

Quality Initial Teacher Education Submission July 2021

Interest in the consultation

Baringa Early Learning Centre is a Canberra-based centre rated as Exceeding National Quality Standards. Baringa places high value on providing exceptional early childhood education in the early years, from birth to preschool, ensuring children feel safe and supported.

Baringa's staff include educators completing a Bachelor in Early Childhood and Primary Education; Bachelor of Education (Birth – 5 Years) and Bachelor of Education (Early Childhood and Primary). As an organisation, Baringa is invested in ensuring staff are well-equipped to support children through the early and primary school years to achieve appropriate outcomes.

In particular, Baringa is passionate about ensuring Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander history and cultures are appropriately included in initial teacher education (ITE) and graduate teachers are supported to facilitate this learning with children. Similarly, teachers need to be better supported to deliver mental health and wellbeing content to children as an essential component of the curriculum.

Response

Are graduate teachers ready for the classroom?

Question: Are ITE Programs preparing graduates for teaching diverse student cohorts, including through cultural competency and inclusive education?

Response:

- To support implementation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander history and culture curriculum content in the school setting, there needs to be specific frameworks to ensure that teachers are aware of and are accountable to this cross-curriculum priority. These frameworks should be introduced during ITE and include stronger messaging, resourcing and illustrations of practice informed by anti-racism principles and practices; actively addressing teachers' concerns about being culturally inappropriate, insensitive, or unsafe; and reflecting age and stage appropriate truth-telling. This should also be made available for qualified teachers as part of ongoing professional development.
- Teachers should be supported to facilitate connections to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander history and cultures throughout curriculum content to assist in integrating cultural competency and principles of inclusion throughout the education program.
- Providing a greater focus and support for cultural competency and inclusion in ITE may also assist in attracting a more diverse cohort to better mirror the diversity of society (as referred to in Part A Q5).

The role of school teachers in supporting the next generation of teachers

This section of the discussion paper refers to student mental health as a priority professional development area for teachers in schools.

Response:

- Baringa emphasises the importance of student mental health as underpinning children's social and emotional development¹ and believes there is an urgent need for more training and support around mental health and wellbeing to be included in ITE.

- Baringa acknowledges that schools experience great difficulties in working within a crowded curriculum and face a major challenge in the extent of topics covered in mental health and wellbeing.^{1,2} Policy change is required to better support schools to deliver mental health curricula, which has been highlighted by both the Australian Government Productivity Commission and the National Mental Health Commission.^{1,2} Mental health curricula need to be given parity to literacy and numeracy and its importance as a key subject, needs to be emphasised in ITE, and the Australian Curriculum, thus empowering teachers to devote more teaching time on mental health and wellbeing.

References

1. Australian Government Productivity Commission (2020). Mental Health: Productivity Commission Inquiry Report Volume 2, no. 95. 30 June 2020. Retrieved from <https://www.pc.gov.au/inquiries/completed/mental-health/report/mental-health-volume2.pdf>.
2. Australian Government National Mental Health Commission (2021). *National Children's Mental Health and Wellbeing Strategy Draft*. Retrieved from <https://www.mentalhealthcommission.gov.au/Mental-health-Reform/Childrens-Mental-Health-and-Wellbeing-Strategy>.

Contact

Kristy Bartlett
Social Impact Coordinator
Baringa Early Learning Centre
E: admin@baringa.org.au
P: 02 6258 8891