



NSW AECG Inc. Submission

Quality Initial Teacher Education Review

THE NSW ABORIGINAL EDUCATION CONSULTATIVE GROUP INC.

The NSW Aboriginal Educational Consultative Group Inc. (AECG) acknowledges the homelands of all Aboriginal people, we pay our respects to Country and to our Elders, past and present.

The NSW AECG is the peak body for Aboriginal Education in NSW. We are a not-for-profit Aboriginal organisation, established in 1977 and incorporated under NSW legislation in 1992. We provide advice on all matters relevant to education and training and deliver a range of services to support:

- the attendance, engagement and educational outcomes of Aboriginal people in early childhood education, in schools and in tertiary education and employment
- the capacity building, resilience and well-being of Aboriginal communities.

Our grassroots community-based governance structure is unparalleled and central to the organisation's strength. We are made up of 20 Regional and 152 Local AECG committees that formally operate around the State. We also support Junior AECG committees as subcommittees of their Local AECGs.

Because of our structure, we have are best placed in NSW to provide:

- Aboriginal community informed and agreed upon responses to governments and education providers
- delivery of localised advocacy and educational services and programs to support schools, communities, governments and the NSW Department of Education
- effective state-wide communication, consultation, allowing for Aboriginal community viewpoints to be echoed throughout the organisation and beyond.

The NSW AECG's governance structure and formally coordinated Network of Local and Regional AECGs means we do not simply represent an individual's or a small group of selected individuals' views on education.

NSW AECG Inc. RECOMMENDATIONS TO THE QUALITY ITE REVIEW:

In terms of the selection of 'high quality' candidates into ITE, the NSW AECG recommends ITE providers closely investigate and address how First Nations input is included to determine the assessment and selection of 'high quality candidates'.

ITE providers work to increase and improve their Aboriginal community engagement initiatives.

Government Departments of Education and Funding Bodies work towards increasing incentive based opportunities to support Aboriginal candidates to access ITE, graduate and to return to teach within their communities.

ITE providers investigate, consider and address the ways institutionalised racism is impacting on the number of potential Aboriginal candidates and future teachers.

ITE providers investigate, consider and improve on their programs of outreach and engagement work with First Nations communities.

ITE providers investigate, consider and address the ways racism and discrimination is impacting on the experience of First Nations students.

ITE providers consider the incorporation of experience based learning initiatives earlier within the course to give students an earlier experience of the profession.

ITE providers provide their students with an education that will support them to understand and honour the commitments made within national and jurisdictional First Nations education policies and strategies – In doing so ITE providers develop mandatory stand alone Units on First Nations education and accountability frameworks to ensure all Units /Courses of work explicitly address First Nations education.

ITE providers in collaboration with Education Departments work towards developing reciprocal relationships with Aboriginal community controlled organisations to deliver teacher training initiatives which supports their ITE students in understanding how to work with the First Nations communities where they will teach in future.

To reduce staffing issues in regional and remote schools ITE providers work with their state/territory Department of Education to coordinate supporting First Nations students to access, graduate and appoint into teaching positions within the local communities.

INTRODUCTION

The NSW AECG welcomes the opportunity to provide our view for the Quality Initial Teacher Education Review. Our submission has been developed with respect for the expertise and wealth of experience of our elected Regional Presidents from across the state of NSW. In addition to consulting with our Regional Presidents this submission has also been informed through consultations with many of our Secretariat Staff who have teaching degrees and/or have worked within schools. With any review process it is important to consider and recognise where we have come from. For countless millennia, across the 50 plus Aboriginal nations that encompass NSW, Aboriginal peoples have developed effective systems of education and relevant educational selection and pathways processes. Prior to 1788 Aboriginal systems of education were acutely woven into broader contexts such as Country, Kin, Lore, Sustainability, the Arts and Community. Education processes were generally life-long and not bounded by the time and age limitations imposed through the current education sector. Education was not directed towards specific age groups or delivered within confined contexts like today's 'classrooms'. One's education was specifically aligned and directed to one's readiness, capacity and progress.

Since invasion, Aboriginal knowledge, languages and systems of education across Australia have been actively neglected and discriminated against within education institutions that have been recently built on Aboriginal land. In varying forms, racism, neglect and discrimination against Aboriginal culture and languages continues within our education institutions today. This impacts heavily on equality of access to, and outcomes in, education for First Nations communities.

There are numerous relevant educational strategies and policies in place, across all jurisdictions, to improve equality of access to and outcomes in education for First Nations Peoples. A few of these include:

- The National Agreement on Closing the Gap
- The NSW Education Standards Authority Commitment to Aboriginal Education
- The Mparntwe (Alice Springs) Education Declaration
- State and Territory First Nations/Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Policies
- ACARA's Framework for Aboriginal Languages and Torres Strait Islander Languages

The NSW AECG fully supports the intent within these policies. Intent, however, has not transferred to significant action and the objectives of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander policies and strategies have not been met. This is partly because Initial Teacher Education (ITE) is failing to deliver prospective teachers with the essential knowledge, skills and attributes which Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities have long called for and need. In 2013 a comprehensive research which included more than 200 schools and 825 teachers across Australia found that out of a possible 1200 minutes of teaching time, Australian teachers were on average spending 5 minutes in total per week (0.4% of teaching time) teaching anything about:

- First Nations cultures,
- First Nations languages,
- First Nations perspectives
- The impact of invasion on First Nations peoples
- First Nations Arts etc.

The research also stated that there is inadequate teacher training offered to prepare them in teaching any of the above ¹. This research was conducted 8 years ago however the NSW AECG has not seen any evidence that suggests improvement.

The failure to honour and value First Nations communities in education and the relevant educational policy objectives must be addressed. Improving the quality of ITE in this regard would go a long way towards delivering on government commitments and policy objectives in this regard.

Over the following pages this submission states the NSW AECG's position regarding the two central objectives of ITE – '*selecting the future teacher workforce and preparing them for the classroom*'. Summaries of the responses gained through our consultations with our Regional Presidents and Secretariat Staff are provided to demonstrate the NSW AECG's position.

Central ITE Objective 1 Selecting the future teacher workforce

ITE ENTRY REQUIREMENTS

The NSW AECG is very concerned with the statistic within the Quality ITE Discussion Paper that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students form only 1% of ITE students when in comparison they form 6% of total school students.

The NSW AECG acknowledges that entry into ITE courses are primarily provided through assessments of a student's UAI score. In regards to UAI scores we know that First Nations Peoples are disadvantaged because, as highlighted earlier Departments of Education in Australia have largely failed to provide an education which connects with the identity and experience of First Nations peoples. The NSW AECG also acknowledges that "the requirement to include assessment of non-academic characteristics has been in place since 2015" and that the most common methods used by ITE providers to assess personal characteristics include a personal statement and the CASPer online screening tool. In regards to the non-academic assessments, the NSW AECG questions whether First Nations Peoples have input

¹ From - *A Summative Evaluation of the Stronger Smarter Learning Communities Project: 2013*. QLD University of Technology

into how these assessments have been developed and how they are assessed.

In consultations with our Regional Presidents and Secretariat staff we asked the following question and have included quotes on the most consistent responses:

What attributes/skills/knowledge do you think would make a 'high quality candidate' for going into teacher training?

"Knowledge about Aboriginal history and the ongoing mental health issues that have come from invasion and the racism and discrimination that has been here since"

"Empathy and a passion to teach kids"

"Culturally aware"

"High general knowledge, literacy and numeracy teaching skills"

"Creative, able to use things like IT to move beyond the standard textbook approach"

"Caring and having an understanding of community and wellbeing"

"Rapport with people, excellent communication skills"

"Listening skills...they must be able to relate to people and to people different than themselves"

"Resilience and problem solving strategies"

"Being future focused"

RECOMMENDATION:

In terms of the selection of 'high quality' candidates into ITE, the NSW AECG recommends ITE providers closely investigate and address how First Nations input is included to determine the assessment and selection of 'high quality candidates'.

ITE RECRUITMENT PROCESSES

The NSW AECG is aware that there are relatively low numbers of Aboriginal students being recruited into ITE courses. As indicated above education institutions and their entry requirements and assessment processes have long discriminated against First Nations peoples. The NSW AECG acknowledges that many institutions are working to address this through providing opportunities to encourage and recruit more Aboriginal students into ITE. But there is clearly much more to be done to enact the meaningful and productive.

In consultations with our Regional Presidents and Secretariat staff we asked the following question and have included quotes on the most consistent responses:

How could more Aboriginal people from your region be encouraged and supported to choose a career in teaching?

“Unis, along with their Aboriginal education centres, should visit more often and let students and community know what is possible around support for and entry into the degree. We are isolated and don’t have contact with education providers enough. Their people need to visit and meet face to face”

“Offering block release programs which are closer to home”

“Need to offer incentives for teacher training to Aboriginal Education Officers who are on the ground with students and families”

“There has to be an employment pathway from community back to community”

“You need to have supports and pathways in place as Aboriginal people have many responsibilities and obligations around their family and community”

“Through employment opportunities like the Aboriginal Education Officer graduate course into teaching”

“Making courses available in our regions for people to access”

“Scholarships – financial support to assist those who need it – scholarship providers need to be flexible, with some scholarships if you don’t do the degree in their timeframe they ask you to pay it back. This doesn’t recognise the pressures Aboriginal students might be under with their family and community”

“Having recent graduates coming into schools to encourage HS students”

RECOMMENDATIONS:

ITE providers work to increase and improve their Aboriginal community engagement initiatives

Government Departments of Education and Funding Bodies work towards increasing incentive based opportunities to support Aboriginal candidates to access ITE and to return to teach within their communities.

BARRIERS INHIBITING ACCESS TO ITE

The NSW AECG is aware of a range of barriers which prevent and inhibit access to ITE for Aboriginal people. It is disappointing that, in particular, geographical isolation and discrimination continue to present as major impacting factors in this regard. In consultations with our Regional Presidents and Secretariat staff we asked the following question and have included quotes on the most consistent responses:

What barriers are there for Aboriginal people around admission and degree requirement processes for entry into teaching degrees?

“Aboriginal people are judged and discriminated because of the way they look”

“There is institutional racism, there is little value placed on community engagement and working with communities”

“A lot of people don't want to go back to (teach in) schools because of their experience in schools”

“Lack of information promoting degrees and requirements locally and meeting with community about this”

“There are existing programs that support admission...but it's the isolation when they get there and the wrap around support that is lacking”

“Barriers in regional and remote are access to appropriate unis to get training, you have to leave Country to go to those unis... leaves your lifeline broken”

“The standards around maintaining level 5 literacy and numeracy for entry – there needs to be additional support for our kids around this, every day our kids walk in two worlds and with ongoing deficit discourse that exists since invasion”

RECOMMENDATIONS:

ITE providers investigate, consider and address the ways institutionalised racism is impacting on the number of potential Aboriginal candidates and future teachers

ITE providers investigate, consider and improve on their programs of outreach and engagement work with First Nations communities.

RETAINING AND GRADUATING ITE STUDENTS

The NSW AECG is very concerned about the issues that impact on Aboriginal student retention and graduation in ITE courses. In consultations with our Regional Presidents and Secretariat staff we asked the following question and have included quotes on the most consistent responses:

What do you think are the main reasons people might leave their course/degree in teaching before they finish?

“Financial restraints but also for Aboriginal students a lack of cultural and learning support and being off Country”

“Unis aren’t preparing students for the reality. They can go into their prac and get culture shock, the school prac supervisor can treat you like a slave and then the kids are misbehaving. Student teachers need to learn classroom management through experience early on in their degree”

“They are not assured of an appointment at a place of their choosing after they get their degree... with the communities and on Country they belong to”

“Family obligations, racism and the massive impacts it can have on mental health. As much as an Aboriginal student might want to do their degree, racism and discrimination can bring people down”

“Deaths in communities affects all of us...there needs to be specific compassionate leave regarding Aboriginal family and community obligations.”

“When I did block course the other students weren’t aware of why we were doing block courses...they would say that Aboriginals get everything given to them...it was culturally unsafe... these students are unaware of why block programs exist.”

“not having student networks or access to Aboriginal student centres for support”

“They haven’t got anybody to go and ask, or too shamed to go and ask, (they) don’t have that specific support...if you feel judged its harder to ask for support”

“Lack of financial, cultural and academic support structures”

“Block release programs have been defunded and are not supported as much as they should be in universities”

“There’s often a lot of love and support from within the uni when you first start but this support can drop off by 3rd or 4th year. Support drops off suddenly and it happens when academic requirements go up”

“The teaching profession is not highly valued or remunerated in Australia”

“I don’t think school placements (practicums) are placed early enough in teacher training courses – it can fail students because they are not up to the challenge. There should definitely be more hands on experience – and students should be working with established teachers when doing their pracs. Also as a teacher in schools it is difficult to get teachers to take on prac students because it is additional workload for teachers to have a prac student. Additional workload on top of big workload – needs to be a better structure in place to deliver effective prac teaching programs”

“The mandatory Literacy and Numeracy testing LANTITE – some students who could turn out to be great teachers get anxious about these tests and fail”

RECOMMENDATIONS:

ITE providers investigate, consider and address the ways racism and discrimination is impacting on the experience of First Nations students

ITE providers consider the incorporation of experience based learning initiatives earlier within the course to give students an earlier experience of the profession

Central ITE Objective 2 Preparing the future teacher workforce for the classroom

As has been identified with Australian schools spending approx. 0.4% of teaching time teaching anything regarding First Nations cultures, languages, perspectives, arts or the ongoing impacts relating to the invasion, the NSW AECG understands ITE providers aren't adequately preparing the future workforce for the Australian classroom. Given the diversity of First Nations Peoples the NSW AECG also understands there is no simple 'one size fits all' solution that ITE providers can take on. However this should not mean our ITE providers avoid their responsibility to ensure the future teacher workforce is competent to engage with and teach about the local contexts in which they teach.

CURRENT TEACHER QUALITY

The NSW AECG recognises that there are a wide range of factors beyond initial teacher education that contribute to teacher quality. However we also acknowledge how important the formal training process is for improving on the specific qualities required to teach in schools. In consultations with our Regional Presidents and Secretariat staff we asked the following question and have included quotes on the most consistent responses

Are teachers trained up with the necessary knowledge/skills/attitudes to be successful teachers in your region?

“We get student teachers coming in and you ask them ‘what are you doing in your course about Aboriginal education? Do you know about the AECG’s Partnership Agreement with the Department of Education or the NSW Aboriginal Education Policy?’ They aren’t doing anything and don’t know of these Agreements and Policies even after the Aboriginal Education Officer shows them. These are third and fourth year students who will soon be in schools”

“No...as for attitudes I have found that in my region the teaching profession with the Partnership Agreement has changed attitudes. We still have some way to go in making it a true equal footing”

“It seems we have more white-fellas that want to do stuff in Aboriginal education”

“Young people today have grown up with less stereotyping around Aboriginal communities – but this isn’t really from any work that is happening within universities”

“No, because compulsory Aboriginal education subjects are not consistent across all unis, some are just electives not mandatory.”

“No...teachers come in not knowing anything about Aboriginal people so they are scared to engage and scared they will make a mistake... Aboriginal people need to be supported to lead this education”

“Unis need to be engaging with Aboriginal communities, they need to have staff trained up and able to deliver the teacher training that communities need”

“It’s the engagement and rapport building skills that are missing...and they need to understand how to make the curriculum relevant, teaching kids about things that aren’t meaningful in their communities is no good”

“They’re taught heavily in theory but not practical”

RECOMMENDATION:

ITE providers provide their students with an education that will support them to understand and honour the commitments made within national and jurisdictional First Nations education policies and strategies – In doing so ITE providers develop mandatory stand alone Units on First Nations education and accountability frameworks to ensure all Units /Courses of work explicitly address First Nations education

IMPROVING TRAINING FOR FUTURE SUCCESS

The NSW AECG recognises improving Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander education outcomes as critical for improving Australia’s economy, social cohesion, health and employment outcomes. We also understand that improving Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander education outcomes will improve what Education Minister Tudge has highlighted concern for - Australia’s declining Program for International Student Assessment (PISA) outcomes. In consultations with our Regional Presidents and Secretariat staff we asked the following questions and have included quotes on the most consistent responses:

What sort of training would make a successful teacher for communities in your region?

“Faculties of Education need to look at scenarios that happen on a day to day basis between schools and Aboriginal communities. If students were able to sit in and listen to the conversations AECG has with community their minds would open to the realities on the ground”

“Uni students should be sent to areas with diverse communities to gain the experience and understanding they need to teach”

“More than one semester of Aboriginal education, and specific learning about the region students are intending to go to”

“Teachers must know why communities don’t have good relationships with schools”

“They need to learn classroom management....to be trained up and practise the trade earlier in their degree so they can be more proficient when they start”

“They need training on how they can get to know the community leaders and parents”

“High level interpersonal intercultural communication skills”

“Cultural protocols training”

“NSW AECG programs like Connecting to Country and Healthy Culture Healthy Country”

“Training that includes localised content would be good for example one day a week working within a community setting like an AMS, an Elders Group, a Land Council or working with an Aboriginal Education Officer where a student can see and experience what happens and what’s needed in Aboriginal communities – this could also be done on their first year on the job.

Are education providers preparing graduates for teaching Aboriginal students and working with parents and community?

“Not at all, it doesn’t come into their training or if it does it’s a 1 hour tokenistic approach”

“No, many teachers are negatively stereotyping Aboriginal families and failing to engage. I remember two Aboriginal boys who were always in trouble and their Mum only coming into the school when they were in trouble. Then for NAIDOC day this Mum came in and joined the committee and cooked dampers on the day and then I invited her in to do some support for students and she came in to read with students and then one of the teachers said “I didn’t know she could read” Just assumed she couldn’t. And then later as things progressed the boys started getting awards and the Mum could come in and see her child succeeding.”

“There’s a perception of teachers that Aboriginal parents don’t want to come into school but they’re rarely invited in for positive reasons and then again they shouldn’t be expected to engage either, how many white fellas want to go into teachers staffroom? so when we don’t engage it’s a problem, this deficit model haunts us all the time.”

“Racism and ignorance - Teachers don’t see Aboriginal students as being Aboriginal if they’re not dark. There are many shades of Koori kids now. This is an issue as a teacher will question how are they Aboriginal – how much Aboriginal are they... these sorts of comments are very problematic. There’s also old teachers in schools who are not up to speed with what Aboriginality is and Australia’s true history.”

“If you’re the only Aboriginal staff member in school you will be treated as if you know everything ‘Aboriginal’. This assumption is everywhere. Or if there’s a problem with an Aboriginal student then you become the ‘go to’. You become the dumping ground for all their (the school’s) problems.”

“Teaching through uni must address the diversity of Aboriginal peoples.”

“Young teachers doing their prac, they should be coming and working in an Aboriginal organisation rather than teaching – this provides connections to community, relationships and understanding how to work for and with the community – when students just do their prac in schools they are learning how to work within a white institution and a lot of teachers in schools try to educate Aboriginal people to become something different and non-Aboriginal people to lose aspiration for changing the system. We need to educate kids to live in this community”

Can you talk about issues that communities in your region encounter with newly trained teachers?

“Newly trained teachers come into schools without any idea what they’re walking into, particularly when they go to remote locations...And teachers speaking down to parents...too self and career centred without looking into the backgrounds of their students before they pick up the phone and talk to parents – they come in not equipped socially and emotionally, thinking they know everything”

“Teachers are not coming out to fail, they are just not prepared appropriately.. education providers need to be preparing graduates around the policy”

“New teachers come in bright eyed and bushy tailed and the moment they hear something from community they’ll run with it without properly listening to or grasping the advice”

“Racism has come up a couple of times”

“Leadership staff mentor new staff in the old ignorant ways of the past...the discourse that still exists from colonisation around Aboriginal deficit in education rather than systemic deficits...continues white privilege. There needs to be structures for Aboriginal cultural leadership roles in schools and for assessments for how school and staff are performing in achieving Aboriginal education outcomes...leadership staff need to be upskilled to address this so the wheels don’t keep turning the same way.”

“A new teacher can come into a school with new views and new style of teaching and then they can get ganged up on and forced to tow the line like the others. This makes positive change very difficult”

“The staffroom can be an unsafe place for newly trained Aboriginal teachers who have experience around community protocols and how to deliver education outcomes for Aboriginal students.”

“Newer teachers can be highly ambitious to teach outcomes and fix the world in one go. Newer teachers can be trained well but need to take on board the experience and advice around wellbeing policies and protocols - It would be good if when you were a first year teacher that you were provided a mentor with experience to work with them.”

“Massive rotation of temp teachers coming and going – turnover of new teachers in remote and regional locations makes community have no chance and students have no chance to form relationships”

RECOMMENDATIONS:

ITE providers in collaboration with Education Departments work towards developing reciprocal relationships with Aboriginal community controlled organisations to deliver teacher training initiatives which supports their ITE students in understanding how to work with the First Nations communities where they will teach in future.

To reduce staffing issues in regional and remote schools ITE providers work with their state/territory Department of Education to coordinate supporting First Nations students to access, graduate and appoint into teaching positions within the local communities