**SUBMISSION TO THE INDEPENDENT REVIEW INTO
REGIONAL, RURAL AND REMOTE EDUCATION
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I welcome the opportunity to make a submission to the *Independent Review into Regional, Rural and Remote Education*.

I am a former principal, Director Staffing Services, General Manager Human Resources and Executive Director People and Services with the NSW Department of Education.

While there are many aspects of education which impact on students in regional, rural and remote communities and schools, this submission will focus on:

- the recruitment of appropriately trained, qualified and experienced teachers;
- the recruitment of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Teachers; and
- the strategies used by Australian states and territories to address the Closing the Gap targets in relation to educational disadvantage.

The delivery of educational provision to regional, rural and remote communities and schools has long been impacted by sensitive political and industrial issues, often requiring solutions which are less than effective for individual school communities. In public education jurisdictions, and they are the jurisdictions which essentially provide the greater service to regional, rural and remote school communities, this is a fact which must be considered. There is often a need to address the "common good", with all-encompassing solutions.

1. Recruitment of appropriately trained, qualified and experienced teachers

In his 2003 paper, John Hattie, now Chair of the Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership, proposed that apart from the attributes which a "student brings to the table" themselves, the quality of teachers is the next most important factor in a student's learning at around 30 percent of effect (Hattie 2003). This view has been supported in many subsequent papers and is not widely challenged.

The recruitment of appropriately trained, qualified and experienced teachers for schools in regional, rural and remote communities is also not a new challenge. There have been many creative, and not so creative, attempts to deliver successful recruitment and retention strategies.

While some may reflect on the halcyon days of the 1970s when teachers were appointed directly to these schools from teachers' colleges and colleges of advanced education, the world has moved on, in terms of the needs of those schools, the modes of educational delivery and the effective "hooks" to lure teachers to these areas.

It must also be recognised that recruiting inexperienced teachers for these schools in the 1970s may have created similar issues to those being faced today, albeit without the considerable exposure to today's media. The use of bonded scholarships and guaranteed employment also contributed to a more seamless recruitment process.

Over the past 20-30 years most public education jurisdictions across Australia have devolved decision making and governance to schools and, in some cases, local school boards. The

devolution of recruitment has featured as one of the enticements for this, along with relative independence of budget management.

Victorian public schools have been progressing down this path since the early 1990s, with the responsibility for recruitment managed locally by school councils. Similarly in Western Australia, under the Independent Public Schools model, school boards have this role. While Local Schools Local Decisions in New South Wales, is not as far advanced as the other two aforementioned states, principals do have much more responsibility for recruitment now than they did a decade ago.

This progression to local governance and decision making has not been without risk, as evidenced through the Operation Ord inquiry of the Victorian Independent Broad-Based Anti-Corruption Commission, leading to criminal charges against a senior officer of the Department of Education and Training and several of his alleged associates.

Where school jurisdictions have decentralised the recruitment of teachers they have tended to support that process through centralised accreditation or registration processes and access to centralised databases, if required. They have also provided single point advertising solutions, with mixed acceptance by principals.

Anecdotal evidence suggests that there are significant shortcomings in this approach:
a. principals and school executives are not trained or experienced recruiters and often have to base their decisions on simplistic consideration of written applications, interviews and referee reports;
b. schools in regional, rural and particularly remote locations may attract limited or, in many cases, no field when positions are advertised; and
c. recruitment activities are not enhanced by sufficiently targeted incentive benefits or enticements for applicants.

In most school recruitment processes a teacher, executive or principal is being considered for their capacity to perform at the level required as well as in the particular location. This is done without any rigorous evaluation of their teaching or educational management and leadership capabilities.

A system whereby there was an initial consideration of their teaching or educational management and leadership capabilities, prior to being eligible to apply for promotions or specific opportunities would add another dimension to the recruitment process and allow recruiters to focus on their specific school's needs.

This type of two tiered approach would also allow for the consideration of eligibility based not just on position level but on suitability to work in certain locations or with certain student populations and communities. This is not to be confused with existing accreditation or registration processes.

Recruitment training for principals and other school based recruiters is currently either non-existent or substantially based on compliance with process. The NSW Department of Education provides online "*training resources that can assist ... conveners/hiring managers and other members of selection panels understand the procedures for selecting school staff through advertised positions*" (DoE 2017). This is typical of most jurisdictions.

School recruiters are not trained in the intuitive aspects of recruitment or provided with the high level tools available to professional recruiters. They also do not have access to all information about applicants, which may be available to a Department's centralised human resources team.

Other than through an advertisement, school recruiters in regional, rural and remote locations do not have any real capacity to source potential applicants for vacant positions. Unlike a Department or a professional recruiter, they do not have access to talent pools or other sources which may enhance the size or quality of a recruitment field.

School recruiters in regional, rural and remote locations are also not experienced in generating interest in vacant positions through networking with colleagues, accessing professional networks or using other means such as social media. In fact, the perceived regimentation of government recruitment processes leads many school recruiters to misconstrue the generation of interest with nepotism.

School recruiters are also often "time poor" without sufficient capacity to devote energy to the additional activities which contribute to successful recruitment.

In any recruitment system as large as many of the public education jurisdictions, there needs to be a targeted system of incentive benefits or enticements to lure quality teachers, executives and principals to non-metropolitan locations. Many of the current systems were developed many years ago and do not reflect the desires or needs of current teachers or school communities.

Many teachers who could be enticed to work in regional, rural or remote locations have needs that extend beyond themselves and include their families. Many of those needs are related to well-being and access to networks, social structures and services to which they had access prior to relocating to a regional, rural or remote location.

There needs to be an investment, not just in monetary rewards for working in these locations, but in infrastructure which supports the physical, social and psychological well-being of the teachers, executives and principals.

A comprehensive review is required, taking into account feedback from the teaching profession to determine what incentives and enhancements are considered suitable enticements by appropriately trained, qualified and experienced teachers. This must not just include inexperienced or beginning teachers but must suitably reflect the views of experienced teachers, executives and principals.

Finally, and with reference to the abovementioned matters, there needs to be a recognition that the centralised provision of recruitment services and access to mobility within and across schools for teachers, executives and principals, does not limit the capacity of principals and school communities to contribute to the types of attributes which they desire in teachers, executives and principals being appointed to schools in regional, rural or remote locations.

The mechanism for the appointment of teachers, executives and principals to schools in regional, rural or remote locations can be managed centrally allowing staff in schools to focus on their core business, teaching, managing and leading schools. Such management should

include a transfer option, with sufficient priority consistent with the commitment of staff to support regional, rural and remote locations.

The United Kingdom Department of Education acknowledged in 2014 the need to address issues of teacher workload, with the establishment of the "workload challenge" (DE UK 2017). Through the challenge they are intending to "*remove unnecessary workload for teachers, to help them concentrate on teaching and their own development*" (DE UK 2017).

The same is arguable for school recruiters in schools in regional, rural and remote locations. The management of more of the recruitment and appointment processes centrally would allow current school recruiters to focus on those aspects of their roles which are essential to delivering better learning outcomes for students, with the possibility of increased quality of staff working in those schools.

2. Recruitment of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Teachers

Indigenous students make up a significant portion of students from remote and very remote communities throughout Australia.

The contribution which Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander teachers make to the education of Indigenous students has been the subject of discussion for many years. There is a wealth of literature to support the view that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students benefit from being taught by teachers who are also of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander descent.

Santoro, Reid, Crawford and Simpson (2011) suggest that "*teachers who have grown up and completed their schooling as Indigenous learners have a wealth of experience and knowledge about the pedagogies that are likely to be successful for Indigenous students*". They explore the holistic approach to the education of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, within and outside the school, presenting a view that only teachers who have experienced life as an Indigenous child and learner can fully understand the cultural, social and cognitive needs of Indigenous students. They do, however, acknowledge that "*Indigenous people are not a culturally homogenous group*".

"*Importantly, there is further strong evidence that engagement of and leadership by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander teachers provides the cultural quality, safety and respect that drives significantly deeper engagement and better outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people, a core principle of the work of the Stronger Smarter Institute (www.strongersmarter.com.au).*" (Johnson, Cherednichenko and Rose 2016 p9)

Hughes and Willmot (1982) through the work of the National Aboriginal Education Committee outlined a need to dramatically increase the number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander teachers in Australian schools, to better reflect the proportion of Indigenous people in the Australian population. Their work identified 72 Indigenous teachers in Australian schools in 1979, and recommended a target of 1,000 Indigenous teachers by 1990.

Throughout the 1980s, 1990s an early 2000s, this view continued to be supported, particularly in relation to the advancement of education for Indigenous students.

The *Melbourne Declaration on Educational Goals for Young Australians* acknowledged that "*Australian schooling needs to engage Indigenous students, their families and communities in all aspects of schooling; increase Indigenous participation in the education workforce at all levels; and support coordinated community service for students and their families that can increase constructive participation in schooling*" (MCEETYA 2008).

In his press release announcing the More Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Teachers Initiative in 2011, then Minister Garrett declared "*It's vital that we find new, practical ways to encourage more Aboriginal people to pursue a career in teaching. Not only will this help provide positive role models for young Indigenous students, but it will also help non-Indigenous students learn about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, history and culture.*" (Garrett 2011)

The MATSITI project provided the impetus for education jurisdictions across Australia to develop and implement new strategies to recruit and retain Indigenous teachers and to enhance existing strategies. With a total budget of around $8m over four years, MATSITI was a low cost project, which was able to raise the awareness of the need to recruit more Indigenous teachers and to contribute to culturally safe environments in which Indigenous students could learn. The project was guided by the leadership of the acknowledged Indigenous academics, Professor Peter Buckskin, Emeritus Professor Paul Hughes and Dr Kaye Price.

Data collected through the MATSITI project in 2012 and 2015 revealed that there had been a net increase of 439 Indigenous teachers over the MATSITI period (MATSITI 2017 p4) and 743 teachers who chose to identify between 2012 and 2015 (MATSITI 2017 p7), arguably attributable to the project and the strategies of project partners.

The evaluation of the MATSITI project made 14 recommendations, one of which was to continue to fund a similar initiative over the next four years (Johnson, Cherednichenko and Rose pp126-131) to further exploit the intellectual capital of the MATSITI project and to build on its momentum. The Federal government has as yet not appeared to adopt any of the recommendations.

After 40 years of recommendations and research pointing to a beneficial relationship between the employment of more Indigenous teachers improving educational outcomes for Indigenous students, the Federal government appears to have left the responsibility for this to the states and territories, possibly under the guise that they could achieve this through a needs based funding model.

While the New South Wales and Queensland public education jurisdictions have significant programs for the recruitment and retention of Indigenous teachers and their leadership development, this is not the case across other public education jurisdictions nor non-government jurisdictions.

The MATSITI period demonstrated that significant progress in this area could only be achieved through some form of national co-ordination. At a national cost of $2m per year, it was value for money.

3. Strategies used by Australian states and territories to address the Closing the Gap targets in relation to educational disadvantage.

The Council of Australian Governments (COAG) in 2008, determined the Closing the Gap targets (COAG 2008) which were intended to be the centrepiece of strategies to address the significant disadvantage suffered by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. These included strategies addressing educational disadvantage.

The states and territories agreed to develop and implement strategies in line with the COAG decision, some of which were outlined in the subsequent *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Action Plan 2010-2014* and the *National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Strategy 2015*.

A scan of the publicly available state and territory government plans and implementation documents reveals that some states and territories have devoted considerable time to documenting strategies and their proposed implementation. However, evidence of successful implementation is not readily available and is not reflected in the outcomes for Indigenous students, particularly in remote and very remote locations.

A 2016 Productivity Commission report revealed that the "*extent of the challenge to improve Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander wellbeing remains evident in the data presented in this report. While there have been improvements in some areas over time (particularly for indicators related to early child development), in many areas there have not, and in some areas outcomes have worsened (for mental health and imprisonment, this represents a continued regression from the previous OID report in 2014).*" (SCRGSP piii)

While the Productivity Commission provides case studies of programs which appear to have addressed Indigenous disadvantage, it also acknowledges that only a "*relatively small number have been rigorously evaluated*" (SCRGSP piii).

In terms of each of the education related Closing the Gap targets the Productivity Commission is of the view that:
- the level of progress in the area of early childhood education and improvement in literacy and numeracy achievement is unclear;
- there has been no significant change in school attendance; and
- there has been some progress in Year 12 attainment. (SCRGSP pp14-16)

Successful strategies such as the 38 Aboriginal Child and Family Centres were abandoned by the Federal government and left to the states and territories to support.

States and territories have also considered it more economically viable to offer boarding arrangements to remote Indigenous secondary students rather than provide adequate schooling close to their community. While this strategy appears to be championed by some Indigenous elders, it adds to the dislocation of young Indigenous students from their traditional lands.

A concerted effort is required by all governments to allocate sufficient resources to Indigenous education in remote and very remote communities to ensure that the cultural link between community and student is maintained and quality learning is available.

4. Conclusion

As mentioned at the outset, there are many factors which influence the effective delivery of educational provision in schools in regional, rural and remote communities. The issues addressed in this submission are focussed on three specific areas.

In summary:
- state and territory governments, with the support of the Federal government, need to pull back from ideologically driven devolution policies which impact on the capacity of school leaders to deliver their core business, teaching and learning, through more effective recruitment practices and the recruitment of appropriately trained, qualified and experienced teachers;
- the Federal government commit to the recommendations of the evaluation of the MATSITI project to ensure the recruitment of more Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Teachers across Australian schools; and
- all Australian state and territory government develop and implement effective policies, and to adequately fund those strategies for the longer term, to address the Closing the Gap targets in relation to educational disadvantage.

I would welcome the opportunity to appear before the inquiry during its consultations in October 2017 to expand on the issues addressed in this paper and any other matters with which the inquiry considers I may be able to assist.

Yours sincerely
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