

Initial Teacher Education (ITE) Review

APPA Discussion Paper - June 2021

Introduction

In April 2021, Federal Education Minister Alan Tudge, launched a review of Initial Teacher Education (ITE) as part of the government's ambition to lift Australian school standards. Work informing the ITE review includes: the development of the Australian Professional Standards for Teachers; the Accreditation of Initial Teacher Education Programs in Australia; Standards and Procedures; and reforms arising from recommendations made by the Teacher Education Ministerial Advisory Group.

Minister Tudge noted in his media release: *"The review of initial teacher education courses is the most critical element towards lifting standards, noting that the quality of teaching is the most important in-school factor influencing student achievement."*

The review is to address two key questions:

1. **How to attract and select high-quality candidates into the teaching profession?**
2. **How to prepare them to become effective teachers?**

NAC members identified four main themes. In addition to the key review questions:

1. **Attracting** and selecting high-quality candidates into the teaching profession;
 2. **Preparing** ITE students to be effective teachers;
- NAC members emphasised:
3. **Continuing development** and support for early career teachers;
 4. **Retaining** high-quality teachers in the teaching profession and **continuing professional development** throughout teachers' careers.

"A key goal of the reforms to ITE has been to ensure that graduate teachers start their teaching career with the necessary knowledge, skills and dispositions to be successful teachers in any Australian school. This review will build on the significant progress to date and inform the next evolution of reforms to continue to improve our capacity to attract high-quality candidates into teaching and equip them to become highly effective teachers."

Alan Tudge,
Review Terms of Reference

The development of pedagogical competence occurs throughout the entirety of a teacher's career. While ITE is an important step in this process, NAC members cautioned against looking at this in isolation. Early career support and continuing professional learning throughout a teacher's career, are equally important considerations.



1. Attracting and selecting high-quality candidates into the teaching profession

Selection

NAC members highlighted the importance of selecting high-quality people for entry into the teaching profession. Entrants must have both the academic skills - including literacy and numeracy skills - and the desirable personal attributes for teaching. They need to have the academic skills and personal qualities to engage students and foster learning and to 'like' working with children and young people.

A combination of 'front-end' selection processes (e.g. ATAR scores and possibly an assessment of personal attributes) together with 'back-end' processes (such as Teacher Performance Assessments in working with students on the practicum) were both considered important. Teacher Performance Assessments (TPAs) are now used by a majority of higher education providers and NAC members feel this process should be systematised and strengthened.

A number of reports have emphasised the importance of teacher selection as a key factor in improving student outcomes. The 2007 McKinsey Report, suggested making entry to teacher training courses competitive and accepting only the number for which there were places as being important means to this end.

They also suggested high qualifications were important, citing the example of Finland where all new teachers are required to have a Masters degree (McKinsey & Company, 2007; The Economist, 2007).

Public Image of Teaching

There is a need to change the public narrative and media around teaching.

The fact is, teaching can be fun, learning environments exciting and it is not all gloom and doom.

We need to promote teaching as a career and encourage opportunities for aspiring teachers to work with young people as part of finding their vocation.

Some NAC member suggestions in relation to this, include:

- Teachers/leadership/graduates talking and connecting with Year 11 and 12 students about their chosen career/vocation.
- Raising the profile of teaching career to secondary students.

Selection of high-quality candidates is insufficient on its own. NAC members advocate commensurate work on changing the public narrative around teaching - "It is an amazing profession".

Opportunities for young people to engage with teaching as part of their vocational experience is one of a number of options to be explored.



- Promoting teaching as a career to people in other occupations to gain experienced graduates from those industries/vocations.
- Offering traineeships to secondary students to work in neighbouring primary schools for say a 12-month period.

Attractive Conditions and Incentives

Promotion of teaching as a career is one factor. Ensuring teaching is attractive as a career also requires a focus on generous remuneration and working conditions. Incentives to attract staff to work in hard to staff schools and remote areas, need attention. Experiencing practicums in remote settings can be expensive for student-teachers who may forgo part time work in their usual places of residence. Subsidies to undertake practicums in hard to staff areas, may encourage graduate teachers to consider remote positions.

A current narrative around teaching is that of a highly demanding and stressful profession. NAC members support high accountability requirements but expressed concern that well-intentioned bureaucratisation may be counterproductive - too many micro-demands can quash creativity and constrain the joy of learning. A discussion about appropriate accountabilities which foster accountability but encourage schools as flourishing organisations, is essential.

2. Preparing ITE students to be effective teachers

NAC members strongly endorse the development of School/University partnerships in teacher education. Partnerships in teacher education build on the strengths of universities and schools and provide the basis for an ongoing partnership in teacher education, teacher induction and the ongoing professional learning of teachers.

The Practicum

Professor Greg Craven chaired the Teacher Education Ministerial Advisory Group (TEMAG) to make recommendations on how initial teacher education in Australia could be improved to better prepare new teachers with the practical skills needed for the classroom. Referring to the submission process for the TEMAG report, *Action Now - Classroom Ready Teachers*, he told an Australian Council of Deans of Education Deans (ACDE) Forum:

“Every single person or group that came before TEMAG emphasised the centrality and criticality of the professional experience. Every single submission talked about its importance...every single person proposed the greater integration of practicum and professional experience with university, teaching and theory”.

“Despite the evidence, and the fact that almost every other profession conducts its training in real-life settings...very little teacher training takes place in the teacher’s own classrooms, the place in which it would be precise and relevant enough to be the most effective.”
(McKinsey & Company, 2007 p. 27).



And this too was the thrust of most comments from NAC members.

As students near the end of their teaching degree, more and more time should be spent in a school setting.

The 2007 House of Representatives Standing Committee viewed the practicum as a critically important part of teacher education courses which was valued highly by student teachers.

Most comments from NAC discussion groups, centred on the appropriateness and desirability of schools being *partners* in teacher training.

However, they concluded problems with the practicum include:
the shortage of practicum placements;

- *the weak link between practicum and the theoretical components of courses;*
- the variable quality of supervision;
- the inadequacy of funding for practicum;
- the difficulty of ensuring that students have an opportunity to undertake practicum in rural and remote areas.

Their implied view was that the causes of this were fragmentation of responsibilities in teacher education with the implication that partnerships between universities and Departments in teacher education would be beneficial.

(House of Representatives Standing Committee on Education and Vocational Training, 2007p xxv).

There is a perceived reluctance from some universities to partner in teacher education and it is hoped this will be addressed as part of the review into ITE.

There are a number of examples of partnership programs providing models which could be scalable across the country. NAC members had a preference for identifying broad goals and encouraging the development of a range of programs which can meet these goals and adapt to local rules and contexts.

Example programs include:

- Sydney University, where the final semester for education students is an internship in schools with mentor teacher support.
- Partnerships in Teaching Excellence - A Tasmanian Department of Education partnership with Utas trail - the final year of students' course included:
weekly time in schools;
group planning and review;
support from a mentor teacher; and
final three months paid internship.
- Deakin University - community partnership focus.



Quality Assurance: Master/Supervising Teachers/Teaching Schools

NAC members expressed concern with the *ad hoc* practicum experience of some students. Accrediting teaching schools and mentors within those schools to work with students during their practicums, may be a model which addresses this.

Quality assurance processes for school placements is considered to be of high importance.

NAC members suggested:

- Micro-teaching, modelling and practicum blocks are all best achieved in partnership with schools.
- Teaching degrees MUST have an important practical dimension.
- Early career teachers want to spend a lot of time on practical knowledge, for instance, managing students.
- Increased practicum time in the final year/years of the course, up to at least half time in the final year.
- Greater input from supervising **teachers for the final assessment** so that only the best student teachers graduate.
- Need a longer-term relationship with a school over a whole year. However, the support needs to be professional - commitment from the school for quality teaching and teachers in the school as trained coaches/mentors.

Properly trained and accredited **Mentor Teachers** are suggested as key to supporting student teachers in their practicum placements.

Structured Mentor Teacher support should also be provided for early career teachers.

Funding

Partnerships between higher education providers and schools need to be recognised and funded according to the contribution of each partner. If models such as teaching schools and mentor teachers are being considered, these need to be appropriately funded.

Commonwealth EFTSU allocation and redirection of funding from programs such as Teach for Australia are all viable funding sources which should be considered as part of the review.

Primary/Secondary Teacher Preparation

- Teacher training needs a specific focus on the different school sectors. Skills of primary and early childhood teaching need to be inclusive and identified.
- What is unique about the needs for teacher selection and training in the primary setting as a generalist teacher?



3. Retaining high-quality candidates in the teaching profession

The development of quality teachers cannot be constructed as a simple set of processes. While graduate teachers are ready to start their teaching careers, they must be supported in their early years and expected to be continuing learners throughout the entirety of their careers.

Quality teaching must be understood to be a continuous process (see Heather's story). In addition to academic knowledge, quality teaching depends on teachers' deep knowledge of the students in their care and an awareness of their backgrounds.

Heather's story

Heather was asked how she would rate herself as a teacher. She stated she thought she was a very good teacher, and ten years ago, if asked the same question, she would have given the same answer.

However, she added "...but if I was teaching today, how I taught ten years ago, I think I would be unhappy with how I was teaching and consider myself to be a not so good teacher."

Quality teaching requires continuing development and questioning of what we do.

The OECD Report *Teachers Matter* (OECD, 2005) makes the case for recruitment and preparation to be regarded as part of a continuum of teacher development. They emphasised that key ingredients in a teacher quality agenda include more attention to the criteria for selection both into initial teacher education and teaching employment, on-going evaluation throughout the teaching career to identify areas for improvement, recognising and rewarding effective teaching, and ensuring that teachers have the resources and support they need to meet high expectations.

Partnerships in ongoing Professional Learning

University is only the beginning. Learning about teaching is life-long. Structural supports, incentives and partnerships to support and challenge teacher continuous improvement, need to be a priority. There is an opportunity to extend our partnerships with universities to ongoing support for continuing teacher professional development.

The Australian Council of Deans of Education (ACDE) state they recognise the importance of teacher professional learning to ensure continuous improvement in teaching quality and student outcomes and enhances the career prospects of many of the 440,000 registered Australian teachers.



In 2007, the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Education and Vocational Training tabled its inquiry into Teacher Education, *Top of the Class*. They were clear in their view that the quality of teaching is the most important factor influencing student achievement - a view strongly supported by research. They concluded that better quality teacher education, including on-going professional development, has the potential to improve the effectiveness of the entire school system.

“Investment in teacher education can increase the academic performance of students, reduce the need for remedial programs and mitigate the negative social and economic consequences of educational under-achievement”

(House of Representatives Standing Committee on Education and Vocational Training, 2007).

NAC members emphasise the development of a quality teaching workforce requires investment in continuing learning for all teachers.

4. Support for early career teachers

Beginning teachers often cite a lack of adequate support in their early years as a key reason for leaving the profession. They report inadequate mentoring and supervision, lack of support in behaviour management, excessive responsibilities and failure to recognise and reward professional growth. By the second year out of university, as many as 29 per cent of new teachers may already be considering leaving the profession (*Action Now – Classroom Ready Teachers p. 41*).

This data is concerning and better support in the early years might address some of this.

NAC members stress the importance of long-term support for early career teachers.

Retaining high quality candidates in teaching is a high priority. Early career support is crucial to retaining good teachers in the profession and in maintaining experienced teachers in the workforce.

A number of programs providing support to early career teachers already exist.

Once again, NAC members support the identification of broad goals and the development of a range of programs which can meet these goals and adapt to local rules and contexts.

