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Professor Mark Scott AO
Chair, Teacher Education Expert Panel
c/o Department of Education
CANBERRA ACT 2601

21 April 2023

Dear Prof Scott,

RE: CHARLES DARWIN UNIVERISTY RESPONSE TO THE TEACHER EDUCATION EXPERT PANEL

Charles Darwin University (CDU) welcomes the opportunity to continue to contribute to Quality Initial Teacher Education reform and provides the following in response to the Teacher Education Expert Panel's Discussion Paper released on 23 March 2023. This targeted response seeks to ensure the Panel is familiar with the challenges of the NT's context, especially as it relates to future performance measurement (Discussion Paper, item 2).

Our context

CDU's vision is to be Australia's most connected university by being courageous and making a difference in the Northern Territory (NT), Australia and beyond.

The NT spans approximately one sixth of Australia's landmass and although it is home to just one per cent of the population, 30 per cent are First Nations peoples. At the heart of CDU's place-based mission is engaging First Nations students and supporting their attainment in vocational and higher education.

Being a dual sector university allows CDU to meet the education needs of Territorians with campuses in Darwin, Alice Springs, Palmerston and Katherine and study centres in Nhulunbuy, Jabiru and Tennant Creek. CDU also has a proud history of delivering on country in some of the NT's most remote locations, bringing training to First Nations communities who need it in places such as Galiwin'ku, Maningrida, Borroloola, Wadeye and Hermannsburg.

Thin and ultra-thin markets define CDU's operating environment and impact its operations across training, education and research, with higher travel costs, supply chain interruptions and workforce scarcity. Economies of scale are almost impossible to realise with Australia's most dispersed population base, of only 250,000 people.

ITE courses at CDU

CDU delivers a full suite of Initial Teacher Education (ITE) programs and has a strong collaboration with the NT Department of Education to respond to school system workforce needs. In addition to ITE, CDU offers important TAFE level courses which are an ITE pathway, including for Teacher Assistants and Aboriginal Teacher Assistants.

In 2022, CDU graduated 312 students from ITE courses, and this represents a strong increase from around 200 students per year in the preceding four years. Across ITE courses in 2022, a comparison of headcount (1,768) to equivalent full-time student load (1,098) shows a significant proportion of students

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are studying part-time. The basis for admission to CDU ITE courses in 2022 was predominantly from other higher education courses (41 per cent), TAFE or vocational courses (25 per cent) and Tertiary Enabling Programs (11 per cent). A much smaller proportion, only three per cent, had an ATAR as the basis of admission.

The Remote Aboriginal Teacher Education (RATE) is a partnership between the NT Government and CDU to support capacity building of First Nations educators in remote NT education settings at every step of their careers, while creating opportunities for those who aspire to become qualified teachers. RATE delivers a targeted suite of professional development opportunities, including ITE courses, Vocational Education and Training and non-accredited training.

In 2021, the RATE higher education pilot program commenced in Angurugu, Galiwinku, Milingimbi and Yuendumu, with 22 Aboriginal Assistant Teachers enrolled in the Undergraduate Certificate of Remote Educators at CDU. In 2022, the RATE pilot continued, expanding to engage Assistant Teachers based in Nyirripi, Yipirinya (Alice Springs), Woolianna and Adelaide River schools, with 30 RATE students enrolled in higher education courses across all sites as of July 2022. In 2023, CDU will commence offering a Bachelor of Teaching through this program for students in remote locations.

Response to Discussion Paper

1. Strengthen ITE programs to deliver confident, effective, classroom ready graduates

CDU broadly supports the discussion paper's proposals to strengthen ITE programs. CDU has contributed to and supports the Submission of the Australian Council of Deans of Education.

Any adjustments required of ITE programs as a result of these reforms need to be implemented in a way that does not disadvantage students currently studying, including if they are studying part-time.

2. Strengthen the link between performance and funding of ITE programs

The Panel proposes performance of ITE courses be better measured and that this performance is made available to students as a measure of quality. The Panel also discusses how funding can be linked to that performance. CDU welcomes the Panel's acknowledgment that alternative options would need to be accommodated (p 37), as there cannot be a one-size-fits-all approach. This is true for the range of performance measurements as well as the nature of the measurement (relative performance or improvement approach).

The sequential nature of these performance measures – selection, retention, classroom readiness and transition – is logical and more specific comments are included below. However, as an overarching position, CDU is concerned that performance measures will miss or dismiss the critical differentiation of the NT and its student cohorts, namely workforce challenges that impact all sectors in the NT.

Workforce

The retention of skilled workforces in the NT is difficult, with churn of qualified professionals coming into the territory, often in their mid-twenties, and staying for a period but then leaving. There needs to be recognition of Northern Australia's fundamentally different workforce trajectory than other places described as 'regional'.

As a consequence of retention challenges, encouraging Territorians to stay in the Territory to underpin the NT workforce is critically important. The case for regional education is strong with evidence that students who study in regional and rural settings are more likely to stay there upon graduating.

A NT focus on 'growing our own' is important, but is impacted by the education challenges for those tertiary students. Data shows that NT school students have the lowest or near-lowest levels of literacy and numeracy in Australia, compounded by remoteness. Many of the challenges CDU students face are related to historical disadvantage, our location and the sparse population base. About 45 per cent of students who complete a NT Certificate of Education and Training receive a minimum Australian Tertiary Admissions Rank (ATAR) sufficient to apply directly to university after high school.

Developing the NT's own teacher workforce is also critical for First Nations teachers, co-teachers and teachers assistants, especially in remote and very remote communities. While CDU does not argue that this should be quantified within a performance metric, the value of local First Nations people becoming teachers and contributing to education in community should be given prominence.

Selection

As acknowledged by the Panel's discussion paper, there is important student diversity in ITE courses. However, government policy settings largely still reflect a presumed cohort of school-leavers, across tertiary education and this is reflected in the focus on ATAR entrance as a proxy for high quality. Broadly, only around 40 per cent of commencing undergraduate students in Australia are school leavers. More specifically, commencing undergraduate students who are school-leavers account for only 21 per cent of First Nations students, 22 per cent of students at regional universities, and less than 10 per cent for CDU.

Only three per cent of enrolling ITE students in 2022 had an ATAR as the basis of admission. While 37 per cent of these received ATARs over 80, CDU does not agree this deserves such a heavy emphasis.

Retention

As outlined above, all workforces in the NT experience significant retention challenges. This is in spite of concerted efforts from government and civil society to promote the livability and benefits of living in the NT.

Classroom Readiness

If Quality Indicators for Learning and Teaching is to be used as a basis for components of performance measurements (and funding) CDU would emphasise that it must be contemporised.

In its submission to the Universities Accord Discussion Paper, CDU has argued that quality indicators for teaching and learning should be redeveloped and monitored over time to improved future-focused quality education. Specifically, the Quality Indicators for Learning and Teaching Student Experience Survey should continue to be refined to better address: non-school leaver cohorts; effective online delivery models; the assumptions behind 'learner engagement' parameters; and the adoption and continuous improvement of technologies.

Transition

It is important to acknowledge that universities have no leverage over students upon graduating and giving any post-education responsibility to universities is problematic.

Funding

With respect to linking performance to funding, the range of options considered by the Panel all present challenges given the complexities of CDU's operating environment. Nonetheless, CDU supports greater transparency for students and the sharing of data between universities, Teacher Registration Boards and school systems.

An alternative, alluded to in the Discussion Paper is to consider how new compacts, or Individual Accords with universities through the Universities Accord process could be leveraged. CDU would advocate that this be a preferred approach by the Panel.

3. Improve the quality of practical experience in teaching

CDU supports the Panel's focus on practical experience and does not seek to add further to the discussion paper.

4. Improve postgraduate programs to attract mid-career entrants


CDU is cautious about moves to truncate courses for mid-career or other postgraduate students, especially where that may diminish practical opportunities. In response to our student and teacher feedback CDU has increased practicals in the second year of the Masters program so students are better prepared and this has been well supported by industry.

School student cohorts in the NT are very diverse and teachers need to be fully equipped to manage a range of students behaviours in response to this diversity. School student diversity takes account of First Nations cultural safety, remoteness, English as a second (or third or fourth) language and high proportions of disability. ITE students need a sound basis to understand and develop contemporary and adaptive skills as well as participating in practicals.

Further information

CDU would be pleased to participate in further consultation with the Panel. Please feel free to contact Prof Ruth Wallace, Pro-Vice Chancellor, Faculty of Arts & Society, Charles Darwin University via ruth.wallace@cdu.edu.au.

Yours sincerely



Professor Scott Bowman AO
Vice-Chancellor and President