



Reconciliation Australia Submission to the Quality Initial Teacher Education Review

16 July 2021



About Reconciliation Australia

Reconciliation Australia is an independent, national, not-for-profit organisation promoting reconciliation between the broader Australian community and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. Our vision is to build an Australia that is reconciled, just, and equitable for all. To do so, we are dedicated to building relationships, respect and trust between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and other Australians. We believe a reconciled Australia is one where:

- Positive two-way relationships built on trust and respect exist between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and non-Indigenous Australians throughout society.
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians participate equally and equitably in all areas of life, and the distinctive individual and collective rights and cultures of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples are universally recognised and respected. That is, we have closed the gaps in life outcomes, and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are self-determining.
- Our political, business and community institutions actively support all dimensions of reconciliation.
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories, cultures and rights are valued and recognised as part of a shared national identity and, as a result, there is national unity.
- There is widespread acceptance of our nation's history, and agreement that the wrongs of the past will never be repeated.

In 2016, Reconciliation Australia launched the [State of Reconciliation in Australia report](#) (the Report). The Report highlights five inter-related dimensions of reconciliation, and makes recommendations on how we can progress reconciliation.

These five dimensions are: Race relations; Equality and equity; Unity; Institutional integrity; and, Historical acceptance.

The five dimensions do not exist in isolation; they are interrelated and Australia can only achieve full reconciliation if we progress in all five dimensions.

About Narragunnawali: Reconciliation in Education

Narragunnawali: Reconciliation in Education is a program targeted at Australian schools and early learning services, and particularly the teachers and educators within these settings. Narragunnawali aims to develop environments that foster a higher level of knowledge and pride in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories, cultures and contributions.

The program includes:

- Reconciliation Action Plans (RAPs) for schools and early learning services that can be developed via the [Narragunnawali online platform](#)
- [Curriculum resources](#) linked to the Australian Curriculum and the Early Years Learning Framework
- [Professional learning](#) resources (including an adjunct webinar program) for teachers and educators linked to the Australian Professional Standards for Teachers and the National Quality Standards
- A national [Awards](#) program to recognise exceptional commitment to reconciliation in schools and early learning services.

Narragunnawali (pronounced narra-gunna-wally) is a word from the language of the Ngunnawal people meaning peace, alive, wellbeing and coming together. The Ngunnawal people are Traditional Owners and Custodians of the land on which Reconciliation Australia's Canberra office is located.

Review submission

In response to the Quality Initial Teacher Education [Discussion Paper](#) and, in particular, with regard to the question of how best to prepare ITE candidates to become effective teachers for their future classrooms, Reconciliation Australia would like to emphasise and evidence the importance of embedding a focus on reconciliation, and on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander content and perspectives across all ITE programs of study.

1. The interest in, and importance of, preparing teachers to effectively embed reconciliation and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures in their future classrooms and school communities is demonstrated through a range of Reconciliation Australia research. For example:
 - An internal analysis of engagement on Reconciliation Australia's [Narragunnawali: Reconciliation in Education](#) platform as at 30/06/21 shows that approximately 8.8% of all actively registered platform Users identify as "Pre-service teachers" on sign-up.
 - The 2020 [Australian Reconciliation Barometer](#) (ARB) report highlights that the agreed importance of teaching and learning about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures is increasing. 83% of the general community and 91% of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people believe it's important for Indigenous histories and cultures to be taught in schools (Australian Reconciliation Barometer 2020, p.86).
 - The abovementioned ARB findings are reflected, in particular, in the following Key Action Areas recommended in the [State of Reconciliation in Australia 2021](#) report, which again point to the importance of the education sector (including ITE providers) in supporting reconciliation in education:
 - Historical Acceptance: "Acknowledge our past through truth-telling, [education](#) and understanding" (State of Reconciliation in Australia report 2021, p. 11)
 - "Governments, working with our [educational institutions](#), should work with First Peoples to improve the teaching of First Nations history and culture in our schools" (ibid, p. 52)
 - Unity: "Celebrate, promote and enhance public [education](#) about First Peoples' history, culture, and achievements" (ibid, p. 11)
 - "Governments, corporate organisations and [education institutions](#) must contribute to, and support unity. Central to this is undertaking and supporting initiatives that celebrate, promote and enhance public [education](#) about First Peoples' history, culture, and achievements. This should become part of everyday business as a way of enhancing our national identity and celebrating the oldest living culture on the planet." (ibid)
2. However, research also indicates that there are risks in ineffectively preparing teachers for their future classrooms and school communities if a focus on reconciliation, and on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander content and perspectives, is not embedded across ITE programs of study and is instead relegated to discreet units of study only. For example:
 - According to [the ANU-CSRMs external Evaluation of Narragunnawali](#), longitudinal analyses of Narragunnawali Reconciliation Action Plan (RAP) Reflection Survey results indicate that there is still a significant percent (approximately 33.4%) of respondents who suggest that staff are only "somewhat" aware that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures are a priority within the Australian Curriculum and the Early Years Learning Framework. (Research Report 15, p.11) Similarly, the specific 'Embed Cross-curriculum Priority' RAP Action that schools may select to commit to as part of their Narragunnawali RAP development process was not a commonly added RAP Action. Of the 2000+ schools registered to develop a Narragunnawali

RAP as at 30/06/21, only 198 (less than 10%) had added the 'Embed Cross-curriculum Priority' Action to their RAP commitments.

- Further, a little under half (48.5%) of school and early learning service institutions that had responded to the RAP Reflection Survey said that “teachers and educators actively engaged with meeting or maintaining proficiency in the AITSL Professional Standards for Teachers Focus Areas 1.4 and 2.4 and the ACECQA National Quality Standard.” (ibid)
3. If an embedment of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures and a focus on reconciliation is not prioritised and modelled in the ITE context, then there is a clear risk that teachers are ineffectively prepared to meet the curriculum and professional teaching requirements expected once they enter into their classrooms and school communities of the future, for example:
- The longitudinal qualitative study of Reconciliation Australia’s Narragunnawali program has further indicated that those engaged with the program feel that it has increased their “confidence in addressing reconciliation and driving meaningful change within their schools and services. Engagement with Narragunnawali provides a formalised means of delivering students, staff, and families with regular opportunities to engage with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures.” Several participants in the study explained that teachers were inspired by the [Narragunnawali] RAP process to meaningfully adapt their teaching practices.” (Research report 14, p.43) That said, the ‘Embed Cross-curriculum Priority’ RAP Action, alongside the ‘Curriculum Planning’ and ‘Teach about Reconciliation’ RAP Actions related to the ‘In the Classroom’ domain of the Narragunnawali RAP framework have been identified as the more challenging to implement.
 - Relatedly, concern has been expressed that “if teachers are not knowledgeable enough about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures, then attempts to include such content in the classroom may be done in a tokenistic fashion.” (Research report 11, p.33) “Some [program] participants... explained that it was difficult encouraging some classroom teachers to practically implement the ‘Teach about Reconciliation’ and the ‘Curriculum Planning’ RAP Actions, because of pre-conceived ideas about the importance of and pedagogy for teaching about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories, cultures and contributions.” (ibid, p.34)

Again, the opportunity for ITE programs of study to better support teacher comfort, confidence and competence in teaching about reconciliation and planning and implementing curriculum activities that respectfully incorporate Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures is clear. This opportunity is reflected not only in Reconciliation Australia research but also through wider external research efforts of relevance, such as AITSL’s [Indigenous Cultural Competency in the Australian Teaching Workforce Discussion Paper](#) (see pages 26 and 28 in particular).

Reconciliation Australia welcomes ongoing conversations and collaborations with the Department of Education, Skills and Employment into the future to support continued improvements to ITE and to reconciliation in education across Australia. Thank you for the opportunity to contribute to this meaningful submission process.