



Members of the 1965 Freedom Ride gather near where the bus returned, 60 years prior. Photo by Michelle Haywood.

# Scholarship honours legacy of the 1965 Freedom Ride

The University of Sydney announced a new scholarship in February honouring the legacy of the Freedom Ride, at an event commemorating the 60th anniversary of the return of the bus to the University of Sydney's Camperdown campus.

The Freedom Ride 60th Anniversary Scholarship for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Students will provide financial support to two Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students from New South Wales who are experiencing financial hardship, for the duration of their undergraduate studies. The 1965 Freedom Ride fought for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to have equal rights and opportunity. The scholarship shares the same ethos, seeking to remove barriers to higher education, and empower the next generation of First Nations leaders.

Led by activist Charles Perkins, the Freedom Riders travelled regional New South Wales challenging racial discrimination and documenting the segregation that existed in communities they went through. On 26 February 2025, opposite the spot they returned to 60 years earlier, original Freedom Riders assembled for a commemoration event. Vice-chancellor and President, Professor Mark Scott, chaired a panel with Jim Spigelman, Gary Williams,

Professor Ann Curthoys and Brian Aarons discussing the enduring legacy of their collective action.

"Your actions 60 years ago changed the course of history, and today we honour that legacy by ensuring future generations have access to the education, opportunities and pathways they deserve," said Vice-Chancellor and President, Professor Mark Scott.

Interim Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Indigenous Services and Strategy), Professor Jennifer Barrett, said the actions of the Freedom Riders continue to inspire the University community.

"This scholarship is about more than financial support – it is recognition of the courage and impact of the original Freedom Riders. It is also about empowering those who might follow in their footsteps," said Professor Barrett.

"The Freedom Ride 60th Anniversary Scholarship for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Students will provide \$8,500 each year to two undergraduate students for the duration of their degree.

"The Scholarship is designed to support a transformational education experience for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students so they can achieve their full potential. This scholarship – alongside the holistic

academic, wellbeing and cultural support available to our students through our Gadigal Centre – provides another opportunity to do so."

Gary Williams and the late Charles Perkins were the first-ever Aboriginal students at the University of Sydney, both starting in 1963 and taking part in the Freedom Ride in February 1965.

"In 1965 we highlighted and took a stand against discrimination, segregation, inequality and injustice in our society," said Mr Williams.

"We wanted to challenge the unjust status quo and discriminatory social norms in northern NSW towns and contribute to progressive social change towards a better future for all.

"While Australia has taken many steps forward since then, we know there is still much work to be done towards justice and equality, and to close the gap between Indigenous peoples and the wider Australian community.

"We're proud of the legacy of the Freedom Ride, and we're honoured that legacy is now being celebrated in this scholarship that will support a new generation of First Nations students and leaders who will take up the torch of those ideals and the ongoing work towards those aims."



THE UNIVERSITY OF SYDNEY

Celebrating 175 years