Loss of remote teaching course a blow to Indigenous educators



By Lincoln Rose
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The decision by Curtin University to discontinue its Bachelor of Education (Regional and Remote) degree is a setback to bridging the gap for all Indigenous Australians.

Whilst Curtin's decision to phase out the course so that all current students can fully complete the degree in which they are enrolled is welcomed, the ending of the course for future teachers puts in jeopardy an effective strategy for improving Indigenous educational outcomes.

The Bachelor of Education (Regional and Remote) is tailored specifically for Indigenous student teachers from regional and remote communities.

It provides individuals with access to university lecturers who have the necessary skills to provide understanding for Indigenous students, displaying cultural awareness and sensitivity that allow for a place of learning respecting Indigenous culture and diversity.

The format of delivery being in blocks is important to the success of this degree, as it allows student teachers to remain in their community for the majority of the year, travelling to Perth only for intensive blocks of study.

This keeps people close to their families and community.

Individuals enrolling in this degree are often leaders and role models in their community, holding important positions such as Aboriginal and Islander Educational Officers, Aboriginal language teachers, mentors to Aboriginal students and NAIDOC coordinators.

An all too common experience is that regional and remote communities welcome graduate teachers, who despite their training, have to learn a new culture before they can be completely effective teachers to Indigenous students.

But once the relevant skills are acquired, they often move back to metropolitan areas, reflecting the high transience rates in regional and remote Western Australia.

Most people enrol in the Bachelor of Education (Regional and Remote) so that they can stay in their community.

Indeed, one of the key objectives in the department's Equity and Diversity Management Plan is to: "increase the representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employees and improvements in their career prospects".

The continuation of this course would have led to the alignment of this plan.

The federal government's recent National Teaching Workforce Dataset: Data Analysis report, June 2014 states that "Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander teachers make up less than two per cent of the teaching workforce. Increasing these teacher numbers is already a strategic imperative for federal and jurisdictional governments."

Unfortunately, the loss of the Bachelor of Education (Regional and Remote) course would seem very much to be in contradiction to this data analysis report.

Authorised by Sally Dennis, General Secretary, The State School Teachers' Union of W.A.
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