Evaluation of the MATSITI Project

The full MATSITI project evaluation report is available at www.matsiti.edu.au/evaluation

Executive Summary

The More Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander project was initiated by the Commonwealth Government and funded for a four year period 2011-2015.

The intent of the project was to increase:
- the number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in teaching positions in schools;
- the capacity of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander teachers; and
- the retention of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander teachers in teaching positions in schools.

MATSITI Context

The MATSITI project emanated from the many reports, plans, research and decisions of recent decades, all articulating a need to deliver on these objectives, in the pursuit of better educational outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students in Australian schools and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people more broadly. These include, but are not limited to:
- the National Aboriginal Education Committee and the work of Paul Hughes and Eric Willmot (1982) in setting an aspirational target of 1000 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander teachers by 1990;
- National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Policy (1989);
- the Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs (MCEETYA) discussion paper (2000) Achieving Educational Equity for Australia’s Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples;
- the National Report to Parliament on Indigenous Education and Training (2001);
- MCEETYA’s Melbourne Declaration on Educational Goals for Young Australians (2008);
- the Council of Australian Governments’ (COAG) communiques (2007 and 2008) on Closing the Gap;
- the Australian Education Systems Officials Committee’s (AESOC) working party on Indigenous Education Australian Directions in Indigenous Education 2005-2008 (2006);
- the Ministerial Council for Education, Early Childhood Development and Youth Affairs’ Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Action Plan 2010-2014 (2010); and
- the Education Council’s National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Strategy 2015 (2015).

Supporting Literature

Support for the MATSITI initiative is also drawn from the writings of many noted academics and authors, highlighted in Chapter 4 of this report.

Project Governance

The governance of the MATSITI project could be considered to be well structured with transparent decision making and highly visible accountability. The MATSITI team, under the
leadership of the Project Director Professor Peter Buckskin, made significant use of the MATSITI website to clearly articulate the initiative’s implementation and to communicate its progress.

Professor Buckskin, was well supported by a dedicated project team within the University of South Australia, a Reference Group and a Working Party drawn from Indigenous stakeholders, who provide general advice and direction.

**Project Constraints**

The Evaluation Panel identified four factors which may have been constraints on the success of the project or the capacity to adequately evaluate its success. These included:

- the self-nomination of projects by project partners;
- the difficulties of capturing teacher workforce data across the range of school jurisdictions, government and non-government, across Australia;
- legislative and industrial barriers to the employment of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander teachers across those same school jurisdictions; and
- cross portfolio responsibilities relating to the obvious interests of both the Indigenous Affairs and Education and Training portfolios in the success of the MATSITI objectives.

**Research**

The MATSITI project engaged Dr Kaye Price and Emeritus Professor Paul Hughes to lead its Research Plan, to identify key factors that contribute to the number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people entering and remaining in teaching positions in Australian schools.

The MATSITI website features extensive contributions which include academic articles, news articles, reports from conferences and workshops and notices. These were a valuable knowledge bank for MATSITI Project Partners and the broader MATSITI community.

**MATSITI Annual Work Plans and Annual Progress Reports**

The MATSITI project team outlined their yearly actions and events a series of annual work plans which were subsequently evaluated through annual progress reports. These work plans were guided by the overarching *MATSITI Project Plan 2012-2015*.

The publication of these documents provided a clear and open approach to the work of the project team, as well as a broader understanding of the breadth of the project.

**MATSITI Partnership Projects**

There have been 57 individual projects conducted by MATSITI project partners supported by funding through the program. Many of the project partners have supplemented project expenditure with in-kind support.

There was a total of $6.96m originally allocated to MATSITI projects, of which 56.9% was derived from direct program grants and the remainder contributed by project partners.
Projects were categorised as Tier 1 if they had broader national coverage or implications. Many of these were undertaken by organisations with national reach or by significant contributors. Tier 2 projects were more localised in nature.

**MATSITI Teacher Workforce Scoping Plan**

The NSW Department of Education and Communities was commissioned to produce the *MATSITI Teacher Workforce Scoping Plan*.

The Scoping Plan was intended to enable “schools and school jurisdictions, university schools of education, professional associations and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander education and community leaders and their networks to develop a coordinated approach to increasing the number and capacities of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander teachers in government and non-government schools throughout Australia”.

It provided an excellent resource for school jurisdictions and other potential MATSITI project partners to draw on strategies which could contribute to the overall achievement of the MATSITI objectives.

**Tier 1 Projects ($1,947,142)**

There were 6 Tier 1 projects funded by MATSITI, with a budgeted MATSITI contribution of $1,947,142.

The Tier 1 project partners the National Catholic Education Commission, Catholic Education South Australia, the Australian Council of Deans of Education, the Australian Indigenous Lecturers in Teacher Education, Principals Australia Institute and the Career Development Association of Australia committed to ambitious projects consistent with the level of funding allocated.

The projects covered a broad range of strategies including a more coordinated approach across the Catholic education sector, the engagement, retention and support of students in teacher education programs, the establishment of an association for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander teacher education lecturers, mentoring support for new teachers and related career support.

While the level of success of individual strategies varied, the Tier 1 projects laid the groundwork for a substantial contribution to the MATSITI objectives into the future.

**Promotional Strategies ($374,375)**

There were 12 projects funded with a focus on the promotion of teaching as a career to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. Two of these projects, conducted by Catholic Education South Australia and the Career Development Association of Australia were built into the Tier 1 projects. The budgeted MATSITI contribution for the other projects was in the vicinity of $374,375, excluding Tier 1 project budgets.

While the major jurisdictions of the NSW Department of Education and the Queensland Department of Education and Training were able to develop successful strategies utilising their access to significant resources, other project partners were able to develop innovative promotional tools which could well be incorporated into larger scale campaigns.
Mentor Strategies ($155,558)

There were five projects funded with a focus on the mentoring of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander teacher education students and beginning teachers. One of those projects, conducted by Principals Australia Institute, was embedded in a Tier 1 project. The budgeted MATSITI contribution for the remaining Tier 2 projects was $155,558, excluding Tier 1 project budgets.

While the outcomes of these projects were limited, it was evident that mentoring programs for teacher education students and early career teachers provides vital support and minimises the risk of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander teachers and teacher education students exiting. This is backed by related literature.

Leadership Strategies ($518,000)

There were ten projects funded with a focus on leadership development among the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander teacher workforce. The budgeted MATSITI contribution for these was $518,000.

The scope of these projects was broad, encompassing programs across the largest jurisdiction, New South Wales, down to a single school project, Monaro High School. While some of the projects were highly successful, several struggled to achieve their aims.

Larger centrally controlled jurisdictions appear to be advantaged in providing leadership opportunities for teachers participating in these types of programs.

Professional Experience Strategies ($123,630)

There were only three projects funded with a focus on the professional experience component of teacher education programs for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. The budgeted MATSITI contribution was $123,630.

The institutions which conducted the two completed projects have each contributed to the research around this area and the need for programs of this nature to be effectively supported by the profession, with clear communication.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Workers to Teachers ($194,510)

There were five projects funded with a focus on strategies to support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Workers to transition to careers as teachers. The budgeted MATSITI contribution was $194,510.

These projects tapped into a known supply for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander teacher workforce, the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Workers, and in doing so contributed to the level of awareness among the target group of the opportunities available in teaching.
There were four projects funded with a focus on the utilisation of school to university pathways for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander school students. The budgeted MATSITI contribution was $198,000.

The projects acknowledged the need to provide pathways alternate to the traditional school to university transition for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, particularly those in remote areas.

There were two projects funded with a focus on identifying the exit factors for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students in teacher education programs. The budgeted MATSITI contribution was $95,875.

While each project identified key factors which led to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students exiting programs, there would be benefit in the project owners working with other lead organisations such as the Australian Council of Deans of Education and the Australian Indigenous Lecturers in Teacher Education.

There were nine other projects funded by MATSITI which did not fit into the above categories mentioned above. The budgeted MATSITI contribution for these projects was $262,771.

These projects included forums and networking, scholarships, early career development, remote teacher education, the use of technology and connection with community. Through their varied success they demonstrate the value of their inclusion in more comprehensive strategies.

The capture of data, whether it be Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander teacher education students or teachers, is problematic, given the constraints on this data in higher education institutions, the dispersed nature of many school jurisdictions and the quality of data held centrally by most school jurisdictions.

While the use of Ernst and Young as contractors to collect and collate teacher workforce data maximised the opportunity to capture a more complete dataset, there were still significant gaps.

The number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students in teacher education programs increased from 1610 to 2459 between 2001 and 2014. However, Aboriginal and Torres Strait
Islander students remained below 2 percent of the total teacher education cohort for that period, with 1.87 percent in 2014.

The number of teacher identified as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander increased from 2,661 to 3,100 between 2012 and 2015. These included 743 teachers who were captured in both collections but only identified in the 2015 collection. It also included 697 teachers who appear to have joined the teacher workforce after 2012.

Other highlights from the data are:
- the median age of Indigenous teachers is 40 years;
- 75 percent of Indigenous teachers are female;
- 83 percent of Indigenous teachers work full-time;
- 83 percent of Indigenous teachers are classroom teachers, 7 percent are deputy principals and 3 percent are principals;
- 57 percent of Indigenous teachers work in primary schools, 32 percent in secondary schools and 11 percent in combined primary/secondary schools;
- 80 percent of Indigenous teachers are in ongoing/permanent employment, 17 percent on fixed term contracts and 3 percent casual;
- 49 percent of Indigenous teachers are employed in a major city, with 10 percent employed in remote or very remote areas;
- the Indigenous teachers new to the 2015 collection are generally better qualified academically; and
- 233 (14%) of Indigenous teachers and executives from the 2012 collection had been promoted by 2015, with 40 of those to principal.

**MATSITI Conferences**

The MATSITI project made excellent use of annual conferences to showcase developments in the employment and career development of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander teachers and leaders and to facilitate valuable networking with the broader MATSITI community.

This culminated in the #OurMobTeach conference in Adelaide in 2015 from which the Tarndanya Declaration was communicated to the Minster for Education and Training, Simon Birmingham. The text of the Tarndanya Declaration is in Chapter 22 of this report.

**Conclusions**

The Evaluation Panel found that successful engagement of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in the teaching profession is an essential contributor to great educational success for children and young people and their families and communities.

It also identified the following factors contributed to successful projects which aim to increase the number and retention of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander teachers in the profession:
- the inclusion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in the leadership of initiatives and projects;
- connectedness of initiatives to wider influences such as school systems, universities, governments and communities;
- sustained engagement and commitment to supporting the project over a number of years so that they can become embedded practices;
- 'one off' projects have a limited impact but when well defined and connected can shift understanding and practices for the future;
- clear project deliverables aimed at attraction, retention and success of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander teachers in preservice education and the profession and leadership roles which can be reported accountably;
- awareness raising and development of cultural competence accompanied by goals for shifts in practices and outcomes; and
- significant in-kind contributions of partners in projects, not only a sign of their commitment, but may be leveraged to embed practices for the future as normal operations.

**Recommendations**

The Evaluation Panel is of the view that the evidence and lessons learned over the past four years should be capitalised upon for a more informed and targeted focus in future, with the extension of the MATSITI initiative for a further four year period, 2016-2019.

The value of having a dedicated third party team with significant expertise in the area of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander education and connections in the broader Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community has been realised through the MATSITI project. The Evaluation Panel is also of the view that an essential element of success has been that such a third party team was under the leadership of noted Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander academics and educational leaders, with access to other experts in this field.

It is arguable that through the awareness raising of the MATSITI project and the implementation of the strategies of the project partners, MATSITI is progressing towards the full realisation of its objectives.

With the period of the MATSITI project being four years and many of the partner projects being much more recent, it is difficult to deduce the true impact of MATSITI. What is evident is that many of the strategies will require much longer to realise their full potential.

The MATSITI Evaluation Panel recommends that:

1. **Priority be given to publicising successful strategies and communicating the broader achievements of MATSITI in a “what works” style campaign across universities, educational jurisdictions, schools and key stakeholder groups in the broader MATSITI community.**

2. **Funding be provided to extend the MATSITI project for a further four years 2016-2019, to be managed by an appropriate third party team with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander leadership, expertise in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander education and workforce, and connections in the broader Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community.**

3. **Projects funded in the period 2016-2019 target specific objectives, draw upon evidence and data from the 2012-2015 initiatives, utilise particular strategies and be managed by project partners with specifically related expertise.**
4. A sub-project be devoted to embedding the MATSITI objectives into the regulatory framework and operational context of school jurisdictions to ensure the sustainability of the pursuit of these objectives up to and beyond 2019.

5. A national strategy of promoting teaching as a career to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples be developed, launched and monitored.

6. A comprehensive national leadership strategy for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander teachers be developed and implemented.

7. Leadership and teaching positions in schools with significant Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander student enrolments be targeted or identified for filling by suitably qualified Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander educators.

8. A national scholarship program of an annual 100 scholarships for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander teacher education students be launched.

9. A suite of strategies aimed at significantly increasing the completion rates of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander initial teacher education students be implemented by universities.

10. Priority be given to establishing and promoting pathways for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Workers to transition to careers as teachers and that such pathways be sensitive to the social, cultural and financial support required for success.

11. All school employers be required to report on the cultural knowledge and practices they have and are implementing to provide a safe environment for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples to formally identify as such and for that identification to be formally recorded and maintained by that employer and reported nationally in a de-identified statistical format.

12. Teacher regulatory bodies in each state and territory be required to provide an opportunity for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander teachers to formally identify as such and for that identification to be formally recorded and maintained by that body and reported nationally in a de-identified statistical format.

13. Teacher unions and the Commonwealth Government agree in principle to include in future industrial agreements mechanisms by which Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander teachers may be provided with priority for employment.

14. The Commonwealth Government amend the relevant legislation to provide preference for the employment of appropriately qualified Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander teachers across all Australian educational jurisdictions.