1. **Background to the Engagement and Success Project**

The Engagement and Success Project provides sustained and targeted support to Faculties and Schools of Education across Australia to continue to focus on and engage with the goals of the MATSITI project within the recommendations of the Behrendt Report.1

The specific aims of the project are to:

- improve the engagement and success of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students undertaking initial teacher education (ITE) programs; and
- to close the gap in retention/graduation rates for Indigenous and non-Indigenous students.

The project concept was developed during 2011 with the aim of building institutional leadership and capacity throughout Australian Faculties and Schools of Education to improve the retention and graduation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students in ITE programs. Only approximately 30% (aggregated national figure) of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students commencing ITE courses across Australia completed and graduated from their course. Originally called the “Retention and Completion/Graduation Project”, the project was retitled for Phase Two to the “Engagement and Success Project”, which began in late 2013.

A research team at QUT (Jo Lampert and Bruce Burnett) were commissioned by MATSITI to undertake a literature review relating to retention and graduation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students in ITE. The subsequent report2 identified specific “walking points” for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students. These critical times when the students are more likely to leave their studies included the first year of study, assessment and exams, professional experience and feelings around lack of cultural safety. Statistical data from 2007 – 2011 on retention, success (% subjects passed each year) and completion rates for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander ITE students were also collected and analysed as part of the project.

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1 Review of Higher Education Access and Outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People, Behrendt, 2012.
2 Burnett, B. and Lampert, J. (2012). Report into the Retention and Graduation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Students Enrolled in Initial Teacher Education, QUT.
ACDE followed up the work of Lampert and Burnett with a one-day forum at the completion of the 2012 ACDE Conference involving Deans and Heads of Education and Heads of Indigenous Higher Education Centres working together to develop institutional action plans. The plans included memoranda of agreement and formal strategies (short, medium and long term) to improve retention, success and graduation rates of Aboriginal and Torres Strait ITE students.

2. Development of Scope Items

A set of scope items were subsequently drawn from the Action Plans and cross-referenced to the recommendations of the Behrendt Review to ensure that key elements of the latter were incorporated. There are two categories of scope items:

1. The general scope items are those outside the parameters of the MATSITI project, but necessary as infrastructure to support achievement of the project objective; and
2. The student-specific scope items refer to those things specifically identified as being critical to improving engagement and success of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students.

Each scope item includes several components. These are listed in Appendix A. As such, an institution might be listed as having strategies in place even if this is only for one of the components.

Following endorsement by MATSITI the scoping document was presented at the Australian Council of Deans (ACDE) for feedback and endorsement at its conference on 16-17 August 2013. Institutions were also invited to participate in Phase Two of the project with twenty-two (22) ACDE members committing to do so. As a preliminary task, participants were requested to update their Action Plans and self-rate against the scoping items to more accurately reflect the situation for their School and institution as at the beginning of 2014. Self-rating was according to the extent to which each item has been implemented with regards to the following continuum:

a. Early stages/Foundational (activities planned, but yet to be implemented);
b. Activities identified in the Action Plan currently in progress; or
c. Well-established processes in place.

The revised information was then aggregated (without reference to institutions) to obtain a national picture in order to identify potential gaps and commence collegial conversation to address these.
SCOPE ITEMS – GENERAL

1. Public/explicit statement of commitment to Indigenous Reconciliation/Education – communicated internally, externally and to students:
   a. Reconciliation Statement;
   b. Indigenous education strategies;
   c. Recruitment and employment strategies.

2. Indigenous research.

3. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples’ representation on Faculty Leadership and Governance groups and committees.

4. Standing Committees (of courses, learning and teaching, student experience etc.) that specifically focus on educational issues pertinent to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples.

5. Internal partnership with Indigenous Support/Education Units:
   a. Shared understanding of relationship/signed agreements/long term relationship.
   b. Specific point-to-point contact between relevant academic and Indigenous Support Unit staff.

6. External partnership with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander elders, Aboriginal Education Consultation Groups, Indigenous Education Boards etc.

7. Teacher education curriculum that includes relevant Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander content/units developed and taught in consultation/collaboration with relevant Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff/community:
   a. Incorporation of relevant graduate attributes for cultural competence of all students.

8. External partnerships for building aspirations/capabilities:
   a. Promotional DVDs
SCOPE ITEMS – STUDENT SPECIFIC

STUDENT EXPERIENCE
- Access to individual advice
- Direct written contact with beginning students
- Customised programs and timetables
- Events
- Mentors and role models
- Recognition (of identity)

ACADEMIC SERVICES
- Skills development
- Designated Academic Advisors
- Personalised Learning Plans
- Tracking
- Professional placement

ACADEMIC PROGRAMS
- Enabling
- Bilingual
- Cohort
- Pathways

SCHOLARSHIPS AND PRIZES

EMPLOYER SPONSORSHIPS/CADETSHIPS

POLICIES AND PRACTICES
- Walking points
- Targets
- Monitoring and review
- At-risk policies/practices
- Exit interviews

CULTURALLY SAFE ENVIRONMENT AND SPACES
- “Go-to-staff”
- Staff training (induction/orientation/professional development) – cultural awareness through to cultural competence
- Inclusive CLT
- Physical space