

# MEDIA RELEASE



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## UC research projects bring in Indigenous voices

Tackling the incidence of scabies in remote communities and reviving a 350-kilometre trade route are two of a set of projects to receive research funding through the University of Canberra's Collaborative Indigenous Research Initiative (UC CIRI).

The University's recently appointed Dean of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Leadership and Strategy, Professor Peter Radoll said UC CIRI is emerging as a strong network of researchers, who are keenly committed to undertake Indigenous research.

"Importantly, UC CIRI's work places engagement with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and communities at the centre, making collaboration one of its core aims," Professor Radoll said.

"To conduct research side-by-side with the people you are focused on, with the shared intention to increase understanding and make a real difference in their lives is a wonderful approach to research and one which we know that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have been seeking for a long time."

UC CIRI has committed a total of \$260,376 to four projects announced today by Professor Peter Radoll.

The first study to receive a UC CIRI grant, worth \$100,000, is trialling the use of natural and native tea-tree oil in treating scabies infection, which is prevalent in remote Indigenous communities.

Assistant professor of pharmacy Dr Jackson Thomas, who is leading this research, said he's excited about this project.

"We're engaging with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander leaders in their communities from the beginning and designing the research project in a collaborative approach," Dr Thomas said.

A second project looks at the design and development of a gateway precinct for the Bundian Way, a traditional Aboriginal trade route between the New South Wales south coast and the Snowy Mountains.

The project is led by assistant professor of cultural heritage Dr Scott Heyes, and will engage with the Eden Local Aboriginal Land Council about the Bundian Way trail system, a 350 kilometre route stretching from the Far South Coast region in NSW to Mount Kosciuszko in the Snowy Mountains. The project will receive \$85,000 in funding from UC CIRI.

The third research grant, worth \$35,724 will go towards another investigation of the relationship between Aboriginal people and the landscape, with a focus on Cullunghutti Mountain (Mount Coolangatta) near the Shoalhaven Heads community.

University researchers will use Indigenous memory, place and landscape methods in order to understand and communicate the entanglement ties between the mountain and the people through their shared history.

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The final project, receiving \$39,652, will examine the use of statistics and other official attempts to describe and quantify achievement in Aboriginal education.

The researchers will focus on how these attempts emphasise presumed failures or deficiencies in achievement. It will also evaluate the relationship between education measurements, policy and practice.

These UC CIRI projects all engage with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander researchers, Elders and community members as well as non-Indigenous researchers across the University and other institutions.

Additional funding support will be provided by UC CIRI towards research projects, Indigenous Honours scholarships and Indigenous PhD scholars later in the year.

Further information about the funded projects is available on request.

- Professor Radoll (0424 154 038) and Dr Thomas are available for interview.

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#### Additional Information

Receiving funding worth \$35,724, University researchers will investigate the relationship between Aboriginal people and the landscape, with a focus on Cullunghutti Mountain (Mount Coolangatta) near the Shoalhaven Heads community.

Researchers from the University's Centre for Creative and Cultural Research along with Indigenous students will work with up to 20 local Aboriginal people, drawing on memories, stories and soundscapes about the mountain.

Associate professor of creative and cultural practice and Lead investigator Bethaney Turner said the mountain is an important part of the Dreaming of local Aboriginal groups.

"Our team aims to collect, and celebrate contemporary Aboriginal memories of the region through the use of 'yarning,' a process that ties in closely with the oral traditions of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. We will also walk the mountain together to stir the memories and stories held by these cultural custodians," Dr Turner said.

"Our project is also committed to building the research capacity of the University's Indigenous students. We are engaging up-and-coming indigenous researchers in a collaborative project with opportunities for mentoring and skill development. We want to inspire these students to consider post-graduate study and research as a career so they can encourage greater indigenous participation in higher education.

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A UC CIRI grant of \$85,000 will fund the research and design of a gateway to the Bundian Way, a traditional Aboriginal trade route between Far South Coast region in NSW and Mount Kosciuszko in the Snowy Mountains.

The project led by assistant professor of cultural heritage Scott Heyes will engage with the Eden Local Aboriginal Land Council about the 350-kilometre Bundian Way trail system which was used to trade food, goods and tools by local indigenous people.

“We are conducting extensive interviews of locals about the trail and will follow that with the development of designs and installations to create a new gateway precinct to the Bundian Way.

“Engaging with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander leaders in their communities about their heritage and being able to take those stories and history into the design and delivery of this new gateway, it’s a very exciting project” Dr Heyes said.

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The first study to receive a UC CIRI grant worth almost \$40,000 will examine the use of statistics and other official attempts to describe and quantify achievement in Aboriginal education.

Associate professor of communication Dr Kerry McCallum, who is leading this research, said the project will gauge whether there is a negative emphasis in such descriptions.

“We will assess whether the way education and policy officials frame Indigenous educational achievements over-represents presumed failures or deficiencies,” Dr McCallum said.

“This work will be the first in Australia to investigate the construction of education measurements and their impact on policy discourse and educational practice.