

Supporting mid-career pathways

1 Context

Increasing the number of mid-career ITE entrants can help to address teacher shortages and improve diversity in the teaching profession. But mid-career cohorts face different barriers than their school leaver counterparts when it comes to entering ITE courses, transitioning to classroom teaching and remaining in the teaching profession.

The Quality Initial Teacher Education (QITE) review made several recommendations regarding attracting mid-career cohorts into teaching, including:

- Evidence-based incentives for mid-career cohorts in relevant fields of demand, to help them overcome barriers to entering the teaching profession.
- Accelerated entry of high-quality mid-career candidates into teaching should continue by supporting innovative employment-based pathways; and expanding existing alternative pathways at both federal and state / territory levels.

Bespoke programs targeted at mid-career cohorts now exist in most Australian jurisdictions. Most of these programs are still in their infancy in Australia, with evidence about their effectiveness still emerging.

If successful, ongoing reform efforts – including those through the National Teacher Workforce Action Plan – also have the potential to incentivise the entry and retention of mid-career teachers (e.g. improving teacher pay progression; relieving workload pressure; raising the status of the teaching profession).

2 Scope and approach

This paper focuses on improving pathways for mid-career cohorts by exploring the following key questions:

- What are potential mid-career cohorts for ITE?
- What are the barriers to attracting mid-career cohorts into ITE and ensuring that they become effective teachers?
- What incentives may be attractive to mid-career changers?
- What are the system opportunities to attracting mid-career cohorts into ITE and ensuring that they become effective teachers?

This paper focuses on mid-career cohorts, noting that the overall ITE cohort is becoming older.¹ This means that reforms aimed at supporting mid-career changers may have spill over benefits for the entire ITE student cohort.

Analysis in this paper is informed by:

- Stakeholder consultation with ITE providers, education departments, teacher regulatory authorities and peak sector organisations.
- A review of existing academic and grey literature on mid-career pathways.

3 Emerging findings

Mid-career cohorts have a lot to offer to schools, as well as the system overall, and there are likely many mid-career cohorts that would consider transitioning to teaching. But there are hard and soft barriers to the attraction, development and retention of mid-career cohorts in ITE and teaching that must be overcome.

3.1 The potential for mid-career teachers

3.1.1 Motivations for transitioning to teaching

Mid-career cohorts may choose to transition into teaching due to intrinsic or extrinsic motivations:

- *Intrinsic motivations* are altruistic in nature and can include a desire to serve society; and a sense of care and commitment.
- *Extrinsic motivations* may include perceptions about teaching as a secure career, and family-work balance. Labour market related factors can impact on these motivations (e.g. they may be less powerful in times of low unemployment).²

There is little research indicating how many mid-career individuals would be open to a career in teaching. A survey of mid-career individuals by the Behavioural Economics Team of the Australian Government (BETA) found that one in ten were planning a career transition to teaching, and that one in three were open to the idea.³

3.1.2 Benefits of engaging mid-career cohorts

Many mid-career individuals bring considerable professional and life experience to teaching, contributing to the quality of the teaching workforce. They may have had successful careers in other fields, including in leadership roles. Many bring strong skills working with children. Many that transition will incur a pay cut, which may mean they are 'doing it for the right reasons' (which may explain why many career-change teachers elect to work in low-SES schools).⁴

¹ Australian Government DoE (2022), *Next steps: report of the quality of Initial Teacher Education review (QITE)*

² Melbourne Graduate School of Education (2021), *Career changers: keeping career change teachers in the profession*, p.14-15

³ BETA (2022), *Attracting high-achieving teaching candidates*, p.12

⁴ Melbourne Graduate School of Education (2021), *Career changers: keeping career change teachers in the profession*. p.15

However, while mid-career cohorts have a significant contribution to make to the teaching profession, they are not a panacea for overall supply challenges. Further, not all mid-career cohorts that undertake ITE courses will make the transition into classroom teaching or stay in classroom teaching.

Inducing additional mid-career cohorts to transition into teaching can contribute to addressing specific workforce challenges, including:

- *Improving workforce diversity and inclusion.* Efforts to attract mid-career cohorts can improve overall diversity of the teaching profession (e.g. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples; those from a culturally and linguistically diverse background).
- *Addressing specific supply challenges.* Professionals can boost teaching supply in subject areas where there are particular shortages, especially in secondary schools (e.g. mathematics; science; design and technology; and languages).⁵ Attracting mid-career cohorts from regional and remote areas to enter the teaching profession can also boost supply in geographic areas facing teacher shortages (e.g. a 'grow your own' approach, as used in the Riverina Hub Program).
- *Improving the flexibility of resilience of the education workforce.* This can be achieved by upskilling and cross-skilling professionals already working in schools to take up teaching roles, or train to take on different teaching roles (e.g. teaching different levels or subjects).

There are many diverse cohorts of mid-career individuals that might consider transitioning to teaching and could add value to the teaching workforce. One way to segment these cohorts is by the specific rationale for inducing the cohort into teaching ([Table 1](#)). These cohorts are not mutually exclusive.

Table 1 – Potential mid-career cohorts

Cohort type	Examples
Cohorts that contribute to broader workforce diversity and inclusion	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples • Culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) individuals • People with disability • Workers over the age of 40
Cohorts open to / facing career transitions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Individuals transitioning back to the workforce after having children / taking on other caring responsibilities • Individuals returning from overseas (e.g. having worked as abroad as a language teacher) • Individuals transitioning out of specific industries (e.g. professional sports people, the Australian Defence Force) • Individuals in industries facing uncertainty

⁵ BETA (2022), *Attracting high-achieving teaching candidates*. p.4

Cohorts that can address specific supply challenges	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Individuals in regional / remote areas • Workers in STEM jobs • Workers in trades
Cohorts already within the education system	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Paraprofessionals • Teachers wanting to cross-qualify (e.g. Primary Teachers reskilling as Secondary teachers; art teachers reskilling as maths teachers) • University lecturers / employees / PhD graduates • VET Trainers and Assessors

3.2 Barriers to engaging mid-career cohorts in ITE and teaching

Mid-career cohorts considering a transition to teaching face ‘hard barriers’ (i.e., structural) and ‘soft barriers’ (i.e. based on beliefs). These barriers can prevent mid-career cohorts entering ITE, transitioning to teaching following their ITE degrees, or remaining in teaching.

3.2.1 Hard barriers

Financial

Research and stakeholder consultations suggest that financial barriers are the most significant barrier to entry for mid-career cohorts.⁶ Mid-career cohorts generally have greater personal and financial responsibilities than their school-leaver counterparts (e.g. many have caring responsibilities for children or parents; and financial obligations such as mortgages). Specific financial barriers they face include:

- *Loss of income during the period of the ITE degree.* This can be most acute during practicums, when students are required to undertake full-time placements without pay to fulfil their study obligations, thus making it difficult to balance other employment.
- *A switch to teaching usually represents a pay cut.* For most mid-career cohorts who are working full time, a transition to teaching is a shift to a lower paid job (as teacher pay upon entry to the profession is relatively competitive with other graduate professions, but generally levels off over time).
- *Requirement to pay course fees / incur student debt.*

Course length

Closely related to loss of income while studying is the length of post-graduate teaching pathways. A mid-career changer with an undergraduate degree usually requires at minimum a two-year Masters of Teaching to qualify as a teacher. The QITE review confirmed that the length of the ITE course – and the period of time that the student must forego income – was a significant barrier to attracting mid-career cohorts into ITE. In a choice experiment of mid-career individuals

⁶ BETA (2022), *Attracting high-achieving teaching candidates*, p.10

conducted by BETA, the ability to undertake a condensed one-year course was seen as equally attractive as a \$20,000 increase in top pay (though not all survey participants were aware of the two-year requirement).⁷

Inflexibility of ITE delivery

The inflexibility of ITE requirements can act as a hard barrier to mid-career cohorts entering, and remaining in, ITE. While many programs offer flexibility for university-based components (e.g. the ability to study part-time or online; ability to undertake intensive subjects at certain times), this is not the case across the board. This can create challenges for mid-career cohorts with competing responsibilities.

The need to undertake full-time in person practicum placements is often the least flexible component of ITE. Placements can be difficult to manage in conjunction with part-time work (e.g. some students struggle to get time off from their jobs to complete the requirements, or may face logistical challenges if assigned practicum placements further from home).

Lack of recognition of prior experience

Mid-career cohorts may bring with them valuable professional knowledge and skills from their previous careers and personal lives. However, often these skills are not formally acknowledged. This is true both at:

- *The point of entry into an ITE degree* – pre-existing skills and knowledge are not formally recognised in a way that reduces the ITE requirements on the student.
- *The point of transitioning to teaching* – regardless of pre-existing professional success, individuals commence as graduate teachers at the bottom of the pay scale.

Barriers relating to lack of recognition of prior experience are often also true of mid-career transitions to other professions, not specific to teaching.

3.2.2 Soft barriers

Negative perceptions of ITE and the teaching profession

Mid-career cohorts may be deterred from considering a transition to teaching due to negative perceptions about the profession and ITE. Negative perceptions include that teaching:

- is not a respected profession
- lacks opportunities for career progression
- is less challenging than other career pathways
- is relatively low paid and includes demanding work outside of school hours.⁸

Stress and pressure associated with the teaching profession reportedly increased during the COVID-19 pandemic (one study found that over 90% of teachers agreed that their workload had become more demanding during this time, increasing their stress levels).⁹

⁷ BETA (2022), *Attracting high-achieving teaching candidates*, p.14

⁸ BETA (2022), *Attracting high-achieving teaching candidates*, p.5; Heffernan et al. (2019) *Perceptions of teachers and teaching in Australia*, p18.

⁹ Bllet et al. (2022), *Australian teacher stress, well-being, self-efficacy, and safety during the COVID-19 pandemic*, p.17

Specific transition challenges faced by mid-career cohorts

Mid-career individuals may face specific challenges during the transition into the teaching profession (which is also the case for other professions). Examples include:

- *Difficulty with 'going back to square one' as a student.* Many mid-career individuals may struggle to become a learner again, or may take time to adjust to their new identity as a student. They may also experience greater frustration about when they perceive that there is a misalignment between theory and practice.¹⁰ Students may also struggle to apply their existing skills and knowledge in the ITE context.
- *Difficulty working in schools.* Mid-career individuals can find it difficult to 'start at the bottom of the ladder' as graduate teachers. Mid-career individuals can feel their skills and knowledge are not appreciated by other teachers or school leadership. Many find it discouraging when their prior experience is not appreciated or put to good use. Consultations confirmed that while many schools have a culture of valuing previous professional experience and supporting contributions to leadership at every level, this is not the case across the board.
- *Challenges inherent in the teaching job itself.* Teaching is an intellectually difficult, physically taxing profession involving a heavy workload and – increasingly – requires work to be completed outside of school hours. These day-to-day realities can come as a surprise to candidates that chose to transition due to the perception that teaching provides work / life balance.¹¹
- *Lack of locational flexibility.* Many mid-career cohorts face greater constraints than school leaver counterparts to relocate (e.g. due to caring responsibilities), creating additional challenges around transitioning to ongoing job roles.

Stakeholder consultation questions:

- Are these the right mid-career cohorts to focus on? Are there other cohorts we haven't identified?
- Do you agree with this characterisation of the key barriers? Are there other barriers we haven't identified?
- Can you describe how these barriers might change or become more acute for specific mid-career cohorts?

3.3 Existing mid-career pathways

3.3.1 Mid-career pathways in Australia

Bespoke programs aimed at attracting mid-career cohorts to teaching have emerged over recent years, and now exist in most jurisdictions. Governments, ITE providers and schools all have distinct roles to play in delivering pathways aimed at mid-career candidates:

¹⁰ Varadharajan (2018), *Navigating and negotiating: Career changers in teacher education programs*, p.115

¹¹ Bauer et al. (2017), *Mature age professionals: factors influencing their decision to make a career change into teaching*, p.191

- ITE providers have a critical role to play in promoting and delivering tailored ITE courses to attract mid-career cohorts. This may include developing innovative models of delivery, and working with regulators to ensure these receive necessary approvals.
- State and territory governments play a role in initiating and funding bespoke programs that are delivered in partnership with one or more ITE providers. Typically state and territory governments will do so where additional incentives are required to attract candidates in line with particular policy objectives (e.g. fulfilling specific teacher supply shortages).
- The Australian Government can also play a role supporting bespoke pathways. For example, it currently supports the High Achieving Teachers program, which funds employment-based pathways that – in part – target mid-career cohorts.
- Schools also have a key role to play supporting mid-career pathways (e.g. by working with ITE providers to facilitate high-quality practicum placements / employment opportunities). Ensuring that school leaders and lead teachers are equipped to support the specific needs of mid-career cohorts is critical to enabling this.

Case study: Teach for Australia's Leadership Development Program

Teach for Australia's Leadership Development Program is Australia's longest-running employment-based pathway to teaching. This two-year program is open to mid-career entrants, though many TFA Associates undertake the program immediately following conclusion of an undergraduate degree. TFA Associates complete a six-week residential program, then commence a paid teaching placement with a 0.8 load in a low SES school. Associates graduate with a Masters of Teaching. Given the intensity of the work / study load, Associates are heavily supported, including through coaching and mentoring.

3.3.2 Key characteristics of mid-career programs

Pathways that successfully target mid-career cohorts have key characteristics. Individual pathways will combine a number of these characteristics, depending on target cohort and context.

Shorter course length

Postgraduate programs aimed at attracting mid-career cohorts into ITE often do so by offering a shorter course length.¹² Shorter courses are attractive to mid-career cohorts because they reduce the amount of time out of the workforce and loss of income. To meet this demand, many ITE providers around Australia offer accelerated programs, in which the student can undertake the content of a two-year ITE course in a shorter period of time – usually, 18 months (see Accelerated Pathways below).

Flexibility

While many providers offer accelerated courses, the intensity of such courses mean they will not be suitable for all types of mid-career cohorts. Many students – e.g. those with caring responsibilities / those seeking to upskill over time while

¹² BETA (2022), *Attracting high-achieving teaching candidates*, p.10

remaining in existing paraprofessional jobs – may require a more flexible part-time model. Providers use different approaches to maximise flexibility in their existing programs by offering part-time study options; allowing students to study online or blend online and in-person learning; providing opportunities to finish the course over a longer period of time; and ensuring students have access to institutional supports (e.g. support to develop digital literacy skills).

Opportunities for paid employment during the course

There are many examples in Australia of mid-career pathways that offer students the opportunity to undertake relevant paid employment while completing their ITE course, in order to address the loss of income barrier. Such approaches can involve either working as a part-time paraprofessional throughout the ITE course; or working as a teacher in a paid capacity towards the end of the ITE course.

Provision of financial incentives

Direct financial incentives can also lower the cost of transitioning to teaching.¹³ State government-supported pathways often include incentives such as:

- Scholarships and bursaries
- Training allowances and stipends
- Course contribution fees or subsidised course fees
- Completion bonuses

The value of these financial incentives varies significantly between programs, but in some cases will total in the tens of thousands of dollars per student.¹⁴

While financial incentives are designed to reduce the cost of switching, they will not fully offset that cost for most career changers. For this reason, it is important that they are coupled with other approaches (e.g. appealing to intrinsic motivations).

Guarantees of employment

Some state governments guarantee employment in government schools following completion of programs. Most often, this is a general guarantee of employment somewhere in the state; in other programs, a particular region might be specified. Offers of employment can provide increased certainty / lower the risk associated with a career transition for mid-career changers.

Additional coaching / mentoring support

Providing additional coaching and mentoring support is also a key characteristic to attract – and as importantly, to retain – mid-career cohorts into ITE and teaching. Many bespoke programs offer students additional coaching and mentoring support, and build the time for the student to undertake these activities into the design of the pathway.

¹³ BETA (2022), *Attracting high-achieving teaching candidates*, p.10

¹⁴ For example, the NSW Mid-Career Transition to teaching includes a \$30,000 one-off training allowance, and a \$30,000 study completion bonus.

3.3.3 Types of mid-career programs

Mapping of existing mid-career programs in Australia shows that three main types of mid-career pathway have emerged:

Accelerated pathways

Accelerated pathways condense the time required to complete a Masters of Teaching. Typically, such courses are completed in around 18 months, but they can be completed in as little as 1.3 years.¹⁵ Accelerated ITE courses are already offered by ITE providers throughout Australia. Under such models, the content of the course itself is not cut down or altered, but is condensed into a shorter time-frame – often requiring students to undertake a summer trimester. Consultations with ITE providers indicated that there is little scope to further shorten this timeframe without changes to the ITE course accreditation standards. These accelerated programs are already intense for students, and providers face a scheduling challenge to fit theoretical and practicum requirements within these timeframes.

Case Study: University of Newcastle Masters of Teaching (Secondary) – Fast Track

The University of Newcastle Masters of Teaching (Secondary) allows students to study in trimesters, fast-tracking what is usually a 2-year degree into 18 months. As such, the content is delivered over a compressed period, but is not otherwise different. Practicum requirements are built into the 18-month period. The course includes simulated learning environments SimTeach, SimSchool and SimCave, designed as safe, interactive spaces for students to practice before entering the classroom.

Earn as you learn (teacher) pathways

Earn as you learn (teacher) pathways involve ITE students being paid to teach unsupervised during the period of study. Theoretical ITE content is generally front-loaded, with paid teaching occurring later in the course. Students will typically be assigned less than a full teaching load, to allow for time to complete their studies / access supports such as coaching and mentoring. Teach for Australia's Leadership Development Program is the longest running earn as you learn teacher pathway in Australia, but such programs also exist at a state level employing different regulatory approaches. Enabling students to earn money for teaching while studying addresses the loss of income barrier for part of the degree, while also contributing to teacher supply.

Case study: Queensland, Turn to Teaching

The Queensland Government-funded Turn to Teaching program targets cohorts in high-demand subjects and locations. It provides students with a \$20,000 scholarship during the first year, as well as benefits for relocation / working in rural and remote locations. During the second year, students gain Permission to Teach and teach a 50 per cent load in a government school. Students have access to a supervising teacher, mentor and community of practice to share their experiences. Following the program, students receive an offer of permanent employment as a teacher in a priority subject area or region.

¹⁵ UNSW Masters of Teaching

Earn as you learn (paraprofessional) pathways

In other employment-based pathways, ITE students work part-time as a paraprofessional in a school while completing their course (e.g. teacher aide; education support officer). These pathways also enable career changers to earn money while studying, in a role that is relevant to the ITE qualification. However, employing students as paraprofessionals, rather than teachers, means they are not taking on the significant responsibility of teaching unsupervised before they finish their studies. Because of this, such employment can also start from an earlier point during the course (i.e. there is less pressure to front-load theoretical content so that the student is prepared to teach unsupervised).

Case Study: NSW Mid-Career Transition to Teaching – employment based

The NSW State Government funds the Mid-Career Transition to Teaching program to encourage mid-career cohorts to enter teaching. It is explicitly targeted at professionals with significant prior experience in high demand subject areas such as maths, science and technology and applied sciences, and who might be willing to work in rural and remote areas. Participants receive:

- *A \$30,000 training allowance and \$30,000 study completion bonus*
- *Paid part-time employment as a paraprofessional while studying*
- *A permanent teaching position in a NSW public school upon completion of studies*

Candidates are also supported by a school-based mentor, receive executive mentoring and membership in the In-School Initial Teacher Education (INSITE) Network.

3.3.4 Barriers to delivering mid-career pathways

ITE providers and governments face barriers in implementing bespoke mid-career pathways:

- For ITE providers, it can involve changing delivery methods (including scheduling that may be different from other courses; and, in the case of employment-based pathways, the need to build or deepen school partnerships).
- Mid-career pathways are costly to deliver (e.g. paying financial incentives; increasing administrative costs).
- Developing innovative models can require deep engagement with regulators to ensure programs are still eligible to receive necessary approvals.
- As mid-career pathways are still in their infancy in Australia, and many approaches are still being piloted, providers and governments do not have an extensive evidence base to draw on for project design / to ensure quality is maintained.
- There is often no guarantee that there will be sufficient demand to fill all places made available (stakeholder told us that numerous bespoke mid-career programs having lower than expected uptake by students).

4 System opportunities to support high quality mid-career pathways

4.1 System-level coordination and regulatory changes

There are several opportunities to support mid-career pathways by changing regulatory settings and working to bring stakeholders together at a system level.

Current teacher shortages have led to renewed interest in reintroducing a one-year qualification for at least some mid-career candidates. The federal Productivity Commission has recommended that jurisdictions reintroduce a one-year qualification for secondary teaching for 'well-qualified individuals in subject areas of high demand'.¹⁶ Efforts to further shorten the length of ITE courses (i.e. to less than 1.3 years) would likely require changes to regulatory standards (e.g. changes to the *AITSL Accreditation of Initial Teacher Education Programs in Australia: Standards and Procedures*). This may involve trade-off decisions about what content those courses focus on.

Changes to regulatory standards could also facilitate a more systematised, widespread approach to allowing students to take up paid teaching roles during their ITE courses. Several jurisdictions already have arrangements allowing students to be paid to teach unsupervised during their ITE course (e.g. through Permission to Teach arrangements in Victoria; Limited Authority to Teach in Tasmania). Jurisdictions have put these arrangements in place to address workforce shortages or support specific pathways such as TFA. Implementing such arrangements can involve:

- Engaging with regulators to secure approvals, or coming up with practical workarounds to ensure students are able to fulfil their ITE requirements (e.g. finding ways for paid teaching placements to be counted towards practicum requirements to fulfil course requirements).
- If system stakeholders agree there is value in allowing ITE students to undertake paid teaching work during their course, working with regulators and across jurisdictions to:
 - Set clear standards for ITE students teaching unsupervised in a paid capacity.
 - Promote consistency between jurisdictions.
 - Develop safeguards to ensure quality is maintained.

There are also system opportunities to embed employment opportunities for mid-career cohorts. For example, government could work with other system-level actors (e.g. ITE providers and employers) to:

- Develop mechanisms to enable placements of ITE students as paraprofessionals / teachers outside the context of bespoke programs. This could involve:
 - Developing MOUs between ITE providers and employers to set clear expectations around how to support ITE students taking on such roles during their ITE courses
 - Streamlining application processes for matching ITE students to paraprofessional / teacher roles

¹⁶ Australian Government Productivity Commission (2023), *Review of the National School Reform Agreement*. p. 42

- Offer mid-career cohorts employment guarantees in a broader range of contexts (e.g. outside the context of bespoke programs).

4.2 Developing and disseminating evidence, best-practice guidance and supports

Mid-career programs are in their infancy and evidence on their effectiveness is still emerging. There is a system opportunity to enable the development of future mid-career pathways by:

- Identifying the critical features for successful design and implementation, based on understanding of the major barriers.
- Identifying and testing promising features that may not currently have a solid evidence base (e.g. pilots).
- Identifying the specific mid-career cohorts and whether critical features need to be adjusted for context.

This role could involve supporting research into the effectiveness of mid-career programs; disseminating evidence; and developing best-practice guidance.

There is also an opportunity to strengthen school-level supports. This could include:

- Supports specifically aimed at mid-career teachers, such as peer mentoring; and encouraging the development of specific communities of practice.
- Supports aimed at other in-school actors, such as training for principals and other school leaders on creating a school culture that values diversity and seeks to maximise benefits from teachers' previous professional background (e.g. mid-career individuals with business backgrounds contributing to effective school administration; or providing career advice to secondary students that is informed by real world experience).

4.3 Promoting innovation in program targeting and delivery

There is a system level opportunity to encourage further innovation in how ITE courses are targeted and delivered to mid-career cohorts.

This could involve exploring options for coordinated system efforts on ITE promotion – for example:

- Better highlighting career progression opportunities in teaching, including:
 - Taking on school leadership roles (e.g. head of department)
 - Progression to HALT status
 - Joint appointments with ITE providers
 - Expert secondments to education departments
- Better promoting schools as dynamic workplaces where mid-career changes can experience agency, intellectual challenge and development of deep expertise.

There may also be opportunities to encourage ITE providers to explore greater innovation with regard to the following:¹⁷

¹⁷ Note: These are suggested innovations rather than evidence-based approaches; they could be piloted to determine effectiveness and ensure they do not compromise teacher quality.

- *Course delivery, duration and flexibility* – e.g., maximising use of online, hybrid and part-time arrangements; scheduling of intensive courses at convenient times for priority cohorts; integrating professional experience requirements into employment-based pathways.
- *Encouraging the transition to teaching* – e.g. providing bridging courses that transition into ITE degrees to allow students to ‘try before you buy’; opportunities for observation and classroom simulation prior to ITE.

4.4 Prioritising mid-career pathways through other government levers

There may be opportunities to prioritise mid-career pathways through other government levers. This could involve indirect financial incentives that government could offer to mid-career cohorts entering teaching, for example:

- Increasing the HELP loan limit amount for students studying ITE leading to registration (as is currently the case for students studying medicine, dentistry and veterinary science).
- Waivers of indexation on accumulated HELP debt and reduction of accumulated HELP debt for mid-career individuals who teach in particular schools (currently issued for teachers in very remote areas of Australia).
- Supporting ITE students by making changes to Austudy.

There may also be opportunities for government to work with other departments to promote teaching pathways to specific groups through employment-related levers, for example:

- Support programs aimed at enabling members of the Australian Defence Force to transition to civilian careers;
- Government employment initiatives (e.g. retraining initiatives in areas undergoing economic transition).

Stakeholder consultation questions:

- Which of these opportunities should the sector prioritise? Why?
- What are the risks associated with these opportunities?
- Are there other opportunities we haven’t identified?

5 Key considerations to support mid-career pathways

5.1 Cost and supply

Supporting mid-career pathways can involve different levels of cost:

- Bespoke programs that involve intensive support and financial incentives for students are costly to deliver.

- Some general system-level opportunities to support mid-career pathways may have lower costs (e.g. the costs of administering MOUs) or higher costs (e.g. costs to departments of education in issuing employment guarantees).

These different costs have implications for the size of the cohort a pathway can target and its ability to contribute to addressing supply issues. Less expensive system-level interventions have the potential to impact larger numbers of students. Conversely, as bespoke programs are expensive, governments generally target them at smaller, specific groups in line with specific eligibility criteria. This targeting may:

- Align with a particular policy objective (e.g. programs aimed at increasing the diversity of the workforce by increasing the number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander or Culturally and Linguistically Diverse teachers)
- Address particular supply issues (e.g. programs aimed at individuals willing to teach in regional areas; and those wishing to teach in high-demand subjects such as STEM).

The QITE review endorsed the approach of targeting incentives at particular priority cohorts.¹⁸ Ensuring targeted programs are designed appropriately for the intended cohort and context is key to uptake and effectiveness.

5.2 Quality and supply

Differing costs between mid-career pathways means there is also a trade-off between quality and supply:

- Bespoke models which provide a high level of support to ITE students and allow a gradual increase of responsibilities over time are associated with improved teacher quality. But because these models are the most expensive to deliver, their potential to address overall supply challenges in the short term is limited.
- Pathways that shorten the length of ITE programs, or make it easier for ITE students to undertake paid work as a teacher during their course, can address immediate supply challenges – but unless sufficient support is provided to ITE students, these pathways risk a reduction in teacher quality (as well as a risk of lower retention due to burn out).

5.3 Balancing cost, quality and supply

Considering options for interventions to support mid-career pathways will involve a balancing of cost, quality and supply.

For example, earn as you learn pathways in which mid-career cohorts work in schools as either teachers or paraprofessionals are similar interventions, but have different implications for balancing cost, quality and supply:

- *Quality:* Paraprofessional pathways enable students to gain experience working in a school, deepening their learning experience, but without the significant responsibility that comes from teaching unsupervised prior to finishing the ITE course. Stakeholders warned that teacher pathways that involve unsupervised teaching during the ITE course can negatively affect teacher quality if students do not receive appropriate supports / are given too high a workload.

¹⁸ Australian Government DoE (2022), *Next steps: report of the quality of Initial Teacher Education review (QITE)*

- *Supply:* Both models have similar benefits for students (the ability to earn money while studying by working in a role that is relevant to the ITE course), meaning both are likely to be effective at attracting mid-career cohorts. Teaching models are attractive because they can directly fill teacher workforce gaps, addressing urgent supply challenges. (Though stakeholders warned heightened expectations on students mean they may be more likely to burn out, which can impact retention in the long run).
- *Cost:* Paraprofessional pathways do not need to provide the same degree of professional support that is required where students are teaching unsupervised, meaning these programs may be able to be delivered at a lower overall cost.

It is also possible to combine aspects of different models, rather than viewing them as discrete alternatives. For example, jurisdictions seeking to return to a shorter ITE qualification could consider retaining the requirement for a two-year Masters degree but structure its delivery in a way that allows coursework to be completed during the first year, with a second year as a paid pre-service teacher (ideally, with the student taking on less than a full course load, to allow time to meet practicum requirements and benefit from mentoring and other transitional support). This would retain the core benefit of ensuring mid-career cohorts transitioning to teaching only have to spend one year out of the workforce, while embedding greater supports for students to maintain quality and preparedness (assuming appropriate supports are provided).