



# Workshop report

## Reckoning and Reimagining:

Workshopping Indigenous justice pedagogies for Australian legal education



22-23 August 2025  
Melbourne Law School  
Wurundjeri Country



With generous support from



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# Table of contents

<b>Executive summary</b> .....	1
<b>Bringing us together</b> .....	3
<b>Background</b> .....	3
<b>Workshop Aartwork</b> .....	5
<b>Participation</b> .....	7
<b>Our conversations</b> .....	11
<b>Program</b> .....	11
<b>Workshop overview</b> .....	13
<b>Understanding our history and context</b> .....	14
<b>Driving structural change in curriculum reform</b> .....	14
<b>Experience of Indigenous legal academics and colonial load</b> .....	15
<b>Learning from colleagues across jurisdictions</b> .....	17
<b>Upskilling to meet our teaching objectives</b> .....	18
<b>Plans for a community of practice</b> .....	19
<b>Our dream for Australian legal education</b> .....	21
<b>Convenors' reflections</b> .....	22
<b>Schedule 1 - Communique</b> .....	23

## Executive summary

***Reckoning and Reimagining: Workshopping Indigenous Justice Pedagogies for Australian Legal Education*** was hosted at the Indigenous Law and Justice Hub on Wurundjeri Country from 21-23 August 2025.

This workshop brought together leaders in Indigenous legal education in Australia, including the community of Indigenous legal academics and key collaborators, to engage in meaningful dialogue and explore strategies to improve the development and delivery of Indigenous curriculum. At this initial gathering, we set out to **deepen our shared understanding of the skills and knowledges required to develop cultural capability in legal services settings and appropriate pedagogies to shift our institutions towards these goals.**

The workshop was convened by a community of legal academics collaborating across institutions, including **Professor Eddie Cubillo (UoM), Professor Nicole Watson (UTS), Associate Professor Marcelle Burns (UTS), Associate Professor Cassandra Seery (Deakin) and Jaynaya Dwyer (UoM).**

The event came to life with the support of Elyse Keyser (UoM), Program Coordinator at the Indigenous Law and Justice Hub, and Inala Cooper (UoM) as MC. We are indebted to each of these women for sharing their exceptional expertise with us to bring this event to life.

We thank the event sponsors for their generosity – the Indigenous Knowledges Institute (University of Melbourne) and University of Technology Sydney.

Our shared intention for this event was to build community amongst Indigenous legal academics and collaborators engaging in Indigenous legal education work, often siloed across university institutions.

*Participant highlight:*

*“Meeting colleagues and people face to face, some of whom I had only ever met online.”*

The gathering was oriented towards workshopping next steps, with programming supporting a range of formats across panels, keynote presentations, and discussion-based elements. Throughout the workshop participants were encouraged to record ideas and aspirations as they came to mind on poster boards around the venue, with the intention of documenting our aspirations inclusively and democratically.

The workshop operated under Chatham House Rules, with the intention of encouraging workshop participants to share candidly about their hopes and experiences for legal education reform, without the potential consequences of having their comments publicly attributed to them.

*Participant feedback:*

*“Chatham house rules made everyone so much more courageous and that's a rare candour. I loved these few days so much.”*

In addition to the two-day workshop, which was available by invitation only, we held two public events:

## Reckoning and Reimagining 2025 - Workshop report

- A panel on ***Dreaming on Indigenous Legal Education***
- A launch of the new open access book ***Legal Education Through an Indigenous Lens*** (edited by Nicole Watson and Heather Douglas)

Over the course of the workshop participants reflected on the key questions:

- How might Indigenous legal authority best be reflected in Australian legal education?
- What do we need to reckon with in relation to Australian legal education?
- What effective pedagogies have you worked with or would like to explore?
- What learnings can we draw from colleagues and collaborators from Aotearoa and elsewhere?
- What needs to be reimagined about academic pathways in law schools to serve Indigenous justice goals?
- How can we build structural power to transform legal education?



# Bringing us together

## Background

This gathering started from our shared acknowledgement as legal educators that the structural exclusion of Indigenous legal knowledges from Australian legal education has real and devastating impacts on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples' experiences of justice. Australian legal education has a long history of laying the legal architecture of colonial violence.

The core regulatory requirements for Australian legal education towards admission as a legal practitioner are 'characterised by stasis',<sup>1</sup> largely unchanged since their introduction in 1982.<sup>2</sup> Through revisions to the *Australian Law School Standards* adopted by the Council of Australian Law Deans (CALD) in 2020 law schools committed to deliver programs that 'develop knowledge and understanding of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspectives on and intersections with the law' (Standard 2.3.3), though as of this year the CALD has determined to no longer report against these Standards. Our desktop review of published course learning outcomes demonstrates that around half of Australian law schools have implemented a specific learning outcome or graduate attribute related to Indigenous experiences of law at the degree level.

The academic year prior to this gathering had been a particularly difficult one for Indigenous legal academics in Australia, with *The Australian* newspaper publishing a series of articles questioning the role of Indigenous perspectives in Australian legal education, including multiple articles targeting individual members of our academic community.

### Participant feedback:

"I am re-energised after a very ordinary year with the media attacks on our work. Great to connect with people who care and are committed to growing this space. It gives me hope for the future."

A core source of inspiration for the organisers in developing this workshop is the work done in tertiary health science education through the [Leaders In Indigenous Medical Education \(LIME\)](#) forum. The LIME Network is a substantial source of knowledge sharing in medical and health science cultural safety education, running a biannual international conference, regular *Slices of Lime* expert seminars and publishing better practice case studies. The forum aims to share knowledge and reward excellence in Indigenous education, in a manner which does not currently have a parallel in the legal education space.

While there is no workshop or community of practice undertaking this specific role in considering Indigenous teaching and learning in university law school settings in Australia, we acknowledge the related work of the following forums:

- **The Council of Australian Law Deans First Peoples' Partnership:** Forum of the peak body of Australian law schools, the Council of Australian Law Deans, with terms of reference including 'to promote the respectful acknowledgement and cultural awareness throughout Australian legal education of First Peoples' laws, knowledges and sovereignties' and to encourage faculty engagement. One of the Co-Convenors of Reckoning and Reimagining Co-chairs this forum, and several others are or have been members.

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<sup>1</sup> Sally Kift and Kana Nakano, *Reimagining the Professional Regulation of Australian Legal Education* (2021, Council of Australian Law Deans Report) 17.

<sup>2</sup> Sally Kift and Kana Nakano, *Reimagining the Professional Regulation of Australian Legal Education* (2021, Council of Australian Law Deans Report) 12.

## Reckoning and Reimagining 2025 - Workshop report

- **The National Indigenous Legal Conference** hosted annually by a state-based Indigenous lawyers association towards an audience of Indigenous lawyers, as well as practitioners and academics. This forum often includes a First Nations law students' day, but has not had substantial focus on legal education or pedagogy.
- The **International Indigenous Curriculum Community of Practice and Indigenous Higher Education Conference**, convenes a biannual three-day conference focusing on Indigenous curriculum across all higher education disciplines, and supported by a regular community of practice.
- The **World Indigenous Peoples Conference on Education (WIPCE)**, focuses on Indigenous peoples' education and the design and development of culturally affirming and intellectually enriching education for Indigenous peoples. A major conference is held every three years, and other forums focus substantially on international law and standard setting relating to Indigenous education.

In convening an initial workshop with key voices in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander legal education in Australia, the convenors hope to build support and work towards growing a national community of practice of legal educators committed to reforms towards First Nations justice in Australian legal education. The 2025 Reckoning and Reimagining workshop is therefore a pilot to explore opportunities to grow a community of practice for Indigenous legal education and explore what sorts of forums and activities will work best for our community.

As convenors we thank everyone who took part for their time, energy, candour and courage – at the forum and in all of their work towards more just futures.



## Workshop artwork



The workshop convenors are grateful to Trent ‘bundirrik’ Lee, Larrakia Artist and educator, for creating the artwork for the *Keeper of Knowledge* artwork for the Reckoning and Reimagining workshop.

Trent is a long-term collaborator with the Indigenous Law and Justice Hub as part of our On Country teaching, and we have benefited greatly from his friendship and teaching.

For this workshop we asked Trent to create a piece for us that would signify both the wisdom and tenacity of academics who have been leading this work, and that this work should be done in community. We asked Trent to represent the fruit of the possibilities of this work, and that some are ‘low hanging fruit’ and that others take a little more work, but that all are worth the benefits.

We were able to send workshop participants home with pins of the owls Trent created for us, as well as a few other reminders of the fruits of their learning.

### **Artwork story: “Keeper of knowledge”**

A sacred place where the tree of knowledge sits with roots that run deep into the heart of the Country. Its branches stretch wide, carrying fruits of many colours and meanings — each one holding a different story and different lesson from all that visit the tree.

The two owls are perched high in the tree. One faces the rising sun, the other looks toward the setting light. Though they came from a different place, both share the same purpose to -

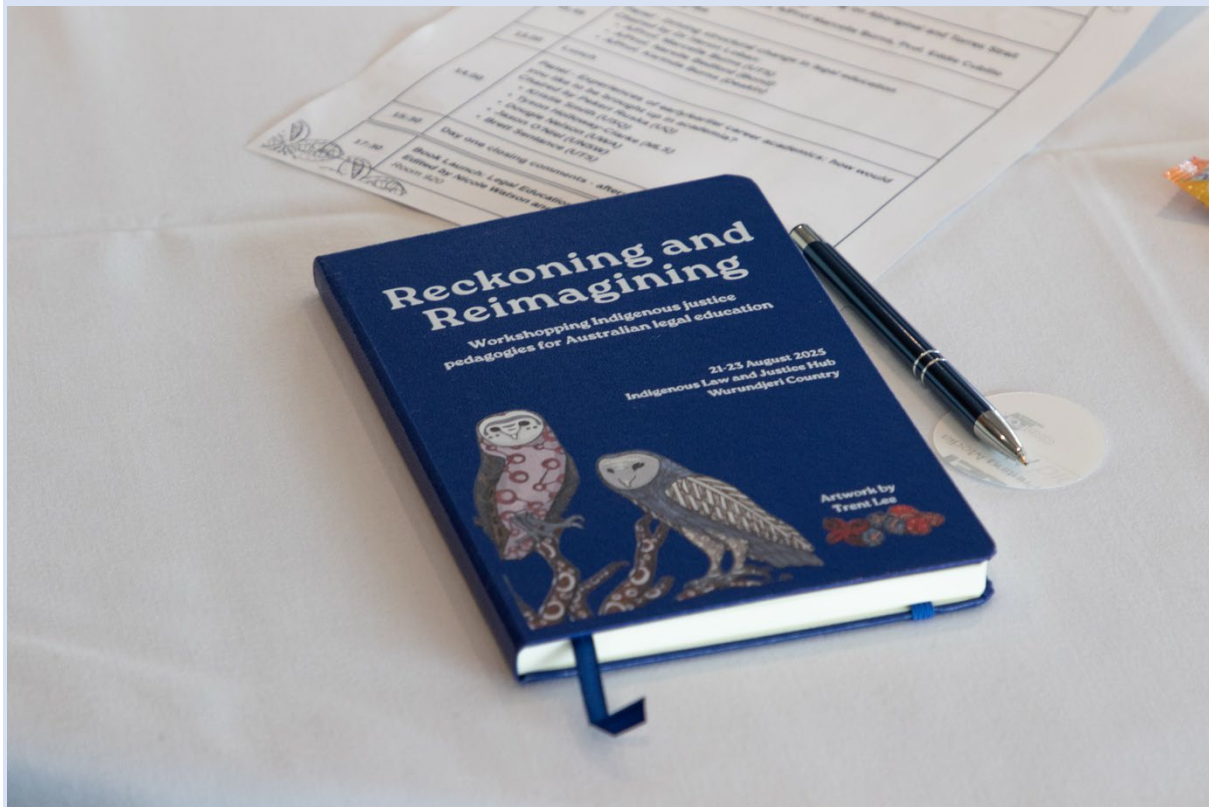
## Reckoning and Reimagining 2025 - Workshop report

listen, watch, learn and guide. They sit in silence, learning by watching and listening to the knowledge from the ones who came before them and from land that is carried through the wind and blows the leaves in the tree passing on these lessons and each other carrying stories from there different places, their feathers are symbols of their knowledge. Teaching us to listen when someone is talking.

Etched in the bark is ochre markings, painted by the elders. These symbols hold deep meaning of strength, connection to Country— stories of creation and resilience. The tree holds knowledge that is protected and must be respected.

Beneath the tree are roots twisted deep into the ground, firm and strong. The roots are to symbolise the importance of grounding yourself and teaches us to have the strength to succeed and survive and for us to passed down to the next generation the knowledge we hold that will make us stronger.

Above them, the blue sky stretches endlessly, painted with soft, flowing patterns. These are the spirits of the elders weaving through the clouds, watching, guiding, and telling us to keep on the right path and that everything is connected — everything we see and everything we don't.



## Participation

There were over **78 participants** in the two-day workshop.

The program included 21 speakers, including Indigenous legal educators sharing their experiences from Aotearoa-New Zealand and Canada.

Over 150 people attended the public *Dreaming on Indigenous Legal Education* panel.

## Who attended the workshop?

Data from registration demonstrates the following about the demographic representation of workshop participants:

Number	Participant category
4	International participants
12	Current PhD students
9	Research-only academics
3	Practicing lawyers
18	Early-Career academics (1-5 years of academic experience)

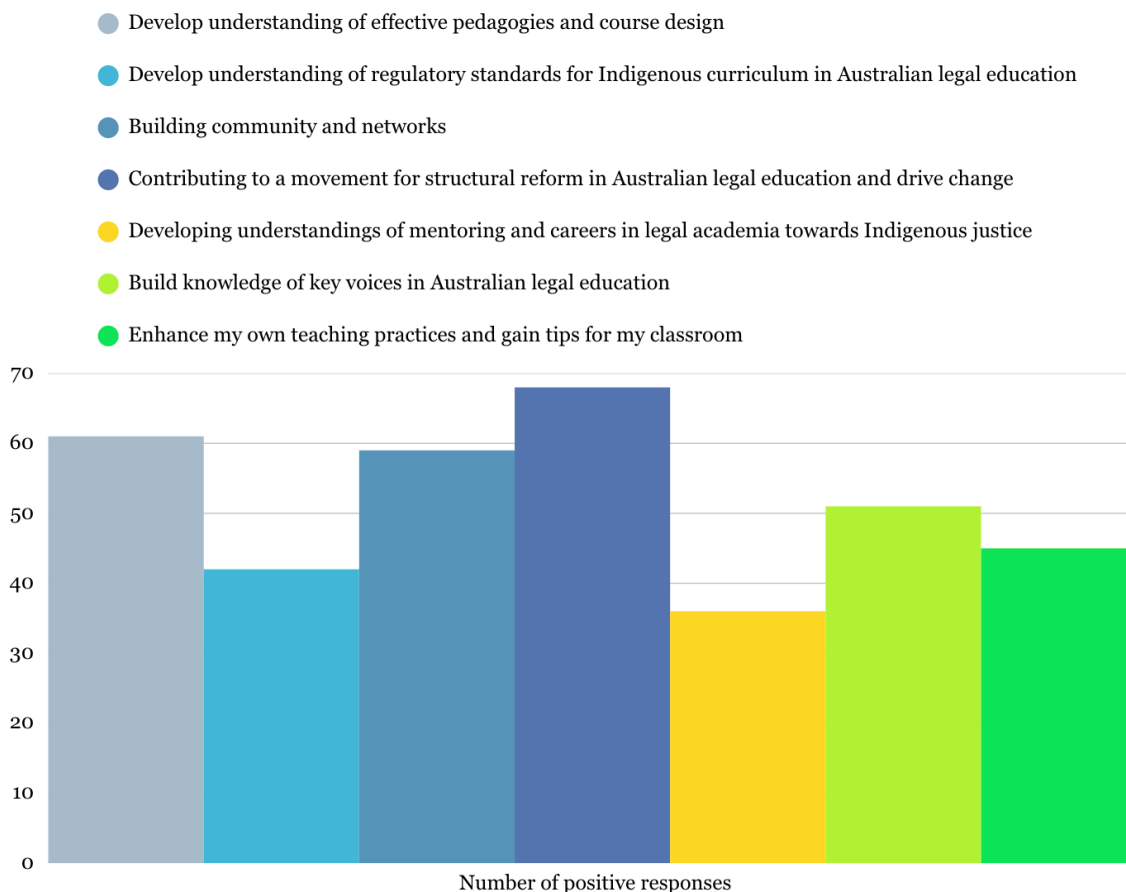
38% of participants identified as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander.

50% of the workshop participants were currently teaching in relation to Indigenous legal issues in an Australian law school.

20% of workshop participants reported that they were currently teaching Indigenous legal issues in the context of a **compulsory subject** at an Australian law school and 36% of participants reported that they were currently teaching Indigenous curriculum in an **elective context** in an Australian law school.



***What is your key motivation for attending Reckoning and Reimagining: workshopping Indigenous Justice pedagogies for Australian legal education?***



A good majority of the people who registered for the workshop (68 out of 78 registrations) told us that one of their key motivations for attending the workshop was to **“contribute to a movement for structural reform in Australian legal education and to drive change.”** The second most popular motivator for attending the workshop was to **“develop understanding of effective pedagogies and course design.”**

During registration participants were also able to contribute their own key motivations for attending the workshop. Some of the motivations that were shared with us were:

- “Understand effective leadership in the current political environment.”
- “Whakawhanaungatanga (building connections) between Indigenous curriculum building in Aotearoa and Australia.”
- “Learnings to inform further development of our school's Indigenous Strategy and approach to decolonising our curriculum in a systematic way.”
- Develop my capacity to embed Indigenous knowledges in a culturally responsible manner.”
- To support First Nations-led reform of law curriculum and practice standards” and,
- "International Indigenous collaboration.”

## How we spread the word

A key challenge of establishing a gathering of this nature was the absence of an existing forum or mailing list of Indigenous legal scholars in Australia, or others interested in Indigenous legal education reform. We knew that our existing networks were unlikely to include everyone who should be invited to this workshop and given opportunity to be in the room. We wanted to extend and grow existing communities.

We set out to develop a list of invitees and sent out an initial ‘save the date’ email where we asked colleagues to also elect colleagues who might be interested. We then emailed the Council of Australian Law Deans and asked them to distribute an expression of interest email to all Australian law schools. We asked each law school to refer participants who were best placed to attend the workshop.

We advised that there was discretionary funding available for those who would otherwise not be able to attend, which would be prioritised towards First Nations academics.

**“This is an important gathering to bring together Indigenous legal educators at a time when our work has been under intense scrutiny. It is an opportunity to come together in solidarity and support each other in this vital work which has a real impact for our peoples.”**

*Marcelle Burns – Reckoning and Reimagining Convenor*

**“We are creating a space to build connections and reflect, under the generous supervision and guidance of incredible leaders and educators.”**

*Jaynaya Dwyer - Reckoning and Reimagining Convenor*

## Funding

The workshop was supported by a major grant from the Indigenous Knowledges Institute at the University of Melbourne. Support was also received from the University of Technology Sydney. With this financial support we were able to make the workshop free of charge to attendees, support speaker travel and provide limited travel grants to participants who otherwise would not have been able to attend.

## Venue

The workshop was held at the Woodward Conference Centre at the Melbourne Law School.

## Feedback

28 people participated in the post-workshop survey. All participants reported that based on their experience at the workshop they would attend another event with this community.

Respondents reported a very positive overall experience at the workshop:

Survey question	Average response
I had a positive experience at the <i>Reckoning and Reimagining</i> workshop.	4.9/5
I was able to build networks and make new connections at the workshop.	4.7/5
There was a benefit from having international guests in the room.	5/5

## Reckoning and Reimagining 2025 - Workshop report

This workshop will strengthen my teaching and curriculum design practices.	4.9/5
I was given adequate opportunity to contribute and participate.	4.8/5

Participants shared the following about the **most important part or highlight** of their workshop experience:

- “Just being in a room full of mob and our allies, sharing experiences and lessons to carry forward Indigenous legal education. It's so uplifting to share and not feel so alone in this.”
- “Circular tables providing opportunity to meet and connect. I loved hearing both our Canadian and Māori guests present. I appreciated the varied presentations that gave me a chance to put everyone's names to their faces and hear from them directly because I generally won't approach our seniors directly.”
- “I can't express how important and valuable it was to have so many mob in the room. Having time to reflect on our shared challenges and experiences in law schools and legal education was really valuable. All of the in between yarns during breaks and at dinners afterwards was just as essential.”
- “Really the whole thing was beautifully put together and run so smoothly. I enjoyed it far more than any academic conference or workshop I've attended (in 15+ years of academic life).”
- “Great to connect with like-minded people who are committed to this work. And so good to see many younger Indigenous legal academics and allies who will take this work forward in the future. A timely intervention to give us space to re-energise and strategise how to build upon our success to date, and spread the love ♡ ♡ ♡”



## Reckoning and Reimagining 2025 - Workshop report

Participants reported how they believed that their *practice would change* as a result of the workshop. Their responses included:

- “I have noted the importance of wellbeing for us working in this space, and have a renewed focus on incorporating relationality, cultural practice, and humour into my institution and workday.”
- “In addition to implementing ideas in my individual teaching units, I will be undertaking a systemic mapping exercise of my law school with a view to working out what needs to be done to incorporate Indigenous pedagogies into the curriculum, and to make the law school a safe and welcoming place for Indigenous students and staff (both academic and professional).”
- “As an early career academic, this will change my whole approach to teaching Indigenous perspectives (I am non-Indigenous). I learned a lot about the role of allies in legal education. I am hoping to put pressure on the university I work at to show all the incredible things other institutions are doing.”
- “I feel more confident to say no to cultural loading, or at least pick and choose. I feel more confident to approach a number of people about embedding First Nations law into curriculum and seeking advice on tactical or strategic ways to tackle this.”
- “That's a huge question and I don't yet know the answer. In the first instance it will make me aware of the fundamentally colonial nature of the law I teach, and the institution I'm part of. This will affect my practice in countless ways, from the way I frame issues to the way I speak to students and colleagues. I suspect this workshop will prove to be a turning point for my teaching career.”
- “Much clearer idea of specific actions to take to weave Indigenous knowledges into our law school.

## Our conversations

### Program

#### 21<sup>st</sup> August

##### 1. ***Dreaming on Indigenous Legal Education***

Facilitated by Inala Cooper

- Jidah Clark -Chair, Treaty Authority
- Professor Eddie Cubillo – University of Melbourne
- Professor Nicole Watson - University of Technology, Sydney
- Dr Carwyn Jones – Head lecturer on Māori Laws and Philosophy program at Te Wananga o Raukawa

#### 22<sup>nd</sup> August

##### 1. **Introduction and scene setting**

Inala Cooper (MC)

##### 2. **Keynote - Holding our ground: Reflecting on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Legal Education**

Prof. Nicole Watson, A/Prof Marcelle Burns, Prof. Eddie Cubillo

##### 3. **Panel - Driving structural change in legal education**

Chaired by Dr Heron Loban:

- A/Prof. Marcelle Burns (UTS)
- A/Prof. Narelle Bedford (Bond)
- A/Prof. Karinda Burns (Deakin)

**23<sup>rd</sup> August**

- 1. Opening of day two**  
Inala Cooper
- 2. Keynote - Prof. Khylee Quince (Dean, Auckland University of Technology)**  
Honouring Tikanga as the First Law of Aotearoa in Legal Education
- 3. Panel - Better practice case studies in effective pedagogies**
  - Lorelai Billing (JCU)
  - Jeff Hewitt (Osgoode Hall)
  - Ashley Morris (VLA) and Dr Laura Griffin (Latrobe)
- 4. Workshop activity - developing our community**
- 5. Sharing from a ‘train the trainer’ project on supporting legal academics teaching Indigenous curriculum**  
Prof. Eddie Cubillo, Cassandra Seery, Jaynaya Dwyer
- 6. Coming together: workshopping a call to action**  
Facilitated by Inala Cooper

## Workshop overview

Key themes and calls to action from the discussion were synthesised into a workshop Communique (see Appendix 1).

### ***Dreaming on Indigenous legal education***

In the opening public event to the workshop, we set out to dream expansively about what Australian legal education to serve Indigenous justice agendas might look like, with contributions from Jidah Clark (Djab Wurrung), Eddie Cubillo (Larrakia, Wadjigan and Central Arrente), Nicole Watson (Mununjali, Birri Gubba) and Carwyn Jones (Ngāti Kahungunu).

In developing this event we noted that work aiming to shift legal practice away from colonial foundations and towards Indigenous justice goals so often finds itself characterised by intense negotiation and compromise. In undertaking an exercise in freedom dreaming we took inspiration from the work of Black American historian Robin D G Kelley, who writes *'love and imagination may be the most revolutionary impulses available to us, and yet we have failed to understand their political importance and respect them as powerful social forces.'*



Jidah Clark spoke about his experience as the Chair of the Victorian Treaty Authority in the context of being a former practicing lawyer and alumni of the Melbourne Law School, and how treaty obligations emerging in the state of Victoria require us to think across legal systems.

***“There is a particular beauty and gift of these Aboriginal knowledge systems which is waiting for the rest of Australia to take on board if we are all ready to listen and be humble about how the system is legitimate, has value, and actually has the answer to our future complex challenges.”***  
*Jidah Clark, Djab Wurrung man and Chair of the Treaty Authority.*

Professor Nicole Watson’s contribution drew on examples from Canadian bijural legal education and revitalisation methodologies to imagine a law school which focuses on relationship and empathy, and considers law school’s obligations to make reparations to First Peoples through agreement-making.

Dr Carwyn Jones spoke about his work at the Te Wānanga o Raukawa, an Indigenous higher education institute in Aotearoa New-Zealand, where he is the head lecturer in the Māori laws and philosophy program. He advocated the importance of thinking of Indigenous law, the First Law of Aotearoa as a lived experience in our conversations within our classrooms, and to work together to build up our collective understanding through shared reflection on our own experiences of law.

Professor Eddie Cubillo spoke of the hard work done by a very few to transform Australia legal education and his hope that those who come behind us will have an easier time. He spoke about exclusion of Indigenous law as a structural choice within systems stacked against First Peoples.

***What would a legal education look like if it answered not to the state, but to Country?***

***If Indigenous law was not treated as an optional cultural subject, but the foundation of an entire discipline?***

***This isn't just an intellectual exercise for us, living in organisations who are happy to feature your face in a brochure, but not your voice in a decision.***

***Professor Eddie Cubillo, Larrakia, Wadjigan and Central Arrente man and legal scholar.***

[You can watch the recording of this important conversation.](#)

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### **Understanding our history and context**

In the opening keynote address Professor Nicole Watson (Birri Gubba and Munanjali), Associate Professor Marcelle Burns (Gomerioi-Kamilaroi) and Professor Eddie Cubillo (Larrakia, Wadjigan and Central Arrente) came together to offer the talk ***Holding our Ground: Reflecting on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Legal Education.***

Professor Watson spoke about the absence of published history of Aboriginal peoples' involvement in legal education and considered the policies which resulted in the relatively late emergence of First Nations lawyers in Australia in comparison to other colonial contexts. She spoke of some of the luminaries of the early Indigenous legal profession, including Magistrate Pat O'Shane, Judge Bob Bellear, Paul Coe and Lloyd McDermott. Reflecting on this history, Professor Watson asked us to consider what our legacy would be and what our gift will be to the next generation of First Nations lawyers and legal academics.

Associate Professor Marcelle Burns spoke of the more recent history of advocacy towards change in curriculum governance across higher education and in legal education towards cultural capability in legal graduates. We considered the important legacy of the Indigenous Cultural Competency for Legal Academics Program, carried out by Marcelle Burns, Anita Lee Hong and Asmi Wood, completed in 2019. However, since this time Indigenous Graduate Attributes have not been uniformly adopted across law schools, and electives considering Indigenous peoples' experiences of law are still not uniformly available across Australian law schools.

Professor Eddie Cubillo then spoke about the current status of legal education as sites of silence, where the omission of Indigenous law isn't only a gap but a message about the values of the profession. Professor Cubillo placed this experience within the broader context of the settler legal system.

Reflecting on our history, participants noted that many University institutions still carried names heavily associated with colonialism and harms to First Nations people and that this should change.

### **Driving structural change in curriculum reform**

Throughout the workshop participants expressed aspirations for an Australian legal education celebrating Indigenous knowledges, grounded in legal realism, accountable to Country and honouring Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander ways of sharing knowledge. Participants believed this should be a core required course underpinned by robust regulatory

## Reckoning and Reimagining 2025 - Workshop report

standards, not something optional for our graduates.

The structural reforms panel, chaired by Dr Heron Loban saw the sharing of innovative and diverse case studies in curriculum design processes towards affording Indigenous legal knowledges due regard in legal education, at both the degree-wide and clinical education level.

Participants engaged in discussion on how to build collective power and voice in driving structural change. Indigenous participants described experiences of being involved in projects in 'advisory only' capacities within organisations which did not properly respect their interests. They described the toll of the accumulation of abandoned institutional commitments, encouraging us to honour the distress associated with the abandonment of these institutional projects.

During discussion, workshop participants discussed the relationship between Indigenous justice interests and the Council of Australian Law Deans, as the key forum through which change in this area might be advanced at present. They considered whether an independent body is needed to advocate on behalf of First Nations legal academics and First Nations interests in legal education more broadly.

A core priority of participants was how to build executive and faculty-level support for curriculum Indigenisation work, how to identify and map faculty capability around teaching Indigenous curriculum, and how to create appropriate incentives to engage in quality teaching and learning practices in relation to Indigenous law and justice.

Participants also discussed how to respond to and address actions by faculty members which act to delegitimise and reject work of First Nations academics and curriculum transformation processes.

Additionally, participants discussed dynamics where early-career academics are encouraged to take up work in leading Indigenous curriculum reform beyond their training or role responsibility and together contemplated when to say no to proposals which aren't well considered.

### **Experience of Indigenous legal academics and colonial load**

Participants in the workshop identified that a core site for reckoning in Australian legal education was with the experience of First Nations colleagues of colonial load and colonial violence in our workplaces.

The convenors of Reckoning and Reimagining were motivated to create a space for Indigenous academics to connect, particularly those who are the only Indigenous academic at their school. A cornerstone of this was the early-career academics panel, where we took the opportunity to listen to emerging Indigenous legal academics about their experiences and hopes for the academy, and thought about opportunities to structure support and academic pathways towards Indigenous justice.

A key theme of discussion across the forum was on how to ethically share labour of curriculum reform work, participants sharing a perception that there is experience of increasing of workload expectations on First Nations academics associated with curriculum Indigenisation and organisational change projects. Participants considered how to build greater sustainability, considering various available workload policies and the extent to which they recognise labour grounded in cultural knowledge. The development of minimum standards around workload policies on colonial load was proposed.

## Reckoning and Reimagining 2025 - Workshop report

*Participant feedback: It's difficult to pick a highlight as the whole workshop was excellent. In saying that, I really enjoyed the ECA panel and hearing their stories on how they got to where they are.*

Workshop participants spoke about their own experiences of the education systems, which was often alienating, bringing this lived experience insight to their work with students. At several points throughout the workshop participants recalled experiences of profound racism in law schools. Having achieved a law degree, many participants discussed feelings of guilt at not utilising their legal skills through direct support for Aboriginal communities and people facing oppression through the legal system, describing staying out of practice and in legal academia as a tough choice.

Participants discussed working in environments where they bore heavy responsibilities through 'service allocations', which had underserved some academics when it came to promotion applications. Participants also expressed that they were sometimes expected by law schools to 'manage up' to senior Indigenous community members as organisational stakeholders, which was not culturally appropriate.



Participants discussed the critical importance of building communities of Indigenous scholars going through the same thing, which took place across their universities, as well as within their discipline across institutions. Equally importantly was building networks of academic mentors and trusted guides to check propositions and go in to bat for you with law school and university leadership. Participants highlighted that this network was indeed already strong, despite lack of opportunities to come together, and that links often seemed to be underestimated by law schools who seemed to assume that information was not shared 'on the grapevine.'

Participants discussed the sorts of considerations highlighted at the workshop as minimum requirements for working sustainably in University spaces. Participants raised concerns about limitations in law schools' responses to recent negative media commentary on the role

## Reckoning and Reimagining 2025 - Workshop report

of First Nations knowledges in Australian legal education, and strategized about how to respond to similar circumstances in future.

In reflecting on what a law school that is culturally safe looks like, participants called for:

- Embedded Indigenous presence and leadership within universities.
- Less hostility towards First Peoples in University workplaces, requiring all staff to work with an understanding of their own cultural lens as well as intersectional sites of discrimination;
- Building clear and effective accountability mechanisms in relation to racism in University workplaces, supported by a culture of anti-racism;
- Support for Indigenous teaching and learning practices within law schools;
- Greater institutional recognition of the service and cultural knowledge contributions of Indigenous staff;
- Industry wide standards for cultural workload recognition rather than individual institutions and negotiation on load/ cultural leave;
- Elimination of lateral violence;
- Community-engaged campuses and law schools which value being in good relation to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities;
- Developing support, understanding and cultural capability amongst executives in Australian law schools; and,
- Person-centred non-hierarchical structures and environments.

Participants also highlighted that the above needs to be supported by proper staffing allocation and financial resourcing.

### **Learning from colleagues across jurisdictions**

Australia has much to learn from experiences in other jurisdictions.

A highlight of the workshop was the keynote delivered by Professor Khylee Quince (Ngapuhi, Te Roroa, Ngati Porou, Ngati Kahungunu), the Dean of Law at Auckland University of Technology. Professor Quince highlighted the journey of legal education to respond to the increasing recognition of Māori legal orders by appellate courts in Aotearoa, and considerations of how to maintain integrity of conduct in the profession in relation to Indigenous law. To change the tide, they reminded us that we need to model ongoing learning as teachers, and spoke to the mentoring of their heroes among Māori members of the legal profession, Moana Jackson and Nin Tomas.

Jeff Hewitt (Cree) joined us to spoke to their practices of teaching law through land-based learning in Canada, sharing inspiring words and practical tips for facilitating legal education beyond the classroom.

Participants reflected that through being in conversation with people working in similar contexts in other settler-colonial jurisdictions, they gained perspective that Australia is an outlier in the lack of firm regulatory requirements to assess graduate knowledge and capability in relation to Indigenous experiences of law.



Workshop participants raised the value of establishing a forum on ongoing dialogue between Australia, New Zealand and other jurisdictions on Indigenous legal education, and cross-jurisdictional or comparative research on Indigenous legal education. Participants particularly considered there was room for shared theorising and development of practice models for approaching bodies of law that rest on very different foundations.

### Upskilling to meet our teaching objectives

Participants shared that there was significant need for upskilling and support amongst Australian legal educators to meet the curriculum goals envisaged at the workshop.

In addition to developing their subject knowledge, participants identified the following skills as important to support in legal educators:

- Being able to develop resources for their classes that are curated with respect for ICIP and cultural authority;
- Being able to work in diverse classrooms, with appropriate attention to the respective learning needs of Indigenous and non-Indigenous students in the classroom;
- Skills to facilitate and intervening in the context of particularly racist expressions in the classroom.
- Facilitation skills associated with building relational learning communities

Participants shared views that capabilities in relation to Indigenous education should be built into employment structures, such as requirements for recruitment.

Participants identified that there is a crucial need for education resources to support teaching in relation to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in core subjects, such as Australian legal textbooks engaging sufficiently with Indigenous legal knowledges.

Participants identified multiple pedagogies which they would like to see developed in more depth in Australian legal education:

- Experiential and On-Country learning models in relationship with place and community
- Co-teaching with elders and other senior cultural knowledge holders
- Storytelling as legal pedagogy
- Critical engagement and analysis of common law as racial and colonial text

During the workshop participants heard from Ash Morris (Victoria Legal Aid) and Laura Griffin (Latrobe) about the development of the Victorian First Nations Cultural Capability Framework and reflected on the need for forums to circulate these sorts of resources and support alignment of legal education to these developments in the profession.

We considered, especially through the contributions of Lorelai Billing (JCU), the possibilities of developing a workforce of practitioner-academics and co-teaching collaborations to support our education goals.

## Plans for a community of practice

One of the workshop exercises involved asking participants to think about the potential for a national community of practice for Indigenous legal education. Throughout the workshop the following insights were shared.

### Key functions

Participants considered that a community of practice on Indigenous legal education should:

- Provide legitimate representation of First Nations interests in Australian legal education;
- Developing and sharing knowledge and resources to support effective Indigenous legal curriculum;
- Provide a forum for support for First Nations people involved in law schools, and to build relationships between schools and community; and,
- Provide an accountability mechanism to institutions of law and legal education in relation to First Nations justice work.

### Key considerations regarding membership

Workshop members did not speak to a particular governance model for a community of practice but expressed a wish that its governance support its independence in its ability to carry out its functions.

Participants expressed differing views about whether the body should be national or international, fostering connections to legal academics undertaking similar work in Canada, Aotearoa and other jurisdictions.

Participants expressed differing views about whether such a body should have reach into the profession or be focused exclusively on legal education. Participants considered that the body should not only be informed in its work by people currently involved in formal legal education but should be inclusive of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community members with an interest in legal education.



Some participants noted that members should have a mix of experience and considered that a national body could grow to have local communities of practice with small forums and local champions facilitating functions.

### **What work the body should the body do?**

Work which participants considered that a community of practice around Indigenous legal education could usefully undertake include:

#### *Teacher training*

- Provide training and professional development seminars for educators on both pedagogy (e.g. skills for enhancing safety in the classroom) and content (e.g. developments that should be reflected in legal education relating to First Peoples such as Treaty processes) to upskill teachers.
- Run a conference.
- Provide a mentoring, auditing or peer-review service across institutions.

#### *Knowledge and resource development*

- Provide intellectual resources considering key aspects of course design e.g. How Indigenous aspects of legal education is situated within a student's global and local context.
- Generate educational resources for use across core curriculum units, published for availability to law schools.
- Develop better practice models for Indigenous legal education across law degrees e.g. compulsory unit; embedding across units or completion of one of suite of courses.
- The body could play some role in the revitalisation of First Nations legal traditions.
- The body could establish a forum for publishing Indigenous legal scholarship.

#### *Coalition building*

- Create opportunities for academics, students and community to grow relationships.
- Provide spaces for First Nations academics to come together.
- Build a community of people interested in growing their knowledge and practice on Australian legal education.
- Developing opportunities for clinical legal education with ACCOs and other organisations.
- Develop standards, practices and cultures of law schools having reciprocal relationships with First Nations communities.

#### *Accountability*

- Speak on behalf of members on key matters.
- Work on enhancing legal sector commitment to culturally safe workplaces and economic empowerment of mob.
- Work on cultural safety standards in teaching and learning.
- Survey law schools and publish outcomes as accountability mechanisms e.g. survey of available electives.
- Cultural safety building and truth telling activities for law schools.
- Deal with the spectre of racism in our law schools.

### **Success factors for the body**

- The body should be inclusive and provide a space where academics can come to learn wherever their starting point.
- The body should have capacity to be a strong and agile voice for justice.
- The body should have a clear purpose and be faithful to it.

## Reckoning and Reimagining 2025 - Workshop report

- The body should do some of its work online to enable access and connection, while also maintaining commitment to in-person connection where possible.
- The body should work in a manner which disrupts established power hierarchies in legal education to locate more power with First Peoples and communities.
- The body should be appropriately resourced with a range of functions, including an admin and secretariate.
- Participants work with commitment to self-determination and humility.

### **Our dream for Australian legal education**

Participants shared that within five years every Australian law graduate should experience as part of their legal education:

- Indigenous leadership, through community, scholarly legal practice;
- Deep and respectful engagement with Indigenous knowledges and expertise;
- On-Country learning, situated in place;
- Joy in learning about law and justice in a community;
- A diversity of pedagogies in relation to Indigenous legal knowledges;
- Strengths-based learning in relation to everyone in our community;
- Legal education with a justice-orientation;
- An understanding of the limitations of legal institutions; and,
- Opportunities for creative expression.

Within five years every Australian law graduate should learn about:

- 65000 years of Indigenous legal orders;
- The Indigenous governance landscape in which they live and work;
- Self-knowledge about their positionality and relationality;
- Truth-telling about the history of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander experiences of settler law;
- Treaty;
- Strengths-based practice;
- The legal assistance landscape and its limitations; and,
- Their professional responsibilities relating to First Peoples.

Through these learnings and experiences our graduates should be able to:

- Work with racial literacy to identify racism and settler-colonial logics
- Work with humility and in a manner which celebrates cultural strength
- Work reflectively
- Fulfil their professional responsibilities to First Peoples, communicating effectively and working with respect
- Work with respect for cultural authority and Indigenous cultural and intellectual property.

## Convenors' reflections

We are overjoyed by the response to Reckoning and Reimagining. There is such power, possibility and community amongst those who were in the room. We are so much stronger together.

Following what we heard from participants we understand that gatherings of this nature are highly valued and crucial to offering support and connection to assist participants to undertake the important work that they are doing all across the Country.

We heard that there is a desire to include and connect with law students in this work as well.

We look forward to growing this community alongside you.



## Schedule 1 - Communique

*This communique emerged from Reckoning and Reimagining: Workshopping Indigenous Justice Pedagogies for Australian Legal Education, held on Wurundjeri Country from 22–23 August 2025. Over seventy-five educators, research students, community representatives, and practitioners came together to reflect on how Australian legal education must change to confront its colonial foundations and to embed Indigenous law and justice across all aspects of teaching and learning. The statements that follow capture our collective conviction that truth-telling, accountability, and structural reform are not optional — they are the necessary foundations of a just legal education system.*

We are First Nations legal academics and non-Indigenous allies who call for structural reform in Australian legal education. This communique is directed to everyone involved in the delivery and regulation of legal education, particularly those who exercise power over its design, namely Law School executives, the Council of Australian Law Deans and the regulators of State and Territory legal admission requirements. It is the conviction of workshop attendees that:

1. Every Australian law graduate should be equipped with an understanding of our 65,000+ years of legal history. They should encounter in their legal education the strength and diversity of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander legal knowledges, the significance of Country to Indigenous legal orders, as well as the truth of the role of Australian legal institutions in Australian colonial projects. Our teaching should feature and generate opportunities to learn from Indigenous histories of powerful advocacy, activism, dispute resolution and law reform work. We have many examples of how to do this, amongst our own teaching and from colleagues abroad, but today only a small number of our law students benefit from these programs.
2. Australian legal academics must engage in processes of reckoning with the colonial foundations of the discipline, and harms resulting from the erasure of Indigenous legal knowledges from our institutions. We call on law schools to reckon with the scope of change truly required to provide a legal education adequate to support First Nations justice objectives. It is not a tinkering around the edges of our practice but a transformation which is required.
3. All Australian law students should experience joy and a sense of belonging in their University education. They should learn in a law school where they encounter a variety of enriching pedagogies connected to Country and community. Legal education institutions should be responsive to the complexity of Indigenous students' lives, without underestimating their brilliance.
4. We must develop appropriate structures of Indigenous authority and governance to enable these transformations. Too often Indigenous colleagues have found themselves labouring on advisory bodies to legal institutions that do not have Indigenous peoples' interests at heart. We call for Indigenous governance over culture and curriculum change to law schools, and structural protections so that initiatives can endure. We must walk carefully in developing sound institutional and faculty support required to shift our practices. These cultural transformations of Australian law schools need to be properly resourced.
5. Indigenous graduate attributes should be present, embedded consistently and scaffolded across curriculum to support learning opportunities centring Indigenous knowledges.
6. There must be an easing of the colonial load experienced by the small number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander legal academics, and concerted attention to building culturally safe workplaces. Developing workforces capable of growing graduate capability around Indigenous legal knowledges requires pathways for First Nations academics, thinking

## Reckoning and Reimagining 2025 - Workshop report

creatively about how we collaborate in teaching, and growing the capability of non-Indigenous academics to take up this work. We cannot set up First Nations academics to fail through unrealistic expectations to do the work of transforming their institutions alone – that is not their role.

7. Racism is a significant problem in Australian law schools, including forms of racism protected by academic freedom. First Nations people in Australian law schools deserve better. Action on anti-racism is urgent and essential. We call upon Law Schools to implement local anti-racism strategies to ensure culturally safe work and learning environments for First Peoples.

8. Every legal educator has a role in developing and delivering Indigenous justice pedagogies for Australian legal education. We invite you to walk this journey with us.

*This communique is both a commitment and a call to action.*

*As First Nations academics, collaborators, and allies, we commit to continuing this work together: to build curricula grounded in truth, Country, and relationality; to ensure that Indigenous law and history are recognised as foundational; and to create law schools where every student learns in ways that honour the oldest continuing legal traditions on earth. We call on all those who design, teach, and regulate Australian legal institutions to take responsibility for transforming legal education — to move beyond acknowledgment toward genuine accountability.*

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