

Power of education helps First Nations students achieve their dreams

NEEDS OF THE NATION

EXCLUSIVE

NATASHA BITA

Education has been the ticket to opportunity for trainee teacher Renee Cubby, who plans to pay the privilege forward by teaching in a remote Aboriginal school.

The 19-year-old Murrawarri woman was born in the Indigenous community of Goodooga – a speck in the NSW outback, outside Lightning Ridge near the Queensland border.

When her family moved to Toowoomba, the teen secured a scholarship to boarding school at St Peters Lutheran College in Brisbane, through the Australian Indigenous Education Foundation.



LYNDON MECHIELSEN

University students Renee Cubby, 19, and Isaiah Harrop, 19

After graduating in 2022, Ms Cubby enrolled in an education degree at Griffith University.

“I would love to go back to my mob and teach in an Aboriginal community,” she said.

“I’m from Goodooga, and after moving to a big city, the experience changed my whole perception of education.

“Back there, people don’t get how big a thing education is.

“It’s important to go to school and finish school – I can tell them ‘I’m from here and I know exactly how you’re feeling.’”

Ms Cubby has taken a six-month break from her studies so she can work with Netball Queensland as a “spirit officer”, supporting young First Nations students at school with cultural and academic mentorship.

Fellow AIEF scholar, Isaiah

WHAT AUSTRALIANS THINK ABOUT ...

HIGHER EDUCATION

	Total	Gender		Age			Geographic area			Household income	
		Male	Female	18-34	35-49	50+	Metro	Regional	Remote	Under \$100k	\$100k+
Absolutely essential for personal and professional success	21	24	18	31	22	14	23	16	21	19	26
Important, but not absolutely necessary; alternative paths can also lead to success	56	55	57	54	58	56	56	57	61	54	60
Irrelevant; a university education is not required to become successful	19	18	21	9	15	29	18	24	19	23	13
Unsure	4	3	4	5	6	1	4	3	0	4	2

Question: In your opinion, how essential is it to have a university education in Australia?

Total sample base n = 1042; total n = 1043; 1 missing; effective sample size = 972 (93%)

Numbers may not add up to 100 due to rounding

Source: The Growth Distillery

Harrop, a Kamilaroi, Mununjala, Nunukul and Nughi man, is studying engineering at the Queensland University of Technology, and hopes to work in the mines when he finishes his degree.

“I’m only the second person in my family to make it to Year 12,” he said.

“There is a big increase in Aboriginal people finishing school, but it’s up to parents to

keep their kids in line, too.”

The Australian’s Needs of the Nation poll, by The Growth Distillery, shows that most Australians prize a university education.

One in five Australians surveyed thinks a degree is “absolutely essential” for personal and professional success.

Just over half think it is “important but not absolutely necessary”, as alternative pathways can

lead to success, while 19 per cent think a university degree is “irrelevant” to success in life.

Total university enrolments fell 3.2 per cent in 2022, the latest federal Education Department data shows.

The number of domestic students starting a degree in 2022 fell to the lowest level since 2013.

Among First Nations students, new enrolments fell 8 per cent in

2022 – the first fall since 2006.

One in three working-age Australians has a university degree, including 36 per cent of women and 28 per cent of men.

Universities Australia chief executive Luke Sheehy said a degree was a “great investment”.

“People with a uni degree enjoy higher wages, better employment outcomes and improved health and wellbeing,” he said.