



CATHOLIC SCHOOL PARENTS AUSTRALIA

SUBMISSION

QUALITY INITIAL TEACHER EDUCATION REVIEW

18 July 2021

INTRODUCTION

Catholic School Parents Australia (CSPA) appreciates this opportunity to provide feedback on the Quality Initial Teacher Education Review (QITER). Over recent years, CSPA and various members¹ of CSPA, have made submissions that have some relationship with the QITER. These earlier reviews include: the *National Review of Teacher Registration* (May 2018), the *Review on The Status of the Teaching Profession* (December 2018) and the *Review to Achieve Educational Excellence in Australian Schools* (November 2017). It is noted that, without reference, some aspects of these earlier CSPA submissions will be drawn upon to provide information for the current review.

The QITER Discussion Paper provides rich evidence on the current state of Initial Teacher Education (ITE) in Australia. While many aspects of ITE are covered in this paper, CSPA's submission will focus on the following:

- A. The inclusion of Parent Engagement as a unit of study in pre-service teacher education programs;
- B. Increased opportunities for pre-service teachers to undertake professional experience prior to full time employment;
- C. Student entry/exit requirements;
- D. Attracting practising professionals into teacher education programs; and
- E. Raising the status of teaching.

A. THE INCLUSION OF PARENT ENGAGEMENT AS A UNIT OF STUDY IN PRE-SERVICE TEACHER EDUCATION PROGRAMS.

The Melbourne Declaration on the Educational Goals for Young Australians (December 2008) stated under the headers of *A Commitment to Action – Developing Stronger Partnerships* that:

Partnerships between students, parents, carers and families, the broader community, business, schools and other education and training providers bring mutual benefits and maximise student engagement and achievement.

Similarly, in the Alice Springs (Mparntwe) Education Declaration (2019), under the headers of *A Commitment to Action – Developing Stronger Partnerships*, it is stated that:

It is critical for the education community to work in partnership with parents, carers and families to support a child's progress through early learning and school.

In the *Through Growth to Achievement: Report² of the Review to Achieve Educational Excellence in Australian Schools* (2018), it is recommended to:

Develop and disseminate evidence-based tools and resources to assist early childhood education providers, primary, and secondary schools to implement best practice approaches to supporting parents and carers to engage in their children's learning throughout their education.

¹CSPA Council is made up of representatives from: Catholic School Parents Queensland, Catholic School Parents Victoria, Catholic School Parents Western Australia, Catholic School Parents South Australia, Council of Catholic School Parents New South Wales, Tasmanian Catholic Schools Parents Council, and Catholic School Parents Archdiocese Canberra Goulburn.

²Australian Government (March, 2018) *Through Growth to Achievement - Report of the Review to Achieve Educational Excellence in Australian Schools*, David Gonski (Chair).

Later, under the header of *What it means*, in relation to this same recommendation, the report states:

Early childhood education services and schools need assistance (information and tools) to help parents support their children to learn.

Clearly, Parent Engagement is central to the learning agenda as set out in these documents and, not surprisingly, has been a key cornerstone of the federal government's *Students First* agenda.³ Parent Engagement is a key influential factor in improving student learning and wellbeing and fifty years of national and international research would support this claim.

A comprehensive list of this research can be found in the Australian Research Alliance for Children and Youth (ARACY) *Parent and Family Engagement: An implementation guide for school communities*.⁴ It is also noted that, over time, families have been respected as the first educators of their children and it has only been across *the last two centuries, as schooling has gradually become compulsory for most people in the developed world, the roles of teacher and parent have grown apart*.⁵

Over many years, ARACY have undertaken extensive work in relation to Parent Engagement and their *Parent and Family Engagement: An implementation guide for school communities* (referenced above) is testament to this work. When ARACY speak of parent and family engagement in learning they are *referring to the role of schools and educators as one of supporting families, understanding and leveraging how they interact with their child's learning, and supporting them to do that in equal partnership with the school* (p.13)⁴.

Over the past eighteen months, school education, in some contexts, has become notably more reliant on this partnership. The COVID pandemic has interrupted life as we know it in relation to all aspects of living, and not least of all in education. Suddenly, in some contexts, schooling has been profoundly interrupted and much data has been gathered to more fully appreciate COVID's impact. For example, based on survey data from Victoria, one of Australia's states worst hit by COVID, John Hattie⁶ observed,

School principals, teachers and parents all spoke overwhelmingly of the positive relationships built over the period of remote and flexible learning. Many parents have sat with their children during this period: They have become more engaged in their children's learning and now better understand their work. Schools also learned more about the home situations of some vulnerable students and can better incorporate these insights into their teaching and student support.

Later in the article, John Hattie concluded:

COVID-19 has brought great challenges and negative impacts, but for schools it may be the greatest educator innovator and accelerator we know. After past disruptions such as earthquakes, floods, strikes, and wars, we rushed back to the comfort of old schooling

³Australian Government: Department of Education (2015) *Students first - Engaging parents in education*.

⁴Barker, B., & Harris, D. (2020). *Parent and Family Engagement: An Implementation Guide for School Communities*. Canberra: ARACY.

⁵The impact of parent engagement on learner success - A digest of research for teachers and parents (N1, Spring, 2010). Gems Education, Centre for Real World Learning, Research into Practice.

⁶Hattie, J. (November 2020). *Education's Golden Ticket: Lessons Learned from COVID-19*. Corwin Connect, COVID 19 – Distance Learning.

hierarchies. The worst consequence of the pandemic for schools and students may be not learning how to bring back better. The Golden Ticket handed to us by the current situation is our best opportunity to dramatically change and improve the learning lives of our students — and it is an educator led revolution.

(Extracted from: <https://corwin-connect.com/2020/11/educations-golden-ticket-lessons-learned-from-covid-19/>).

CSPA suggests that parents/carers, the first and ongoing educators of their children, should play a key role in this *educator led revolution*. It is the ongoing view of CSPA that there needs to be a shift in culture and emphasis around promoting Parent Engagement such that the responsibility for the effectiveness and outcomes of Parent Engagement in learning is shared in partnership between school principals, other school leaders, teachers and parents.

At the same time, one must not underestimate the challenges around this as many teachers are somewhat hesitant to interact with parents⁷. CSPA proposes that great leverage would be generated towards removing this anxiety and maximizing the potential of parents/carers working in partnership with schools around their children's learning if formal preparation in Parent Engagement became a mandated study requirement in all pre-service teacher education programs. While these programs are usually over-subscribed with topics for study, it is suggested that a subject such as *Engaging with parents to maximize student outcomes* could at least be offered as an elective course.

Also, the professional development of current teachers and parents regarding Parent Engagement will assist in embedding improved practices, and to assist this, CSPA is currently developing six videos for release in 2022. Assisted with funding from the Federal Government, CSPA is using the lens of COVID to create parent and teacher professional development resources on Home-School Connections: Student Health and Wellbeing; Home-School Connections: Student Learning; and Home-School Connections: Looking Forward. These videos will be made available to all schools through the [Gearing Up for Parent Engagement](#) website.

Evidence for more emphasis being placed on studies in Parent Engagement in pre-service teacher education programs can be found through *The Australian Professional Standards for Teachers*⁸ which makes reference to parents in all seven standards. CSPA's [submission](#) to the National Review of Teacher Registration (May 2018) outlines these parent references in detail.

The National School Improvement Tool⁹ makes reference in four of the nine domains as to how parents should be engaged towards improving student learning outcomes. References to parents can be found in Domain 1 (An explicit improvement agenda), Domain 3 (A culture that promotes learning), Domain 7 (Differentiated teaching and learning) and Domain 9 (School-community partnerships). Differentiating teaching and learning episodes is important for all students however none more so than for students who for a myriad of reasons may face exceptional learning challenges. For example, a useful reference is an ARACY ethnographic study which focused on Parent Engagement in low SES families, aboriginal families, culturally and linguistically diverse families, and families with children with special needs¹⁰.

⁷See for example a study by Doecke et.al. (2008) which found that for 82% of the teachers surveyed their greatest professional anxiety was around their work and relationships with parents.

⁸Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership Ltd. (AITSL), Feb. 2015, Australian Professional Standards for Teachers.

⁹State of Queensland (Department of Education, Training and Employment) and the Australian Council for Educational Research (2012). National School Improvement Tool.

¹⁰Australian Research Alliance for Children and Youth (ARACY). (2016). Researching parent engagement: A qualitative field study. Canberra: ARACY.

CSPA proposes that Parent Engagement could be raised in status if the Federal Government were to generate a Policy on Parent Engagement in Australian Schools. Such a policy would be more robust and likely to have impact if all key stakeholders regarding the educative process have input. This includes: parents, teachers, school leadership, school students, system education leaders, university education deans and pre-service education students.

B. INCREASED OPPORTUNITIES FOR PRE-SERVICE TEACHERS TO UNDERTAKE PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE PRIOR TO FULL TIME EMPLOYMENT.

The maxim that teachers are born and not made, together with everybody *knowing* what schooling should be like through their perspective as a student, may lead to a false sense of expectation for some pre-service teachers. The acid test for many pre-service teachers is when they first undertake classroom teaching, the success of which can be determined by not only their preparation, but also the students in the class and the support provided by their supervising teacher.

As outlined in the QITER Discussion Paper, professional experience can vary from 60 days to 160 days depending upon the tertiary institution offering the pre-service teacher program and the type of program (e.g. graduate, postgraduate, masters). CSPA agrees with others that some tertiary institutions could place more priority on professional experience and require pre-service teachers to undertake a longer period of professional experience, e.g. at least one semester (20 weeks) towards the end of a pre-service teacher's degree program in a negotiated school. Both the supervising teacher(s) and the pre-service teacher should be adequately remunerated under such arrangements.

One model for this is the Victorian Employment Based Pathway initiative which *sees intern teachers* (known as Associates) with *subject area knowledge complete their Master of Teaching (Professional Practice) with Australian Catholic University while on two-year placements at government secondary schools in regional, rural and disadvantaged communities.* (Extracted from <https://www.miragenews.com/student-teachers-make-their-mark-on-secondary-589923/>). This provides effective on the job training through coaching and mentoring by an in-school team and can play a role in staffing some hard to staff schools because of their location or other challenges.

Another model is the St Thomas Aquinas Teaching Schools Institute in Hobart which offers a [unique approach](#) to a teaching degree in Catholic education. Advertising on their website notes the program includes:

- *One to two days per week working as a Teacher Assistant with a Mentor Teacher;*
- *One day per week face-to-face lectures/intensives at the Teaching schools;*
- *A number of intensive lecture weeks each year delivered at the Teaching schools; and*
- *350 days of school-based experience by the completion of your degree.*

(Extracted from <https://catholic.tas.edu.au/teaching-schools>).

CSPA sees the above two examples, together with the Nexus Program through La Trobe University (as outlined in the QITER Discussion Paper) as excellent programs for pre-teacher education in relation to the amount of professional experience which is built into the degrees.

C. STUDENT ENTRY/EXIT REQUIREMENTS

The criteria used to determine suitable candidates to enter the teaching profession include:

- i. A suitable ATAR (or equivalent) score.
- ii. Written statement.
- iii. Interview.
- iv. Assessment of key capabilities (e.g. Computer-based assessment for sampling personal characteristics (Casper) Test.
- v. Teaching Performance Assessments (TPAs).
- vi. The Literacy and Numeracy Test for Initial Teacher Education (LANTITE).

The various ways in which some combinations of these criteria are used can be found in the outlines of university degree programs and some examples are given in the QITER Discussion Paper. Some institutions such as Deakin University use the Casper test which provides an assessment of non-academic attributes, while the Melbourne Graduate School of Education uses the Teaching Capability Assessment Tool (TCAT) which is a combination of academic and non-academic criteria.

CSPA suggests that expectation should be placed on institutions to use some combination of the optional criteria listed above (or equivalent) in determining those who will become eligible to enter the teaching profession. The dominant use of an ATAR score together with the LANTITE seems an overly simplistic approach to achieving this. As noted in the QITER Discussion Paper, not all providers as of yet use Teaching Performance Assessments (TPAs) however, in time, it would seem that such tools should be mandated to assist in refining the suitability of exiting graduates. This being said, institutions should be more valued for having suitable entrance requirements for pre-service teachers that convert to high completion rates of effective teachers.

D. ATTRACTING PRACTISING PROFESSIONALS INTO TEACHER EDUCATION PROGRAMS.

As teaching becomes less attractive to school leavers, innovative programs need to be further explored to fill the gap and quickly address teacher shortages, particularly in such secondary areas as English, Maths and the Sciences. More tertiary institutions should be encouraged to offer programs that attract suitable practising non-education graduates into teaching, with a key factor for any practising professional being the length of time out of the workforce required to gain a teaching qualification.

An Accelerated Graduate Bachelor of Education (AccGradBEd) program at James Cook University in the mid-1990s was one such program. This program was highly effective in the completion rate for training secondary Maths and Science teachers, which were in short supply at the time with only very low numbers presenting through the usual pre-service teacher degrees on offer. Key elements of the program included:

- a) The program was available to graduates who had two curriculum teaching areas in their undergraduate degree (such as a Bachelor of Science or Bachelor of Engineering).
- b) The graduate had to have satisfactorily completed two years of full time work in their tertiary qualified area of expertise (e.g. as a marine biologist or as an engineer).
- c) Criteria a) and b) would then facilitate them receiving Recognition for Prior Learning (RPL) for one semester of the four semester accelerated Postgraduate Education program.

- d) These candidates then completed three semesters of study across one calendar year. This involved undertaking two semesters with the final year GradBEd cohort and completing a split semester in January – March and November – December).

The program was attractive to suitable practising professionals as they would be out of the work force for one calendar year to transition to a different profession and employment prospects were very high. Also, the AccGradBEd group completing two semesters with the GradBEd cohort was generally viewed positively by both groups of final year peers as co-learners, and the additional cost to the faculty was greatly reduced through combining these final year cohorts.

Additionally, the AccGradBEd cohort completed 16 weeks of professional experience during the year. Each AccGradBEd student was in the same school at the start (four weeks) and towards the end (four weeks) of the school year, as well as being in the same school for an eight week period of professional experience when the GradBEd cohort was also undertaking their final practicum. The split semester also included four intensive weeks of studies outside the normal, two semester university year.

A useful number of effective teachers were trained through this program as it was attractive to postgraduate students who had proved to be academically able at both school and tertiary levels. Biological Science lessons, for example, were richly informed by a qualified teacher who had practiced for at least two years as a Marine Biologist. Now, some twenty-five years later, some additional testing could be used to help provide security of the capabilities of prospective candidates to such programs.

As teaching becomes less attractive to school leavers, programs such as this, and others such as the United Kingdom's Now Teach as outlined in the QITER Discussion Paper, could be explored more closely.

E. RAISING THE STATUS OF THE TEACHING PROFESSION.

The QITER Discussion Paper noted a 2019 Grattan Institute survey which found that high achieving young Australians *perceived teaching to fall well short of the intellectual challenge and pay offered by their chosen career*. Teaching does have a status problem, and CSPA suggests that this requires addressing on many fronts such as the following.

E1. Increasing the attractiveness of the profession for teachers and principals, including workplace conditions, and career and leadership structures.

Catholic School Parents Australia recommends:

- The generation of a national model of teacher classification and remuneration.
- The further development of an appropriately remunerated lead teacher classification over a ten year horizon to keep highly effective teachers on an enhanced career pathway in the classroom.
- A remunerated professional internship for a year/half year for graduate-probationary teachers – similar to other professions.
- At national and state/territory levels, governments and pre-service teacher program providers to promote the constructive partnership between parents and teachers for improving student learning and wellbeing.

- Repackaging teaching using multi-narratives to appeal to a broader range of generations.
- Greater focus be placed on upskilling early career teachers.
- Remote/regional/rural contexts to be promoted as opportunities for the faster advancement of early career teachers including: enhanced pay, enhanced leave, enhanced contractual arrangements around permanency, enhanced superannuation and assisted accommodation.
- The generation of a national model of principal classification and remuneration.
- There be a revisioning of a national commitment to schools as safe places for students, school staff and parents.
- There be a revisioning of the timing and provision of professional development for school staff.

E2. Provision of appropriate support platforms for teachers, including human and IT resources.

Catholic School Parents Australia recommends:

- The effective upskilling of teachers to work with families as genuine partners in the education of their children and young people. Epstein¹¹ (2009) speaks of it as: *“This is not hard work but heart work. Not more work, but the work. Not harder work, but smarter work to mobilise all available resources that will contribute to student success”*.
- Parent engagement to be integrated into professional teaching practice as outlined in the AITSL Professional Standards for Teachers and The Professional Standard for Principals.
- Some categories of suitably qualified School Officers to work as para-professionals and complete some teacher non-teaching roles (e.g. current non-teaching responsibilities such as playground duty and electronic data entry).
- Electronic communication to be utilized within mutually agreed protocols of use by staff, students and parents.

E3. Investigating ways to increase retention rates for the teaching profession and to alleviate 'burn out' among early-career teachers.

Catholic School Parents Australia recommends:

- The further enhancement of professional pathways for teachers through appropriately remunerating classroom teachers.
- The identification of creative ways to have teachers take up long service leave (LSL) at appropriate intervals – i.e. for LSL to be used as it was originally intended.
- At national, state, territory levels, governments and pre-service teacher program providers to promote the constructive partnership between parents and teachers for improving student learning and wellbeing.

¹¹Epstein, J.L. and Associates. (2009). School, family, and community partnerships – your handbook for action (Third Edition). Corwin Press.