Case study 2: Cultural Capability Framework & Training

Embedding cultural safety at an institutional level and resourcing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander-led knowledge-sharing at scale

Prior to 2020, cultural safety training at the University of Newcastle was ad hoc and delivered only on request, resulting in low engagement and patchy uptake. Cultural capability was not viewed as an institution-wide priority, contributing to a lack of understanding around Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural and intersectional concerns – particularly for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff, students, and their families. This led to limited cultural safety and a weaker sense of belonging across the University community.

In 2020, the Office of Indigenous Strategy and Leadership launched the Cultural Capability Framework, led by the Wollotuka Institute, to address cultural safety across the institution. The Framework aims to increase cultural capability among both staff and students by fostering a stronger understanding of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures, histories, and contemporary issues.

Since its launch, the Cultural Capability Framework has significantly strengthened cultural safety and awareness across the University and is now embedded in the new staff on-boarding process. Over 1,000 staff have completed post-training surveys, with an average rating of 4.9 out of 5 for both delivery and content. The vast majority agreed that they learned something new (99%) and would recommend the training to others (98%).

Building cultural capability across communities

Building on this success, the University has extended its Cultural Capability Training beyond campus, making it available to **industry, government, and community organisations** across the Hunter region and beyond. This expansion allows external partners to engage directly with Aboriginal-led and locally tailored learning and to strengthen their own capacity for culturally responsive engagement. Now, more than 3,000 staff, students and community members have now participated in the training, with consistently outstanding feedback.

Cultural Capability Framework & Training		
Staff Training:	**Student Training:**	**Industry Training:**
Cultural Capability Training is compulsory and aims to create a culturally responsive work environment through a better understanding of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, histories, cultures, and contemporary issues. • Part 1: Three 20-minute self-paced online modules • Part 2: A 3-hour in-person workshop, facilitated by Wollotuka staff • Part 3: A half- or full-day on-country experience, offering immersive learning led by local Aboriginal communities • Training is supported by reflective practice and ongoing feedback surveys	Cultural capability development is embedded across all programs of study. This approach is being expanded as part of the University's commitment to the Culturally Responsive Graduate Attributes, continuing to remain a priority for student learning. • Online learning modules • Establishment of the Culturally Responsive Graduate Attribute, ensuring all students have the opportunity to increase cultural knowledge and understanding irrespective of their program of study • Integration of cultural knowledge into curricula • Increased inclusion of Wollotuka-taught core courses within programs of study	Cultural Capability training is offered by the University to help workplaces across the Hunter and beyond lead with cultural integrity, strengthen community connections, and contribute to a more inclusive society. • Part 1: Three online Modules designed to build foundational knowledge of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures, histories and contemporary issues • Part 2: 3-hour face-to-face workshop designed to build upon foundational knowledge and provide tailored advice and feedback on the specific organisation's values and experiences • Ongoing advice and support

Figure 4. Cultural Capability Framework & Training at the University of Newcastle.

Figure 5. Cultural Capability Training facilitators, Kayla Faulkner and Dr Jake MacDonald.

Scan to learn more about Cultural Capability Training on the University's website

Described by participants as "transformational," the training has deepened understanding of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures and reshaped approaches to teaching, leadership, and community engagement, fostering greater cultural confidence, empathy, and accountability across the institution.

The program has been embraced by a diverse range of sectors, with early participants including **Wests Group Australia, Kaplan Australia, EJE Architecture**, and **Terras Landscape Architects**. Industry participants report that the training provides not only cultural insight but also practical tools for embedding respect, inclusion, and understanding into workplace culture, recruitment, and community engagement.

Growing demand reflects recognition that cultural capability is fundamental to effective leadership and organisational integrity. Highlighted in the Universities Australia 2022-2025 Indigenous Strategy as a best practise example, the Cultural Capability Framework and associated training demonstrate how universities can move beyond awareness-raising to sustained, Aboriginal-led cultural change. Leadership can drive social impact, strengthen connections, create safer workplaces, and foster genuine reconciliation across communities.

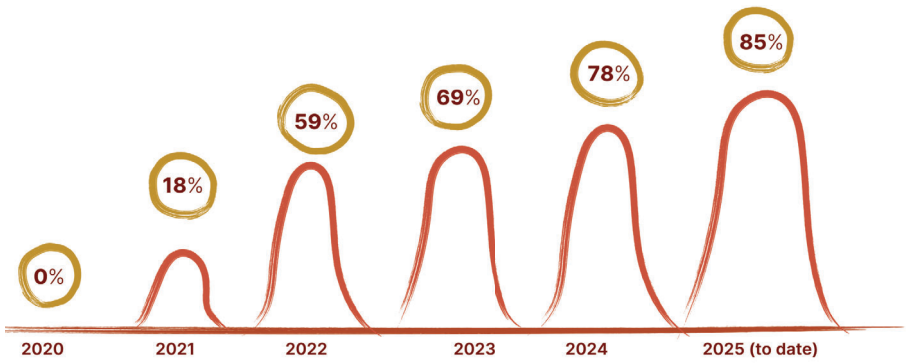

Figure 6. Staff Cultural Capability training uptake over time (2020–2025).

OVER
1,000+
staff surveyed

4.9 OUT OF **5.0**
average satisfaction
with training

99% **learned something new**

98% **would recommend** the training

FUTURE GOAL:
All new staff
complete cultural capability training
as part of their on-boarding process

80.6% of students who responded have been **exposed to knowledge** about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures through their program.

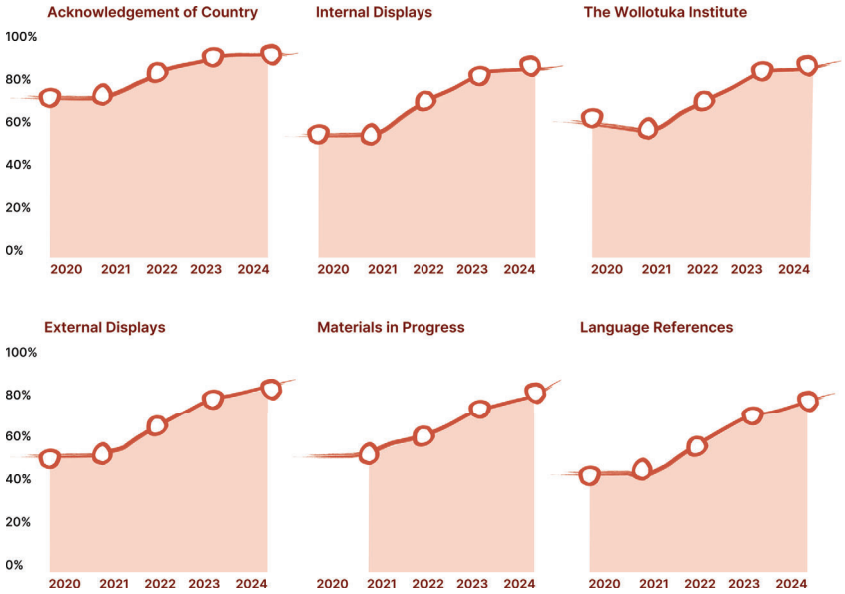

Figure 7. Percentage of responding students who have been exposed to knowledge about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultires through their program.

Figure 8. Cultural Capability Training in the classroom.
Figure 9. Cultural Capability Training on Country.