

JOINT SUBMISSION: NT Department of Education and Charles Darwin University's response to the Quality Initial Teacher Education Review

August 2021

In response to the discussion paper for the Quality Initial Teacher Education Review 2021, a joint submission has been prepared by the Department of Education (the department) and Charles Darwin University (CDU). CDU is the only tertiary institution in the Northern Territory with ITE courses in scope. The department and CDU recognise the important role Batchelor Institute has as a delivery partner for initial teacher education to Aboriginal students across Australia.

The submission:

- highlights the unique context of the Northern Territory and provides specific responses to the questions
- provides a direct response to some of the more pertinent questions in the Discussion Paper as they relate to the Northern Territory.

Northern Territory Context

Schooling and Early Childhood Services

In the Northern Territory (NT), education is provided to a highly diverse population. Students, young children and their families are dispersed across the 1.35 million square kilometres.

There are 222 early childhood education and care services within the NT. There are 153 government schools in the NT, of which 108 schools are in remote and very remote communities. The size of the population in each community can range from less than 100 to over 2 000 people, and schools in these communities are almost wholly populated by Aboriginal students. There are 39 non-government schools also registered to deliver education services to children in the NT, many of which operate in very remote locations within small community settings.

Two in five students in the NT are Aboriginal, compared with one in 17 nationally. One in five students are very remote Aboriginal students, compared with one in 325 for the rest of Australia. Many of these students are learning English as a second or third language, and live according to the principles and practices of an Aboriginal culture.

Teaching workforce

The Northern Territory Government is the primary employer of teachers in the NT. The department is committed to a strong equitable public education system that gives every child the opportunity to engage, grow and achieve. This requires a teaching workforce that is responsive to the diverse needs of children and young people in the NT. This means a workforce that can operate inclusively through a child-centred and holistic approach.

Present recruitment trends indicate that the majority of new teachers to the NT are from interstate, predominantly from Victoria. In 2021 and 2020, 43.5% and 31% of recruits that attended



teacher orientation were from Victoria respectively, and the second highest number of recruits were from the NT.

As at June 2021, the department has 207 Aboriginal Assistant Teachers, 117 Aboriginal teachers and 35 Aboriginal Senior Teachers, and is committed to growing this number to more closely reflect the Aboriginal student population. This is in recognition of the evidence that supports the importance of students seeing themselves represented in the educator workforce to drive engagement and ultimately student achievement. In remote communities, in addition to supporting students in the key areas of learning, culture and community, Aboriginal teachers are important role models for post-school transition and pathways.

To support NT's vision for greater numbers of Aboriginal teachers, we are implementing a range of initiatives including the new Remote Aboriginal Teacher Education (RATE) program that is aimed at providing tailored and supported pathways and sustainable models to teaching within identified local communities. The current pilot model focuses on existing Aboriginal Assistant Teachers who aspire to be fully qualified classroom teachers. The outcome of this initiative aims to provide schools with more options to recruit locally.

In NT Aboriginal communities, teachers and assistant teachers learn, plan, teach and assess together as a teaching team. This approach must be culturally responsive and pedagogically strong to ensure that relevant local knowledge is linked with the curriculum and informs pedagogy. Classroom teachers in these contexts are required to gain an understanding of Aboriginal ways of being, knowing and doing and to incorporate these into their teaching practices. The willingness of teachers recruited to remote services to learn about the culture of the local community and develop productive working relationships underpins their capacity to both live and teach effectively in remote contexts.

Teachers also require the capability to work with a broader team of professionals to meet the needs of each student, e.g. allied health, and incorporate specialised expertise into practice to support student learning.

There are challenges recruiting to specialist teacher positions. For the NT, national shortages in suitably qualified/experienced teachers to fill early childhood, Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) as well as special education positions are further exacerbated in remote locations.

CDU

CDU, through the College of Indigenous Futures, Education and the Arts, provides a range of higher education courses in the NT and Australia wide, with a particular focus on regional education. This includes ITE courses at undergraduate and postgraduate levels that specialise in:

- improving teaching and learning outcomes and relationships in the classroom;
- building capacity in Indigenous and digital education;
- developing an informed, evidence-based approach to learning and teaching in diverse educational settings.

CDU's teacher education courses provide valuable opportunities for professional experience placements in a variety of settings in local, remote, interstate and, when possible, overseas





schools – in both government and independent sectors. With 2024 students enrolled in teacher education degrees in 2020, and vocational, embedded and enabling programs that provide pathways to teacher education, CDU makes an important contribution to building the teaching profession in the NT and beyond by ensuring students in regional and remote areas have opportunities to become effective teachers.

Responses to Questions in the Discussion Paper

How could more high-quality candidates from diverse backgrounds be encouraged to consider a career in teaching?

The department and CDU recognise the importance of attracting high-quality candidates from diverse backgrounds to consider a career in teaching. However, defining high-quality first is important.

Traditionally, high-quality candidates have often been considered to be those school leavers with strong academic performance. However, a teacher's capacity to respond to children's needs holistically impacts on student academic performance. To effectively support students to reach their full potential, a teacher needs to be able to:

- work with empathy, patience and persistence;
- be passionate about teaching, to reach beyond the curriculum and inspire students in their learning;
- be culturally responsive and create an inclusive environment in which children and young people belong, can celebrate their culture and identity, make learning relevant and improve engagement;
- engage with the community and build positive relationships through strong interpersonal skills;
- use critical thinking to understand and identify a student's unique skills, knowledge and abilities, and differentiate pedagogical practices to account for this.

While this broader definition of 'high-quality' is relevant for all children, it is particularly relevant in the NT to best cater to the diverse needs of its students. By first defining high-quality and understanding what the core successful characteristics of a teacher are, a targeted strategy to attract these cohorts into teaching can then occur.

One incentive that the department has in place to attract high quality candidates into NT teaching positions, is the payment of the Highly Accomplished or Lead Teacher (HALT) allowance for teachers with national HALT certification. The allowances are currently set at \$11 725 and \$24 551 per annum and are only payable while employees are in designated classroom teacher positions. Classroom teachers who attain HALT certification are proven leaders of excellence in teaching and demonstrate a holistic high quality, high impact teaching and learning for improved student outcomes.

The department has a range of attraction initiatives underway. A continued focus on this important work (based on evidence-informed best-practice approaches) is required to identify and attract high performing individuals, particularly those in regional and remote areas. One example for revisiting may be bursary programs that bind graduating teachers to work in areas of high need (based on geolocation or curriculum/pedagogy specialisation such as STEM and Indigenous education). Evidence of potential impact of this type of arrangement would require careful impact analysis to avoid unintended impact.

The discussion paper seeks advice on what may be preventing mid-career professionals from transitioning to teaching. For mid-career professionals, a two-year Masters program is a significant commitment of time. Greater recognition of prior learning in content areas may allow:

- greater focus on in-classroom experience within Masters programs
- specialisation in focus areas that meet the needs of regional and remote schools.

How could more Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples be encouraged and supported to choose a career in teaching?

The department and CDU recognise that the teaching workforce needs to be reflective of the school communities that it serves. For the NT, this means more Aboriginal people in the teaching workforce.

Research shows that Aboriginal students perform better under the guidance of Aboriginal teachers. Further still, local Aboriginal teachers have an ongoing commitment to their communities, and are highly valued leaders because of their deep knowledge of local languages and context.

There are a number of complexities for many Aboriginal people electing to study to become a teacher. These include cultural obligations to family, community and country that can at times conflict with training or employment obligations.

There can also be barriers for Aboriginal people in remote communities to enter into tertiary education, with high proportions of students not completing Year 12, and limited options for local access to ITE courses.

Research recognises many inter-related factors play a part in creating successful tertiary programs for remote Aboriginal learners. These include the importance of cultural knowledge; learning on country; student motivation; personal empowerment with a transformative effect; flexible and adaptable trainers; training coordination and support; community and family support; peer relationships with other learners; individual confidence and identity; strong foundational skills and local community ownership.

In response to this research, along with analysis of findings from case studies and significant consultation, a 2021 Remote Aboriginal Teacher Education (RATE) pilot commenced in Galiwin'ku, Yuendumu, Milingimbi and Angurugu. 21 aspiring teachers from these communities are currently enrolled in the Undergraduate Certificate Remote Educator course, which is being delivered by CDU and Batchelor Institute.

Fundamental components of the 2021 RATE pilot are being tailored to provide on the job training and meet site specific needs, which includes:

- ongoing engagement with local communities with on-site workshops delivered by CDU and Batchelor Institute
- negotiated site plans with schools and ongoing systemic support

- aspiring teachers engaging in study pathways that are based on career aspirations and preferred ways of learning.

2021 RATE pilot sites have been determined based on each having the following attributes:

- cohorts of aspiring teachers who are ready to enter tertiary education,
- relevant community support in place
- school support and structures in place.

This initiative is starting small in four remote communities while best practice approaches are further developed, with the intention to broaden this scope and strengthen the local pathway options for Aboriginal people into the teaching profession.

In addition to this, CDU has developed an ePortfolio platform for uploading recognition of prior learning (RPL) evidence. 2021 RATE pilot participants are the first students to benefit from this system; however, it is anticipated that these benefits will be extended to broader cohorts of learners in the near future to acknowledge lived experience alongside existing skills and knowledge. This will impact on time required to fulfil study requirements and enable students to progress towards completion of courses without duplication of efforts.

CDU has developed and implemented a range of programs to improve the pathways, engagement and graduation rates of Aboriginal teachers. Indigenous led units are embedded to build cultural competence and knowledge of Indigenous education models to prepare all ITE students and teachers that work with diverse student cohorts to build success for students in remote, regional and urban settings.

The Batchelor Institute delivers a range of courses, including the CDU initial teacher education courses. Batchelor Institute uses a Both-Ways Learning philosophy which recognises Aboriginal students' knowledge, languages and culture, and that students, lecturers and support staff all journey together. New knowledge and learning are validated in ways that align with individual and community responsibility and obligations.

There is an opportunity, as part of this review, to gather perspectives from Aboriginal people and organisations to identify additional improvements to attract and retain greater numbers of Aboriginal teachers in the workforce. Any potential reforms to ITE must be carefully considered to resolve existing and prevent new barriers to employment. Engaging Aboriginal people in the design and implementation of any initiatives will better ensure the effectiveness of any new policy directions.

Should more be done to identify suitability for a career in teaching earlier in the degree or before entry to ITE? What might this look like?

The strengthened ITE course accreditation Standards and Procedures should provide confidence that the same high standards are being applied across Australia, as ITE providers are required to demonstrate that pre-service teachers have gained the knowledge and skills needed to be successful in the classroom by the time they graduate. Assessments should be embedded within ITE programs rather than reliance on achievements under testing conditions.



As a result of introducing LANTITE as a requirement for graduation, there have been examples of Aboriginal teachers who have completed an ITE degree, but have been unable to graduate because they did not pass the test. Therefore, caution should be taken to prevent further circumstances such as these. Consideration should be given as to whether LANTITE in its current format considers the diverse backgrounds of ITE students. This is particularly relevant to the NT context.

In order to assess suitability, there must first be a definition of suitability which recognises the diversely skilled teacher workforce required. It should be acknowledged that teachers operate within the context of other teachers and paraprofessionals include health professionals. In the NT, a team-teaching approach is common to utilise complementary skillsets to effectively deliver education programs.

Aboriginal educators with cultural and linguistic skills in local languages are invaluable to supporting Aboriginal students to access the curriculum. Programs developed in schools, such as Talking Namba in East Arnhem, utilise a team-teaching approach to develop learning resources and implement pedagogical approaches suitable for an intercultural context through the utilisation of local language and concepts. The Garma metaphor is particularly valuable for conceptualising bicultural (or 'both-ways') education practices. Garma describes knowledge traditions coming together, working together and agreeing together in the context of a particular place and a particular agenda, without compromise to either of the contributing traditions.

The development of Teaching Performance Assessment (TPA) tools provides an opportunity to improve the assessment of teaching performance in context, address the diverse ways that pre-service teachers respond, and assess the skills and knowledge of pre-service teachers through evidence-based assessment. There is an opportunity to review the guidelines for the assessment of teacher performance standards to improve successful engagement of high performing educators in remote communities and utilise the depth of experience in schools and universities to improve outcomes for students and teachers from diverse backgrounds.

The TPA tool could be broadened to incorporate alternative options for assessing literacy and numeracy skills that are culturally responsive to the diversity of ITE students and English as an additional language or dialect (EAL/D) speakers, rather than having the Literacy and Numeracy Test for Initial Education (LANTITE) tool as a sole option. There may be an opportunity to consider a process to recognise prior learning that is aligned with the assessment of literacy and numeracy standards as part of the application process.

Do the current professional experience arrangements support the preparation of ITE students for the classroom and school environment? How could these be improved?

There is a great deal of variance as to how ITE programs prepare ITE students for diverse student cohorts in the classroom and school environment. Like many other disciplines, the greatest learning and building of skills of pre-service teachers is achieved during professional experience placements. It is where the theory is applied and the attributes of a teacher are demonstrated. Current professional experience arrangements give a minimum amount of days to be achieved. This enables enhanced focus on developing capability to teach diverse student cohorts and to become familiar with diverse settings.

There may be opportunity for ITE providers to include longer periods of professional experience whereby the ITE student is the teacher (in situ), noting that most programs offer the traditional 4 to 6-week blocks (as an example) of professional experience, instead of a full term or learning in schools. This could strengthen evidence-based teaching approaches for responding to current and future student needs, including for example trauma-informed practice.

There may also be an opportunity to improve the quality of the professional experience through strengthening mentor teacher training and increased flexibility to adapt professional experience to the current and future needs of schools and early childhood services. Resourcing implications must be carefully considered for any further professional development, in line with potential positive impact on mentor teacher retention.

In addition to placements and study in each of the learning areas of the primary school curriculum, Primary Teacher ITE courses provide graduates with a subject specialisation. This includes clearly defined pathways into specialisations that are in demand, with a focus on subject/curriculum areas. In the NT, the area of demand includes teaching students with additional needs and have English as an Additional Language or Dialect (EAL/D).

It is important to recognise that graduate teachers have completed a qualification that meets the requirements of a nationally accredited program. ITE Course Accreditation Standards ensure that ITE program design and assessment processes identify where each Graduate Teacher Standard is taught, practised and assessed and require that pre-service teachers to have demonstrated successful performance against all of the Graduate Teacher Standards prior to graduation.

CDU works with the department through a Teaching School Partnership Agreement which enables structured support for schools to achieve a rigorous approach to the assessment of pre-service teachers' achievements against the Graduate Teacher Standards including:

- a. identification of the Standards to be assessed;
- b. provision of assessment tools, protocols, practices and guidelines;
- c. clarification of expectations and roles in assessment, particularly designated roles for supervising teachers in practical assessment of pre-service teachers;
- d. timely identification of pre-service teachers at risk of not satisfactorily completing the formal teaching practice, ensuring appropriate support for improvement;
- e. mandating a satisfactory formal assessment of pre-service teachers against the Graduate Teacher Standards as a requirement for graduating from the program.

The Teaching Schools model includes coordination of training for mentor teachers and professional learning leaders, and has demonstrated positive impact on pre-service teacher outcomes.

Our experience of working in this partnership has emphasised the value of investing in experienced teachers and university lecturers working together to build high quality and relevant programs, utilising expertise from both sectors for the common purpose of preparing high quality graduates through the sharing of evidence based, best practice models. There may be an opportunity to expand on this approach with innovative models of engagement which focus on and attract further investment in remote education settings. This approach aligns with the recommendations of the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Early Childhood Strategy



presented recently to the Honourable Minister Ken Wyatt AM, MP, Minister for Indigenous Australians.

There is also an opportunity for providers to develop courses which focus more specifically on professional experience in the classroom, and have flexibility to adapt professional experience to the current and future needs of schools and early childhood services. To ensure the success of this approach, the cost implications need to be considered to ensure funding models reflect the actual and increasing costs for education partners.

It is not the role of ITE providers to yield teachers demonstrating practice at the proficient stage of the teacher standards. Graduate teachers require support to become proficient and meet the requirements for full registration through demonstrating achievement of the seven Standards at this level. In the NT, this support is provided through the department's induction process and through the provisional to full registration process.

The department offers a suite of online professional learning resources that are built into the induction process to help equip teachers in providing safe and supportive environments that foster student learning and wellbeing. This includes a focus on: Attention Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD); Autism Spectrum Disorder; Supporting Student Wellbeing and Mental Health; Understanding and Supporting Behaviour; Understanding Hearing Loss; and Attachment and Trauma. .

The department is developing a new Early Career Teacher Program as one of the actions under its Teacher Wellbeing Strategy. This program is currently in the research phase, but will be an evidence-informed initiative that strengthens support for early career teachers in their first five years.

Are there examples of incentives that have successfully worked to attract quality teachers in areas of shortage? How could these be rolled out more broadly?

A number of projects, programs and initiatives are underway that focus on promoting teaching opportunities in the NT.

Attraction initiatives are essential to promote the department as an employer of choice and build a pipeline of quality educators to address current and future workforce needs. Current projects, programs and initiatives include:

- targeted national digital campaigns throughout the year
- connecting with pre-service and graduate teachers through presentations at Universities (locally and interstate)
- enhancements to the Teach in the Territory website to improve the information available to teachers
- developing NT teacher stories and testimonials to support promotion of teaching in the Territory
- managing a Teach in the Territory Facebook group to promote opportunities, teacher stories, incentives and benefits

- collaborating with education focussed websites to advertise teaching vacancies nationally
- maintaining the Teacher Sourcing Pool to ensure currency of teacher applications and sharing candidates with schools
- implementing the teacher permanency strategy
- improving the teacher exit process to inform future workforce planning requirements.

Classroom teachers in the NT are among the highest paid in the country and receive a range of financial and non-financial incentives and benefits. This includes:

- the Rapid Incremental Progression of Salary scheme which allows beginning teachers to apply and progress through the standard teacher salary increment levels faster;
- relocation assistance for teachers appointed for more than 6 months; and
- allowances for teachers in special schools and some pre-school positions.

Remote teaching in the Territory allows teachers to learn new skills and knowledge that they would not get in a mainstream setting, and provides greater opportunities for career progression. With remote teaching comes additional financial and non-financial incentives for individuals and families, including rental concession, fares out of isolated locations, remote incentive and retention payments.

Other key work that contributes to teacher attraction and retention includes partnering with Teach For Australia; collaborating with CDU on the Teaching Schools Partnership Agreement; enhancing the teacher orientation program; developing and implementing the 2021 Remote Aboriginal Teacher Education Pilot; administering the Aboriginal Teacher Education Scholarships; and supporting Educator Wellbeing.

Teach For Australia is an alternative pathway for training teachers which aims to attract high-quality, non-teaching graduates to study in a two-year postgraduate Master of Teaching Secondary (Leading Learning) degree whilst teaching “in situ”. Eligible TFA schools have an Index of Community Socio Educational Advantage (ICSEA) value equal to or below the national median (1000).

TFA assists the department in attracting and recruiting high quality teachers. After entering a Collaboration Agreement in 2012, the continued employment of TFA Associates has resulted in 83 placements in NT Schools to date. The costs associated with this model are high, as is the quality of Associates carefully recruited to these positions.

NT TFA Associates are a mixture of interstate local Northern Territory residents. Teach for Australia have created a special remote support model for the NT program to further assist Associates who are placed in remote schools. This means that Associates are supported to teach and live in remote NT communities. This is done through continuous coaching through both TFA and an experienced educator at the school, as well as professional development opportunities and a virtual community of practice made up of other Associates across Australia. Most importantly, the Associates value having a Cultural Advisor – a local Aboriginal community member who provides advice and support on culture and language.

There has been much discussion about teacher registration over the past 12 months, with careful consideration of how this process may enable or be a barrier for teachers moving between jurisdictions. It is understood that the recent changes to the national Automatic Mutual Recognition of Occupational Registrations (AMR) scheme is intended to assist employment of teachers moving between jurisdictions.

How could teacher and school leader workloads be made more manageable to allow them to provide more support to pre-service and newly graduated teachers?

Teacher workload is an important issue for the Department of Education. The *Education NT Teacher Wellbeing Strategy 2019-22* recognises that when teachers are at their best, students are at their best.

The NT has the highest proportion of certified Highly Accomplished and Lead Teachers (HALTs) who are well positioned to provide quality mentoring for pre-service and graduating teachers. There may be an opportunity to utilise this group of expert instructional leaders to establish teaching-university fellowships to lead research and practice in high impact teacher education for regional, remote and NT schools. Professional experience is a potential starting point for these potential fellowship arrangements, noting the importance of adequate resourcing for both universities and schools to offer high quality placements.

Teachers at Highly Accomplished and Lead Teacher Standards provide quality opportunities and placements for pre-service teachers, including high-quality professional learning opportunities that focus on improved student learning.

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