More teachers the goal

By JILLIAN MUNDY

THE University of Tasmania (UTAS) is taking measures to increase the number of Aboriginal teachers in Tasmanian schools.

A new report, ‘Aboriginal Education Workers in Tasmania Becoming Teachers’, details what motivates, supports or deters Aboriginal education workers (AEWs) from moving on to a teaching degree, and what factors influence Aboriginal student engagement and success in Tasmania. The report was released last month, along with an announcement of 20 Higher Education Contribution Scheme scholarships for Indigenous students at UTAS.

The university’s Aboriginal higher education advisor, Claire Andersen, who was involved in interviewing 33 AEWs and Aboriginal teacher’s aides for the project, co-authored the report.

Disparity

She would like to see an end to the disparity between the high ratio of Aboriginal students compared with a low number of Aboriginal teachers. She said that if more Aboriginal people became teachers, they would be able to influence the education system, which for so long denied, ignored or stigmatised Aboriginal identity and culture.

“We’re never going to change the culture of education until we have more of our own people in there as teachers, as educators,” Ms Andersen said. “To do that we need people to come to uni, get their teaching qualification and get out there and work.”

Barriers identified were lack knowledge on how to go about getting a teaching degree, lack of encouragement and the financial strain of studying.

Many of the AEWs interviewed also felt their role was not sufficiently valued in the Tasmanian education system, leading to a reluctance to enrol in teaching studies.

The report was launched by Tasmanian Greens Leader Cassy O’Connor at an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander professional development day for teachers and education students, hosted by the UTAS Riwunna Centre for Aboriginal Education.

Recommendations

The report recommends funding for scholarships, providing AEWs with professional development, paid study leave and provision of information about teaching courses and pathways, establishing an 8% quota of teaching positions for AEWs and Aboriginal students to qualify as teachers, and compulsory professional development for all teachers in relation to Aboriginal culture.

Applications for the UTAS HECS scholarships for Aboriginal and Torres Islander students for studies in Bachelor of General Studies (Education Pathway) or Associate Degree (Education Support) close on December 14.