 1 non-Aboriginal) held Aboriginal-specific roles under broader disciplines (e.g., as a Professor of Aboriginal Health within the Health/Social Work discipline).

Given some divisions' relatively small sample sizes, analysis within and between divisions was not undertaken.

Qualification level

Table 2 shows the highest level of qualification held by academics.

The percentage of individuals who did not hold a PhD was approximately equally distributed between Level D (Aboriginal: 13 per cent; non-Aboriginal: 3 per cent) and Level E (Aboriginal: 15 per cent; non-Aboriginal: 3 per cent).

Table 2: Highest level of education

	Aboriginal		Non-Aboriginal	
	Num	%	Num	%
PhD or equivalent	96	81	112	95[17]
Non-PhD qualification[18]	17	14	4	3
Unknown	5	4	2	2

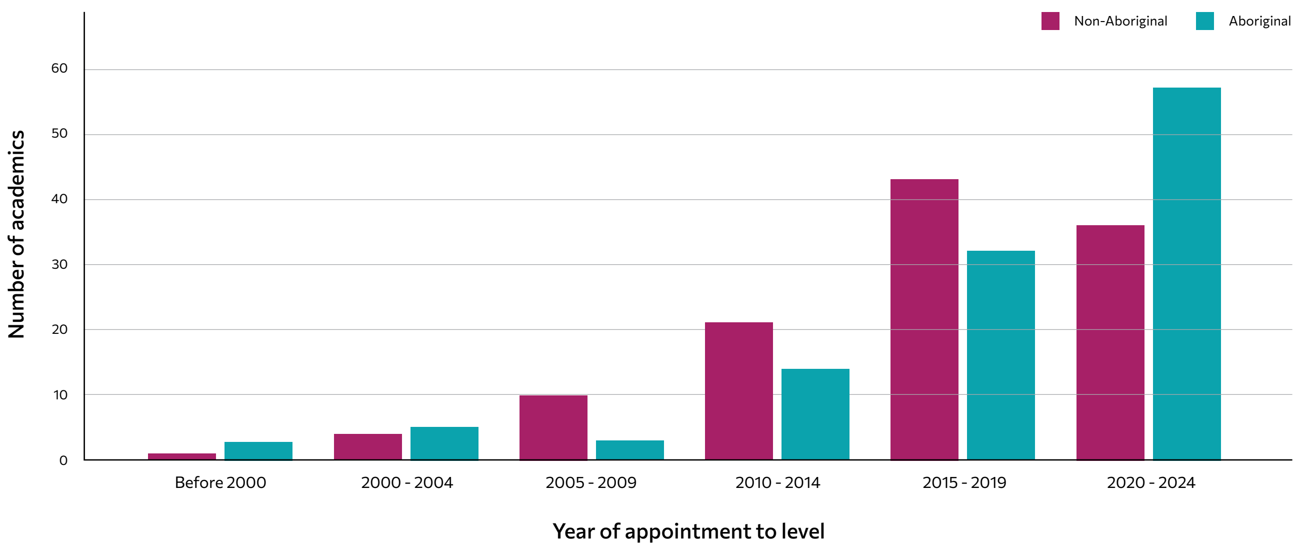
Note: percentages may not sum to 100 due to rounding

Year of appointment to level

The year of appointment to level was unknown for seven academics (four Aboriginal, three non-Aboriginal).

For academics where the year of appointment to level was known, 50 per cent of Aboriginal scholars had been appointed during 2020-2024 (inclusive), relative to 31 per cent of non-Aboriginal academics[19] (Figure 1). This difference was taken into account in subsequent analyses where relevant.

Figure 1: Appointment year



Years from PhD to senior level appointment

Aboriginal academics who held PhDs received those from 1990 to 2023. For non-Aboriginal academics, their PhDs had been awarded from 1974 to 2017. Given historical disparities in tertiary education participation for Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Australians, this result is unsurprising.

Figure 2 (overleaf) shows the number of academics by broad year of PhD award. For Aboriginal academics who held a PhD, the average length of time between the award of the PhD and appointment to level was 6.1 years (SD = 6.6), with a range of -10 to 24 years.

In other words, some academics were appointed to a senior level up to 10 years before receiving their PhD. Ten individuals were appointed at a senior level before receiving their PhD.

Figure 2: Year PhD awarded

For non-Aboriginal academics who held a PhD, the average time between award of the PhD and appointment to their level was 12.5 years (SD = 6.2), with a range of -6 to 32 years. One individual was appointed before receiving their PhD.

Appointment to a senior level before being awarded a PhD was represented as a negative value in the dataset.

A relatively greater number of Aboriginal academics were appointed to senior level before receiving their PhD, which may have skewed the results. To take this into account, analyses were re-run without individuals appointed before their PhD.

For Aboriginal academics appointed after receiving their PhD, the average time between the award of the PhD and appointment to their level was 7.4 years (SD = 5.5). For non-Aboriginal academics, the average length of time between the award of the PhD and appointment to their level was 12.7 years (SD = 6.0).[20]

Years from PhD to Level D

For Level D academics, the average time from PhD to appointment was 4.7 years (SD = 4.9) for Aboriginal academics and 10.2 years (SD = 5.8) for non-Aboriginal academics.

When only those individuals appointed after being awarded their PhD were considered, the mean time to appointment was 5.5 years (SD = 4.5) for Aboriginal academics and 10.7 years (SD = 5.1) for non-Aboriginal academics.[21]

Years from PhD to Level E

For Level E academics, the average time from PhD to appointment was 6.8 years (SD = 7.2) for Aboriginal academics and 13.6 years (SD = 6.2) for non-Aboriginal academics.

When only those individuals appointed after being awarded their PhD were considered, the mean time to appointment was 8.4 years (SD = 5.8) for Aboriginal academics and 13.6 years (SD = 6.2) for non-Aboriginal academics.[22]

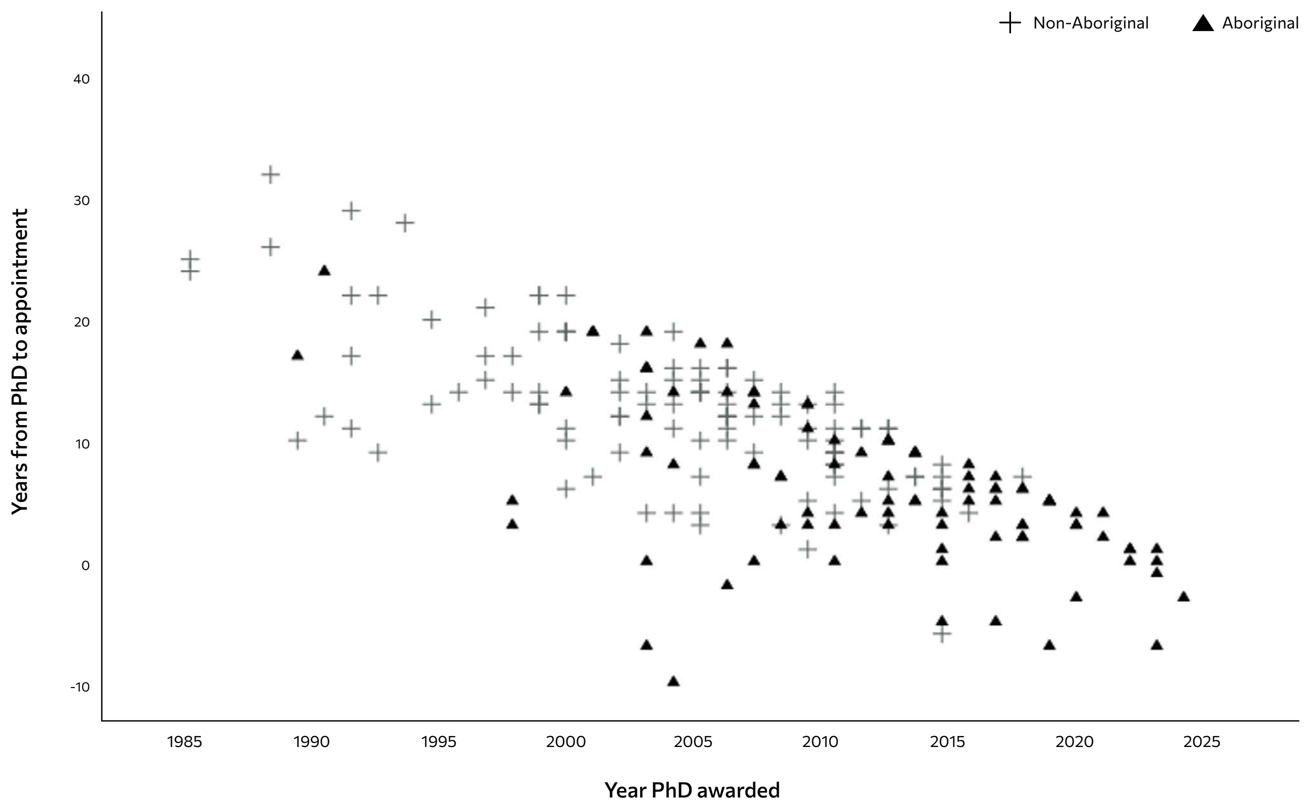
Changes in time from PhD to appointment at senior level

Figure 3 (overleaf) shows the years from PhD to senior appointment against the year the PhD was awarded (including individuals appointed before their PhD award). The years between receiving a PhD and appointment to a senior level have decreased over time.

The figure suggests three different phases of Aboriginal senior academic appointment:

- Phase 1, up to approximately the early 2000s, very few Aboriginal academics were appointed at senior levels, and time from PhD to appointment varied substantially
- Phase 2, from approximately the early 2000s to around 2014, time to appointment was relatively similar (with some outliers)
- Phase 3, from approximately 2015 onwards, Aboriginal academics have had a consistently shorter time to a senior appointment than non-Aboriginal academics.

Figure 3: Time to appointment by year PhD awarded



Note: for interpretive simplicity, one individual whose PhD was awarded before 1980 has been omitted. Some dots can represent multiple cases because different cases have the same values.

Publications

Aboriginal academics had an average of 39 publications (SD = 45.1). Non-Aboriginal academics had an average of 101 publications (SD = 95.6).[23]

Regarding publications before appointment to level, Aboriginal academics had an average of 17 publications (SD = 21.3), while non-Aboriginal academics had an average of 48 publications (SD = 41.6)[24]. Table 3 shows details for each level.

Publication outputs pre-appointment were distributed differently. Almost half of Aboriginal academics (46 per cent) had fewer than ten publications at the time of appointment to a senior level, relative to 14 per cent of non-Aboriginal academics in that category.

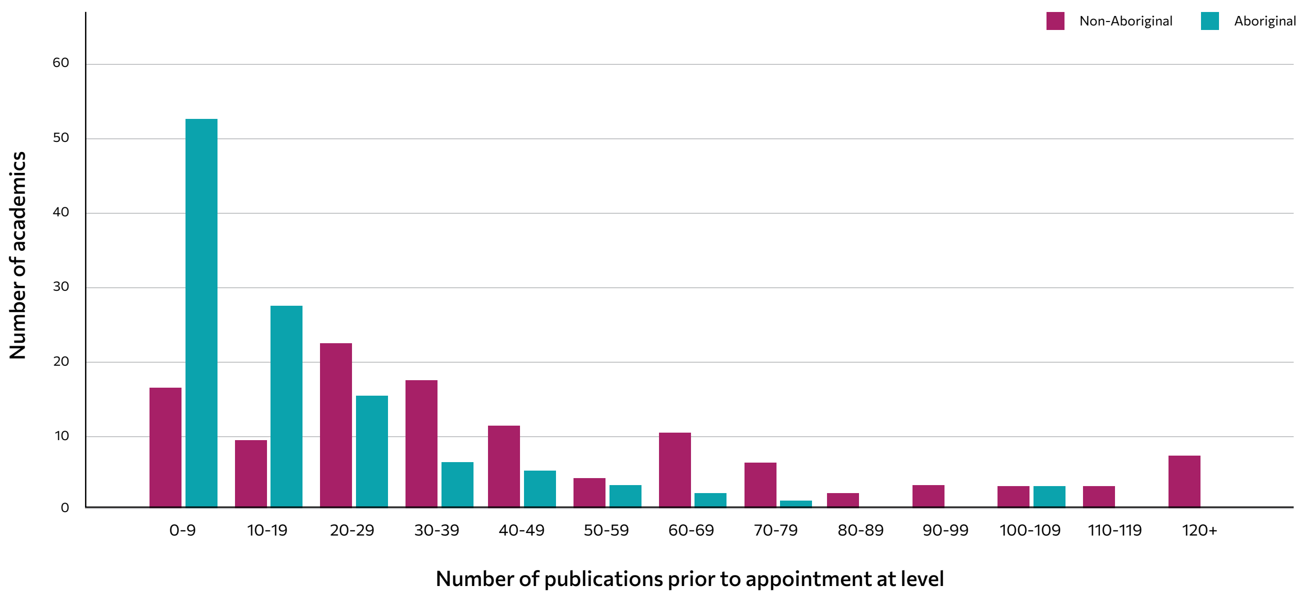
The publication numbers for non-Aboriginal scholars also had a longer "tail" - meaning that there was a spread across the higher end of publication numbers, in contrast to the more clustered distribution of Aboriginal academics around lower numbers (Figure 4 overleaf).

Regarding publications after appointment to senior level, Aboriginal academics had an average of 22 (SD = 37.0), and non-Aboriginal academics had an average of 53 (SD = 74.4).

Table 3: Number of publications by level

	Aboriginal		Non-Aboriginal	
Level D	**Mean**	**SD**	**Mean**	**SD**
Total publications	23	20.0	52	35.1
Publications before appointment to level	14	13.9	33	24.7
Level E	**Mean**	**SD**	**Mean**	**SD**
Total publications	48	51.5	124	106.5
Publications before appointment to level	19	23.9	55	46.2

Figure 4: Publications before senior appointment



As noted above, a significant percentage of senior Aboriginal academics had been appointed to senior level during 2020-2024.

Those scholars would be expected to have fewer publications since appointment (i.e., less opportunity) relative to academics who had spent a number of years at level.

To ensure a fairer comparison, the average number of publications per year since appointment was calculated.[25] This was three per year for Aboriginal academics (SD = 3.9), and six per year for non-Aboriginal academics (SD = 6.5).[26]

Changes over time in publica-tions before appointment

Figure 5 shows the number of publications before appointment to senior level, by year of appointment to senior level. The few academics appointed pre-2000 (Aboriginal: 3; non-Aboriginal: 1) are excluded for interpretive simplicity.

The relatively small number of Aboriginal academics appointed in the early years of the dataset must be acknowledged, and the figures treated with caution.

Overall, there was a general upward trend in the number of publications before appointment at the senior level, with academics appointed more recently typically having more publications than academics appointed in earlier years.

However, the disparities between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal academics' publication track records remained consistent

Figure 5: Pre-appointment publications by year of appointment

Impact — the h-index

Aboriginal academics had an average h-index of 9 (SD = 7.5). Non-Aboriginal academics had an average h-index of 20 (SD = 17.3).[27]

This could not be adjusted to reflect pre- and post-appointment values; it is a point-in-time measure based on all publications. It is likely to be affected by variables such as "research opportunity", which could not be controlled for in this study. A proxy measure was used: number of years since PhD. This measure was positively correlated with h-index values.[28] When years since PhD was controlled for, Aboriginal identification was still associated with a lower h-index.[29]

Discussion

This study shows several disparities between senior Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal academics' track records before appointment at level. Senior Aboriginal academics had, on average, around half the pre-appointment scholarly publication track record of non-Aboriginal scholars but were appointed to senior levels of academia around twice as quickly after being awarded a PhD. These findings suggest that diversity and inclusion targets that emphasise the appointment and promotion of Aboriginal academics may be influencing employment decisions and creating a culture of low expectations.

This study does not in any way imply that Aboriginal scholars are not capable of meeting the same standards as non-Aboriginal scholars. Indeed, it shows the opposite. It is clear from the data that despite overall differences, many individual Aboriginal scholars were on par with non-Aboriginal scholars with respect to publication track records and time to promotion after being awarded their PhD. It is likely that as levels of tertiary education have increased among Aboriginal Australians[30], so too has the number of Aboriginal academics, and merit-based appointments at senior levels are the result.

However, this does not mitigate the disparities between senior Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal academics. Appointment of Aboriginal-identifying academics is associated with lower track record expectations and (particularly in recent years) fast-tracking relative to non-Aboriginal academics. This raises serious questions about the appearance of universities not applying equivalent standards to all academics, irrespective of identity.

One explanation is that Aboriginal academics are appointed based on extensive career experience,

such as within government.[31] Qualitatively, based on the available information about academics' employment histories, in some instances, that seems true of both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal scholars. However, there were also instances where Aboriginal academics had limited employment histories and relatively little experience either outside or within universities. In some cases, Aboriginal academics at senior levels were classified as "early career researchers"[32] and had no substantive employment history outside academia.

A short period between a PhD and a senior appointment could also mean that the person had a lengthy track record of scholarship (potentially alongside qualifications such as a master's degree) and undertook a PhD to further their career and actively fulfil appointment expectations.

Qualitatively, some Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal academics had well-established track records of scholarship before their PhD and appointment. However, the disparities in pre-appointment publication track records between the groups suggest that this is not a sufficient explanation for the seemingly more rapid advancement of Aboriginal academics.

It is possible that Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal academics, before their appointment at level, had different research opportunities (for example, some appointees may have had less time in their previous role/s to produce outputs, and their previous role/s may have placed less emphasis on this type of output). Qualitatively, this was true for some scholars, both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal.

If opportunity affects pre-appointment outputs, then it is reasonable to expect that after appointment, the volume of work produced by Aboriginal scholars would reach parity with non-Aboriginal scholars. This did not appear to be the case, with Aboriginal scholars having lower average outputs per year post-appointment than non-Aboriginal scholars.

Factors such as financial incentives may be playing a role in appointment decisions. For example, some research grants are only open to academics who identify as Aboriginal.

The ARC has a specific scheme - Discovery Indigenous – which provides funding to "support excellent basic and applied research and research training by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander researchers - as individuals and as teams" and "support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander researchers."[33]

Similarly, the Indigenous Health Research Fund, administered by the National Health and Medical Research Council on behalf of the Australian

Government Department of Health and Aged Care, has allocated $160 million to Aboriginal-led research.[34]

Also, universities may appoint senior Aboriginal academics based on "special knowledge" those individuals are believed to possess, which non-Aboriginal scholars are not considered to have. For example, Federation University expects that "...all disciplines are actively engaging with indigenous knowledges."[35] There are no indicators of that knowledge or how it is objectively demonstrated or quantified. Is publicly declared identity alone sufficient to confer expertise? And, if "lived experience" is considered a form of qualification for Aboriginal academics, is this also true for non-Aboriginal academics?

Limitations and future directions

This report has some unavoidable limitations. Chiefly, due to the lack of consistent publicly available information, examining measures such as grants received was impossible.

While some grant funding bodies have publicly searchable databases of funding recipients, the majority still need to. There remain unanswered questions about, for instance, whether Aboriginal academics are primarily receiving grant funding through Aboriginal-specific grant schemes.

The issue of output quality versus quantity must also be noted, especially in light of the general increase in publication numbers, alongside the decreasing time from PhD award to senior appointment, that this study found for Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal academics.

It would be valuable to conduct further research into the quality of academic publications, using indicators such as the international reputation and standing of journals in which articles are published.[36]

The study relied on university search engines to find the sample. This may have detected only some staff members who publicly identified as Aboriginal and may have resulted in under-counting.[37] However, the purpose of this work was not to compile an exhaustive list. The sample size was sufficiently large to provide valuable insights, and there is no reason to believe it was not representative of senior Aboriginal scholars.

The study could not consider fractional appointments or different research/teaching/service profiles (such as a research-only profile or a profile more weighted towards teaching than research). However, there is no reason to expect that Aboriginal academics are more likely to be appointed on a fractional basis or that they have consistently different research/teaching/service profiles to non-Aboriginal academics. And if they do, this raises the question: why?

Aboriginal academics were usually found in Executive divisions, followed by Humanities and Health.[38] This raises questions about why self-identification was not commonly detected within other disciplines.

This may simply be a result of education pathways, with Aboriginal students more likely to pursue humanities, education, and health qualifications. For example, notable under-representation of Aboriginal students in STEM courses is well documented.

Another potential explanation is that in fields where "hard" knowledge – such as a deep understanding of physical sciences – is necessary, identity becomes irrelevant or perhaps has fewer incentives attached than in "soft" fields. A comparison group that this study could not consider is Aboriginal academics who do not publicly identify as Aboriginal.

Understanding what role public identification may play in appointment processes and how and why that may vary between disciplines is essential for future work.

Conclusions

Aboriginal people have been historically disadvantaged in education and employment, and closing the tertiary education and employment gap is a laudable goal.

Attaining tertiary education is a necessary first step towards an academic career, so it is reasonable to expect that as growing numbers of Aboriginal Australians complete higher education, the number of Aboriginal academics - including at senior levels – will also grow naturally. This appears to be evidenced by some of the scholars included in this study, who were on par with their non-Aboriginal counterparts.

However, it is equally apparent that for many Aboriginal academics at senior levels, Australian universities seem to be undermining the minimum standards set out in their Enterprise Agreements, policies, and guidelines.

It is unclear how academics with limited track records and low impact could be deemed to meet the expectation of having achieved national or international recognition for their scholarship, be considered to have attained a high level of achievement or made an outstanding contribution to their field, or be considered an eminent authority.

Political or ideological objectives should not have a bearing on minimum standards for academic performance. However, it is unfortunate that when diversity and inclusion targets are adopted, well-intentioned though they may be, meeting them can become all-consuming and come at a cost.

It is difficult to see how a two-tier system with lower expectations applied based on publicly declared racial heritage benefits the pursuit of high quality scholarship, deep expertise, and research excellence that universities claim to value.

Adopting lower expectations for Aboriginal academics appointed to senior levels, relative to non-Aboriginal academics, also carries notable risks for individuals and institutions. Do universities wish to create divisions between staff because of perceptions of inequitable race-based treatment? Do they seek to erode public confidence that the government funding given to universities is being used to appoint the most appropriately qualified individuals?

What universities aim to achieve by applying different standards and expectations to Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal senior academics is unclear. Universities may genuinely believe they are contributing to closing the gap by applying different standards based on race.

They may simply fail to understand that appointing individuals who have successfully attained tertiary qualifications and established career trajectories, does not address Aboriginal disadvantage. Or, by broadening the types of knowledge or experience that matter, they may avoid admitting that they are applying different standards.

But whatever their justification for such practices, they are likely to reinforce paternalistic and patronising views that Aboriginal Australians cannot be expected to meet the same standards as others.

Any future review of the tertiary education system and its employment practices should ensure that this soft bigotry of low expectations is resoundingly rejected.

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10 Gillard, J. (2012). *Prime Ministerial Statement: "Closing the Gap"*. https://pmtranscripts.pmc.gov.au/release/transcript-18388; Pearson, N. (2016). *The Soft Bigotry of Low Expectations*. https://capeyorkpartnership.org.au/noel-pearson-the-soft-bigotry-of-low-expectations/

11 E.g., Department of Education, Australian Government. (2023). *Schools Measures – Closing the Gap*. https://www.education.gov.au/closing-the-gap/schools-measures-closing-gap; Sarra, C., Spillman, D., Jackson, C., Davis, J., & Bray. J. (2018). High-Expectations Relationships: A Foundation for Enacting High Expectations in all Australian Schools. *The Australian Journal of Indigenous Education*, 49(1), 32-45; Victorian Government. (2023). *Inclusive Workplaces*. https://www2.education.vic.gov.au/pal/inclusive-workplaces/policy-and-guidelines/aboriginal-inclusion.

12 In some cases, this was not explicitly stated and had to be inferred from information available in publications. For example, a publication from 2010 may have stated that the individual was an Associate Professor, while a publication from 2012 stated that they were a Professor. The promotion year could have been anywhere between 2010 to 2012. In these cases, the latest year was selected. This method was applied consistently for all academics who had an unclear appointment year. There was no

difference in the percentage of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal academics with appointment year uncertainty (Chi square = 1.9, p = 0.41). To confirm that this did not affect the results, analyses were re-run without the uncertain appointment year individuals. The results did not change.

13 The accuracy of Scopus is open to question. However, it was assumed that any inaccuracies would be randomly distributed across the two groups studied

14 The non-Aboriginal sample had 74 females (63 per cent) and 44 males (37 per cent)

15 This included, for example, Indigenous Studies Centres

16 This included fields such as sociology, history, linguistics, anthropology and archaeology

17 Chi square = 10.6, p = 0.005

18 This included Bachelor's degrees, Diplomas/Certificates, and Masters degrees (or equivalent)

19 Chi square = 12.6, p = 0.027

20 t = 6.3, p < 0.001

21 t = 4.2, p<0.001. Note that there was a relatively smaller sample size for Level D academics than for Level E. Appropriate caution should be applied

22 t = 5.0, p<0.001

23 U = -6.6, p<0.001

24 U = -7.2, p<0.001

25 Note that publications during the year of appointment were included in the interests of maximising output numbers, as information was not commonly available about month of appointment

26 U = -3.8, p < 0.001

27 U = -5.3, p < 0.001

28 Pearson correlation coefficient = 0.3

29 Standardised beta coefficient = -0.2, p = 0.001

30 Productivity Commission. (2023). *Closing the Gap information repository*. https://www.pc.gov.au/closing-the-gap-data/dashboard/se/outcome-area6

31 It should be noted that some academics may be appointed based on their administrative and leadership credentials rather than their scholarship. While there was no publicly available evidence to suggest any disparity between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal academics in this regard, future consideration of this issue may be beneficial.

32 This term refers to emerging researchers who are typically at the beginning of their career

33 https://www.arc.gov.au/funding-research/funding-schemes/discovery-program/discovery-indigenous

34 https://www.health.gov.au/our-work/mrff-indigenous-health-research-fund

35 https://libguides.federation.edu.au/c.php?g=953511&p=6917152

36 At the time of writing, the Excellence in Research for Australia framework, which supports such activities, was under revision

37 In one case, a scholar was incidentally found who had in previous roles identified as Aboriginal but did not openly identify as Aboriginal in their current senior executive role. This raised a challenging methodological question of whether that scholar could be included as a focal individual.

The decision was made that they could not be included, given that their public identification appeared historical rather than current. It was not deemed appropriate to assume that their past identification as an Aboriginal person necessarily reflected their current identity

38 The sample also contained a larger percentage of Aboriginal scholars in Aboriginal-specific divisions, relative to non-Aboriginal scholars. Outputs may vary between different divisions (for example, STEM versus humanities).

However, it is unlikely that the disparities between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal scholars can be adequately explained by the different sample sizes within each division. The sample matching strategy used in this study – which took into account the inability to always draw a matched comparison from the same unit/centre/school - would be expected to reduce the influence of such differences on the between-group comparisons.

Further, if scholars in Aboriginal-specific academic divisions do have different 'metrics' relative to scholars in other areas (whether Aboriginal or non-Aboriginal), and if this did contribute to the disparities observed in this work, then this would raise questions about whether low expectations are specifically applied to Aboriginal scholars within Aboriginal units/centres/schools.

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