

Media Release

Chiefs of Staff, News Directors

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New initiatives to develop pathways into teaching degrees for Aboriginal people at University

The University of Tasmania will release a new report today titled *Aboriginal Education Workers in Tasmania Becoming Teachers*.

The report was produced by researchers in the University's Tasmanian Institute of Learning and Teaching (TILT) and the Faculty of Education.

The report was funded by the More Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Teachers Initiative (MATSI), a four-year national project funded by the Australian Government to increase the number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people employed in teaching positions in Australia.

The research aimed to find out what factors motivate, support or deter Aboriginal Education Workers (AEWs) to enrol in a teaching degree, and what factors influence Aboriginal student engagement and success in Tasmania. The research was undertaken by a team of three academics and grounded with Aboriginal researchers interviewing Aboriginal people.

Aboriginal researcher Lauren Gower (Education), said "people opened up to us because of our shared experiences as Aboriginal people in Tasmania."

"They told us of the barriers preventing them taking up teaching; major barriers were the lack of: knowledge on how to gain access to a teaching degree, lack of encouragement and lack of finances."

Aboriginal researcher Clair Andersen (TILT) said "supporting culture and identity are critical in fostering engagement and retention of Aboriginal students. Community involvement was critical to the research process and data collection."

Two non-Indigenous academics from the Faculty of Education were also involved in the research, the Head of School, Associate Professor Karen Swabey and Dr Mary O'Dowd. Dr O'Dowd, who was involved in writing the report stated, "a critical issue in gaining deeper perspectives was recognising the value of Aboriginal research methods."

Cassy O'Connor MP will launch the report at an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Day held at the University today. The Education Day features a variety of speakers presenting on issues relating to Indigenous education.

Key findings include:

- A significant number of participants felt the role of the Aboriginal Education Worker is not sufficiently valued in the Tasmanian education system, leading to a reluctance to enrol in teaching studies
- Some participants noted there was an insufficient inclusion of Tasmanian Aboriginal perspectives in classrooms and a lack of role models and mentors
- Participants noted that career pathways need to be communicated to students as early as possible to encourage Aboriginal student success
- Money was the most cited barrier to enrolling in a teaching degree. Most Aboriginal Education Workers work to support their families and consider full time study incompatible with work and family commitments

Key recommendations include:

- Providing AEWs with professional development and paid study leave
- Provide funding, including scholarships, to overcome inequity which disadvantages Aboriginal people gaining access to university
- Establish an eight per cent quota of teaching positions for AEWs and Aboriginal students for qualify as teachers
- Provide AEWs with information about existing teaching courses and pathways

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