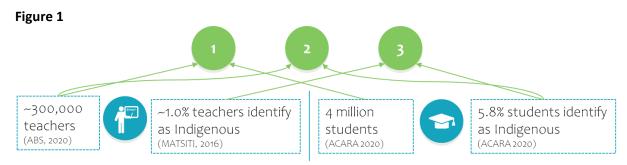
Quality Initial Teacher Education Review

National Indigenous Australians Agency (NIAA) Submission

Teachers account for 30 per cent of the variance in student outcomes — the biggest in-school influence (Hattie, 2003). This highlights their critical role and the importance of ensuring that teacher training appropriately prepares them for success. The Quality Initial Teacher Education (ITE) Review (the Review) identifies two central roles for ITE — *selecting the future teacher workforce* and *preparing them for the classroom*. In Indigenous education, this translates to three distinct but interrelated goals:

- 1. **Indigenous content** all teachers are able to respectfully embed Indigenous perspectives in the curriculum, ensuring that all students have the opportunity to learn about the depth, wealth and diversity of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures.
- 2. **Indigenous students** all teachers have the skills, capabilities and knowledge to effectively support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students to succeed in education
- 3. **Indigenous teachers** more Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are selected for teaching and school leadership roles, ensuring the profession is representative of the diversity of the student population they support.

Figure 1 depicts the different cohorts involved in these goals.



The Australian Government respects and values teachers' immense and critical role and acknowledges that further support is required to achieve the goals listed above. Universities, and the ITE programs they deliver, cannot achieve these goals alone, but we must start here to ensure that new teachers are best prepared from the start of their careers. These foundational skills will enable them to support all students to succeed, and realise the aspirations of the *Alice Springs (Mparntwe) Education Declaration* (Education Council, 2019). Alongside this, schools and existing teachers, with coordinated effort from education authorities, must also be supported to meet the goals of ITE reforms. Through strengthened ITE and equivalent teacher professional development, both preservice and in-service teachers will be supported to realise our shared aspirations.

The National Indigenous Australians Agency (NIAA)

NIAA is committed to implementing the Australian Government's policies and programs to improve the lives of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. We work with state and territory governments, peak bodies and service providers to ensure that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander programs and services are delivering for Indigenous Australians.

NIAA is not involved in the direct delivery of school education. However, we work with all education departments to progress our shared interest in supporting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students to reach their full learning potential. The Indigenous Advancement Strategy (IAS), administered by NIAA, supports a range of activities to assist students, families and communities to access, engage and succeed in education. NIAA also administers the Indigenous Student Success

Program (ISSP)¹, providing supplementary funding to universities to help students take on the demands of university and succeed. The flexibility of the ISSP assists universities to tailor their services to match student needs.

NIAA also coordinates the Australian Government's response to Closing the Gap². The National Agreement on Closing the Gap — developed in partnership between Australian governments and representatives of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peak organisations — includes four priority reforms and a suite of socio-economic targets to track progress in life outcomes. Five of these focus on the importance of education, including Year 12 attainment (*Target 5*) as a precursor to employment and health outcomes, and tertiary education (*Target 6*) as a pathway to success. ITE plays a role in enabling teachers to support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students to succeed in school—growing the pipeline of potential university students—and in supporting more Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to complete university and become teachers.



 ${f 5}$ Students achieve their full learning potential



6 Students reach their full potential through further education pathways

Context is key

In all of the goals outlined above, understanding context is an important element of being able to respond appropriately (Taylor, 2014). Be it understanding the context of a school community to effectively localise content and make it respectful and relevant for students. Or understanding the cultural context of the Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander students in a classroom, or the contextual aspirations and challenges of prospective Indigenous teachers to design an appropriate and effective response to grow the workforce.

While ITE cannot, nor should it try to, teach all possible contexts, it can impart a key learning on all teachers — that context is key. By starting with understanding their context, teachers remain open to new learnings and can combine their growing professional expertise with their new context to determine required action.

"... quality teaching of Aboriginal perspectives is contingent upon the teacher's conceptualisation of Aboriginal knowledge as that which is always grounded in place and only meaningful in the context in which it is produced." (Harrison & Greenfield, 2011)

Understanding Country is a simple first step. From Ngunnawal Country in the Nation's Capital to Meanjin (Brisbane), home to the Yugara and Turrbal peoples; to Mer (Murray Island — Meriam Country), Tarndanya (Adelaide — Kaurna Country), Nipaluna (Hobart — Palawa Country), or Mparntwe (Alice Springs), home to the Arrernte people. This is just a sample of the diversity of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and cultures to which Australia is home. This diversity by location exemplifies the importance of context. If teachers can begin by understanding this context, then they can operate with respect and build authentic relationships. There are many resources that assist in identifying the Country you live or work on, such as the AIATSIS Map of Indigenous Australia³ or Reconciliation NSW's Aboriginal Languages of NSW & ACT map⁴.

¹ <u>https://www.niaa.gov.au/indigenous-affairs/education/indigenous-student-success-program</u>

² <u>https://www.closingthegap.gov.au/</u>

³ <u>https://aiatsis.gov.au/explore/map-indigenous-australia</u>

⁴ <u>https://education.nsw.gov.au/about-us/strategies-and-reports/our-reconciliation-action-plan/resources</u>

Ensuring all students learn about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australia

The Australian story has been characterised as comprising three strands: "our ancient heritage, our British inheritance and our multicultural triumph" (Pearson, 2014). All students should have the opportunity to learn about each of these strands and the place names in the preceding section illustrate the diversity of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples' ancient and continuing

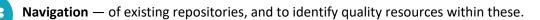
connections to Country. Embedding this learning has been an ongoing call from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples—such as through the 1989 National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Policy (1989 AEP)—and commitment from Australian governments—through Education Declarations (Mparntwe, 2019, Melbourne, 2008, Adelaide, 1999, Hobart 1989), the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Strategy (Education Council, 2015) and the Australian Curriculum (ACARA, n.d.). It is also the focus of Teacher Standard 2.4 (AITSL, n.d.).

Australian Professional Standards for Teachers (Teacher Standards)

2.4 Understand and respect Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to promote reconciliation between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians.

However, various reviews indicate that many teachers feel they do not know enough about, or have the confidence to incorporate, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander curriculum content. Research by Emeritus Professor Allan Luke et al suggested that teachers devote less than five minutes per week to teaching Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories, cultures and languages, with many not engaged in these activities at all (Luke et al., 2013). Further, an Australian Government project led by Professor Marcia Langton AO identified four factors⁵ that fundamentally affect a teacher's ability to effectively teach about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures:

Fear — of their own limited knowledge, or of doing something wrong.





Value — of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander knowledges; with some seeing this as primarily for Humanities and Social Sciences.

Change — changes in priorities for the classroom drive where to apply effort and has inadvertently positioned this content as an "additional other".

Meanwhile, the Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership (AITSL)⁶ is currently undertaking an Australian Government funded project on Indigenous Cultural Competency in the Australian Teaching Workforce. AITSL's discussion paper and National Dialogue reiterated the fear and uncertainty many teachers experience when it comes to including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander content. While AITSL's project will continue to define cultural capability in the context of the Teacher Standards and is expected to develop resources to assist teachers develop in this area, it also acknowledges that ITE plays a role in establishing a strong foundation to pedagogical practice.

⁵ <u>https://www.indigenous.gov.au/teaching-guides/curricula-project/how-guide</u>

⁶ <u>https://www.aitsl.edu.au/indigenous-cultural-competency/get-involved</u>

NIAA Submission to Quality ITE Review (2021)

Beyond the challenge of confidence, non-Indigenous teachers have reported feeling that they don't have the authority to include Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspectives in their teachings (Yunkaporta & McGinty, 2009). An important distinction here is that schools and teachers are not

expected to *teach culture*, rather to teach *about* cultures. This distinction reinforces that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples are the knowledge holders and responsible for instilling culture in their young people. The exception to this is where community is heavily engaged in the school and specifically requests culture-based education programs, such as part of bilingual education programs or in majority Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander schools. In these cases, the teaching of culture will occur in partnership with community, providing authority for teachers' involvement.

1989 AEP Goals

- 17. To develop programs to support the maintenance and continued use of Aboriginal languages.
- 20. To enable Aboriginal students at all levels of education to have an appreciation of their history, cultures and identity.
- 21. To provide all Australian students with an understanding of and respect for Aboriginal traditional and contemporary cultures.

It is not just about teachers knowing what to teach, it is also about knowing how to teach it (Harrison & Greenfield, 2011). This is important to ensure good intentions are not undermined by ineffective delivery. ITE units on Indigenous education must balance increasing teacher students' awareness of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and cultures, with tools for delivering this learning. This includes pedagogic tools, how to build a culturally safe learning environment and being aware of students' backgrounds and how it may affect Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students.

"Students are not learning Aboriginal views or perspectives, rather they are learning about their non-Aboriginal teacher's perspective on Aboriginal Australia. They are learning their teacher's meta-narrative about Aboriginal people." (Harrison & Greenfield, 2011)

A practical response

University courses routinely prepare students to determine if a research source is appropriate for academic work. This approach could be extended to support ITE students to determine the appropriateness of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander resources. In this way they are not assessing the cultural validity, rather exploring the context to discern its usability. This could include:

- Was it written by an Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander author or in collaboration with the Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander community it is about?
- Has it been recognised as appropriate by academics or community members?
- Is it still current/relevant?
- Does it portray a strengths-based narrative? i.e. doesn't reinforce negative stereotypes or misconceptions, or portray deficit discourse.
- Is it relevant to the local community or region where I work? If not, what additional context do I need to provide my students when introducing this content? For example, explaining that it is a national example such as the experiences of the Stolen Generations, or that it portrays an experience of cultural practice from another climate/region for which there isn't a local example, such as a coastal experience when you are in an inland location.
- How might I need to engage with the local community to incorporate this respectfully?
- If I'm still unsure, who could I check this with (within the school or local community)?

Enabling teachers to nurture Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander student success

"There was an old adage when I was training as a teacher – teach from the known to the unknown – and understand the culture of a child to enable a better outcome." (The Hon Ken Wyatt AM MP, 2019)

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students make up 6 per cent of the Australian student population (ABS, 2020). To support their educational achievement, classrooms and schools need to be culturally safe, for students *and* the school community. Supporting this diverse cohort of students will mean needing to identify, understand and show awareness of the various factors that contribute to their educational experience, including culture and social experiences (AITSL, 2020).

Closing the Gap Targets

5. Students achieve their full learning potential.

6. Students reach their full potential through further education pathways.

Where teachers are not equipped to understand the cultural background or meet the particular needs of Indigenous students, they often end up using inappropriate resources and see students through a deficit lens (Anderson, Diamond, & Diamond, 2020). ITE courses can counter this by fostering an approach that is underpinned by strength-based, high-expectations approaches so Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children can thrive in education.

Teachers and school staff play a critical role in supporting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander student achievement (Lowe, et al., 2019). Evidence shows that when teachers have a better understanding of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander knowledges, histories and cultures, they have a positive impact on educational outcomes (Whatman, McLaughlin, & Hart, 2020). Similarly, outcomes are better when Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander content is embedded. The Footprints in Time Longitudinal

AITSL Teacher Standards

 1.4 Strategies for teaching Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students.

Study of Indigenous Children (National Centre for Longitudinal Data , 2021) results indicated that schools who embedded the Australian Curriculum's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Histories and Cultures Cross-Curriculum Priority achieved higher than average literacy, vocabulary and maths scores of Indigenous students compared to schools that did not implement this.

The requirement for teachers to develop this capability is evidenced through Teacher Standard 1.4. However, a third of teachers report that their ITE did not adequately prepare them to support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students (McKenzie et al, 2014, 2011, 2008). Ma Rhea, Anderson and Atkinson (2012) also found that formal teacher development lacked in these areas.

Taylor (2014) highlights the importance of having dedicated Indigenous education units in all ITE courses. An important consideration raised is timing, and when best in the ITE course to include the Indigenous education unit to maximise teacher capability and minimise unhelpful feelings of personal responsibility or guilt. Taylor further suggests that specific Indigenous education units must balance building knowledge about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, to counter limited awareness on entry, with a focus on pedagogic capability to support growth in teacher professional practice. This is supported by Professor Aileen Moreton-Robinson's (2012) research where it was found that 25% of core subjects were focussed on pedagogy and teaching practice, as opposed to a majority focus on knowledge transfer.

"For Indigenous students, the evidence suggests that a culture of high expectations in schools; strong student–teacher, and community, relationships; and support for culture are also particularly important — all underpinned by strong school leadership" (PC, 2016). Research by the Productivity Commission (2016) suggests that supporting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students' achievement requires the same fundamentals as all students—high-quality individualised instruction that takes account of each student's learning needs, supported by an

inherent expectation of ability to succeed. However, there are a number of elements for teachers to be able to implement these fundamentals successfully. Appropriate acknowledgement of students' culture, inclusive environments, strong student-teacher, and community, relationships and culturally responsive teachers are important for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students (PC, 2016; Milgate & Giles-Browne, 2013).

Applying this to a different context

Teaching in regional and remote Australia requires

AEP 1989

- 14. To enable Aboriginal attainment of skills to the same standard as other Australian students throughout the compulsory schooling years.
- 15. To enable Aboriginal students to attain the successful completion of Year 12 or equivalent at the same rates as for other Australian students.
- 16. To enable Aboriginal students to attain the same graduation rates from award courses in technical and further education, and in higher education, as for other Australians.

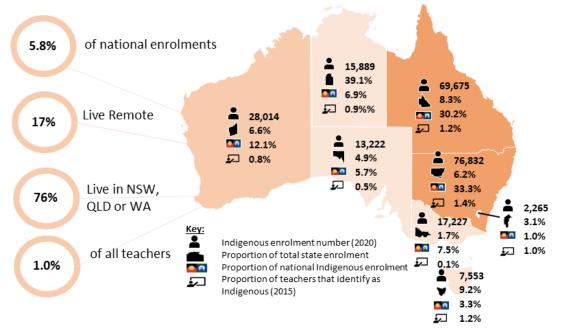
a different level of preparedness (Hall, 2013). Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students from regional and remote Australia often experience a range of complex and interrelated social and community factors that can create barriers to success (Australian Government, 2017). In this context teachers are also more likely to engage classes with majority Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, given the much higher proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students from remote areas compared to non-Indigenous students (ABS, 2016a). This means it is even more important for these teachers to be equipped to support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students to counter the disparities in attendance, Year 12 attainment, ATAR eligibility (AIHW, 2019) and post-school education outcomes (ABS, 2016b). Without this, new teachers, who may have good intentions but little experience, starting their career in remote schools means students do not have the benefit of teachers with a wider knowledge and experience base (Halsey, 2018).

Rennie and Anderson highlighted that many of the pre-service teachers felt more guidance is required for teaching English as an Additional Language or Dialect (EAL/D) students. While universities try to highlight some of the challenges, teachers don't actually understand the practicality of this and are not suitably prepared (Rennie & Anderson, 2019). For example, Aboriginal English can be mistaken as low proficiency in Standard Australian English and teachers do not adjust their approach for this difference. Evidence supports instructional approaches that are sensitive to the home language of Indigenous EAL/D learners, and which is a two-way process. Researchers noted that home language recognition should not been seen as an alternative to the objective of working towards a high level of proficiency in standard Australian English, but as the most viable means of reaching that objective, building on student's existing linguistic strengths (Silburn, 2011; Malcolm, 2013). It is therefore important that ITE students receive training in supporting and recognising EAL/D learners.

In line with the Independent Review into Regional and Rural and Remote Education, pre-service teachers should be provided with more opportunities, over an extended period of time, to develop an understanding of and experience in teaching in regional and remote schools. This requires collaborative effort from education authorities, universities and education sectors.

Figure 2 depicts Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander student enrolments and proportions against the proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander teachers for each jurisdiction.

Figure 2



ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER ENROLMENTS & TEACHERS

Growing the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander teacher and school leader workforce The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Histories and Cultures Cross-Curriculum Priority identifies the importance of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students seeing themselves and their cultures in the curriculum. Equally, given teachers' influence on student outcomes, it is important that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students see themselves in the staff and role models within positions of authority in schools (Lucas & Villegase, 2004). Evidence shows that having teachers of the same background as a student, has a small but meaningful impact on student test scores (Goldhaber, Theobald, & Tien, 2019). This isn't just from having more Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander teachers in the classroom, but also in positions of authority, such as lead teachers, deputy and Principal roles to complement the existing Aboriginal Education Worker and Indigenous Teacher Assistant workforce.

"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..." (MATSITI, 2016)

Increasing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander representation in the classroom has been a longstanding priority. In 1979 the House of Representatives Standing Committee, the National Aboriginal Education Committee, declared that it was "of fundamental importance, for both the social and economic development of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island people, that Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders be significantly represented in the professions" (O'Donoghue & Moore, 2019). However, despite data availability challenges being addressed through the Australian Teacher Workforce Data Strategy, there still appears to be a large gap in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander teacher numbers compared to students (who comprise 6% of the total student population). Not only do Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander teachers provide role models to foster higher aspirations among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, they contribute to the cultural capability development and cultural safety of learning environments and provide a bridge between cultural differences of students and schooling institutions. Further, particularly in remote areas they offer a more cost-effective alternative. Non-Indigenous teachers have a higher turnover rate, whereas local Indigenous teachers tend to have an ongoing connection to that area, will stay for longer and provide a stability that the students often miss with non-Indigenous teachers (Hall, 2013).

Notwithstanding the important role of Indigenous Higher Education Units in having an Indigenous presence on campus and supporting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, education faculties must take a lead role in strengthening ITE. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples experience a range of barriers to higher education. This is evident in the low proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students receiving an ATAR above 50 — only 8 per cent of Year 12 aged

AEP 1989 Goals

- 2. To increase the number of Aboriginal people employed as educational administrators, teachers, curriculum advisers, teacher assistants, home-school liaison officers and other education workers, including community people engaged in teaching of Aboriginal culture, history and contemporary society, and Aboriginal languages.
- 4. To increase the number of Aboriginal people employed as administrators, teachers, researchers and student services officers in technical and further education colleges and higher education institutions.

population (PC, 2020). This will require school education improvements to lift Year 12 attainment and ATAR outcomes. In the meantime, universities should continue to provide targeted support for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students. This could be bolstered by focused partnerships with education authorities to provide targeted opportunities to increase the number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander ITE students.

A range of initiatives have been supported at state and federal level to increase Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander teacher numbers, such as the More Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Teachers Initiative (MATSITI, 2012—2016). The project found that the most successful campaigns to attract more Indigenous peoples to teaching had a highly visible message aimed at Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, including specific scholarships and guaranteed jobs (MATSITI, 2016). Further examples such as Grow Our Own by Catholic Education NT and the Remote Area Teacher Education programs in Queensland and the Northern Territory demonstrate a direct partnership approach between education authorities and universities, as well as incorporating some of the lessons from MATSITI, such as scholarships, mentoring, targeted training, tertiary study supports and employment. Other examples, such as the Stronger Smarter Institute's Australian Government funded, Teachers of STEM Initiative, apply a targeted lens for economic growth sectors and are showing early signs of success. Further initiatives will be important to grow the workforce to parity with student representation and must also consider progression into leadership positions.

Thinking about complementary reforms beyond ITE

Beyond growing ITE student representation, there is also a need to grow the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander academic workforce. Department of Education, Skills and Employment (DESE) higher education data shows that Indigenous staff comprise only 1.1 per cent of total university workforces. Of this, only a third are in academic positions (DESE, 2021). Universities should continue to explore partnerships with bodies such as the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Higher Education Consortium (NATSIHEC) and Australian Indigenous Lecturers in Initial Teacher Education Association (AILITEA) to grow their own workforces. Evidence suggests that some further work is needed to increase the attractiveness of teaching as a profession. High performing countries in PISA, such as Singapore and China, were ranked in the top 10 countries that hold the teaching workforce in high regard, alongside doctors (Dolton, Marcenaro, De Vries, & She, 2018). The Varkey Foundation Global Teacher Status Index (2018) found that a range of factors contribute to teachers status, such as in countries like China and Malaysia where occupation status was strongly correlated with financial remuneration. The higher respect for teachers the more likely that a person and society will encourage their children to become teachers.

Conclusion

The challenge for the education system is to enhance ITE to improve Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander education outcomes. The vital role of teachers must be backed by robust and culturally responsive ITE that has meaningful learning content on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander knowledges, histories and cultures to better support students.

The Closing the Gap agreement presents a new way of working with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. All reforms should consider how they can best support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander outcomes, through targeted support for students and increasing understanding of the entire community. Partnership with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples is fundamental in the design and development of future reforms. Key partners in the ITE space could include Indigenous academics in the field, the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Higher Education Consortium (NATSIHEC), or the newly established National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Council (NATSIEC, comprised of Indigenous Education Consultative Bodies (IECBs)).

The contribution of a partnership can support and strengthen a broad range of strategies to embed Indigenous perspectives in the curriculum, have all teachers effectively support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students and increase the number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander teachers and school leaders. Without this partnership ITE reforms are unlikely to meet the Government's commitment to improve outcomes of all students.

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