Catholic Schools NSW Submission

QUALITY INITIAL TEACHER EDUCATION REVIEW

August 2021

Overview

1. Catholic Schools NSW (CSNSW) responds to the Quality Initial Teacher Education Review (the Review) on behalf of the almost 600 Catholic schools in New South Wales.

2. While CSNSW has a leadership role as the peak representative body for Catholic schools, day to day operational responsibility lies with each of the eleven diocesan education offices for Catholic systemic schools and with each individual school for Catholic independent schools.

3. This submission is informed by their feedback and provides a 'system-wide' response to the Review's discussion questions and Terms of Reference.

4. CSNSW has also contributed to the NSW Government response to the Review and supports its recommendations for national action to:
    *   attract more high-quality candidates into Initial Teacher Education (ITE) and the teaching profession
    *   boost the quality of ITE courses to ensure confident and capable graduates
    *   ensure timely access to enhanced ITE and early career teacher data, and
    *   recognise the importance of ITE changes on the Early Childhood Education workforce.

5. The NSW Government response also references several innovative practices in the NSW Catholic sector.

6. This submission provides further detail on the discussion questions in the Review Discussion Paper and makes some broad observations about the need to situate ITE reform within a broader education reform context.

About Catholic Schools in NSW

7. Catholic schools have been an integral part of Australia's education landscape for 200 years and see themselves as partners with families, government, and the broader community in delivering a high-quality education across NSW. Today, Catholic schools educate more than one in five children in NSW.

8. Catholic schooling in NSW is comprised of 596 schools, which employ 27,000 teachers and enroll 256,000 students, Kindergarten to Year 12. Catholic schools are geographically and socio-economically diverse and include mainstream schools, special schools for students with disability, flexible learning centres and vocational colleges.

9. Catholic education is broader than just its schools and covers the continuum of learning via its prior-to-school early learning centres, out-of-school-hours care facilities and Catholic tertiary institutions, including two universities.

10. Currently, most undergraduate and postgraduate teachers come into Catholic schools from the two Catholic Universities (55–60%).

11. A key differentiator of the Catholic school system is the preference (and, for certain roles, the requirement) for the workforce to be Catholic, thus limiting the potential supply of teachers. Not surprisingly then, a large percentage (82%) of the teaching workforce is Catholic.

Catholic Sector Strategic Workforce Review

12. In 2020/21, CSNSW undertook a strategic review of the Catholic school workforce in NSW. The Workforce Review aimed to develop a 'blueprint' of the workforce and identify the key drivers of supply and demand to assist with local workforce planning and respond to State and Federal policy reform. The simulation model that was developed will allow CSNSW to model the impact of workforce trends and/or changes in policy settings over several years.

13. While the Catholic school sector is experiencing current teacher shortages in some locations and key learning areas, the baseline simulation modelling suggests that the Catholic sector in NSW will have a workforce shortfall of approximately 15% by 2030. Regional and rural schools will face slightly higher shortfalls compared to metropolitan schools. The shortage is largely driven by insufficient supply of teacher graduates and the retirement of baby-boomer teachers. The gaps are largely proportionate to those predicted for government schools in NSW.

Introduction

14. Teachers are pivotal agents in the schooling system. Not only are more teachers required to cater for the growing student population across Australia, but they are also required to be high quality to best influence student outcomes.

15. Over the last few years, teacher quality and supply issues have become a significant policy priority. Following the Gonski Review of 2017, the National Skills Reform Agreement was signed, identifying the need to "review teacher workforce needs of the future to attract and retain the best and brightest to the teaching profession and attract teachers to areas of need."

16. In June 2019, the Education Council responded by announcing a National Teacher Workforce Strategy that would review teacher workforce needs to attract and retain quality teachers into the future. This work is currently underway through AITSL.

17. Various State and Territory Governments have also initiated similar work. In accordance with the NSW Bilateral Agreement, the NSW bilateral reform plan commits to a "national and state specific workforce strategy reflecting respective areas of responsibility." To this end, both CSNSW and the NSW Department of Education have embarked on separate workforce reviews to help ensure rapid and longer-term teacher supply.

Previous Initial Teacher Education Reviews

18. The role ITE plays in supplying the next generation of educators is a complex and vexed one. This is illustrated by the fact that in the last fifty years there have been over one hundred inquiries into the quality of ITE (Ledger et al, 2020).

19. The last significant inquiry was undertaken by the Teacher Education Ministerial Advisory Group (TEMAG) in 2014. The *Action Now: Classroom Ready Teachers* report, and the ensuing Government response (2015), focused on the following recommendations:

- stronger quality assurance of teacher education courses
- rigorous selection for entry to teacher education courses
- improved and structured practical experience for teacher education students
- robust assessment of graduates to ensure classroom readiness
- national research and workforce planning capabilities.

20. Several TEMAG recommendations are still in the process of being fully implemented and understanding the full impact of the reforms will take time as pre-service teachers progress through their ITE programs and move into the classroom.

Situating ITE Reform in a Broader Context

21. A more holistic and integrated policy response is required if we are to make the necessary and sustained change to the attraction, retention and quality of the teacher workforce. ITE reform must be considered within its broader educational eco-system. We will fall short of our aspirations, and we will continue to revisit the same issues, if we narrowly focus on ITE at the expense of the broader range of industrial, professional and cultural issues impacting on teacher workforce supply and demand.

22. Some of the broader contextual factors include:

- The current outdated industrial model of schooling which impacts on remuneration, employment and career pathways, flexible work practices, autonomy and innovation.
- Changing understandings of the limits and purposes of schooling leading to pressure on what schools and teachers are expected to be and do.
- Changes in the regulatory and compliance environment for schools impacting adversely on teacher and school leader workloads, leading to 'teacher burnout' and concerns over health, safety and wellbeing.
- The pace and direction of education reform affecting teachers' morale, engagement levels and confidence.
- Curriculum structure and changing skill needs have created a misalignment between current teacher skill sets and specialisations and demand for new specialisations in the school system, for example there is increasing demand for teachers with specific training in supporting students with disability and Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD) backgrounds.
- Demographic and societal shifts influencing people's work patterns and expectations, as well as families' needs and behaviours.
- Although the public tends to see teachers as respected and trusted, teachers themselves tend to report feeling unappreciated for the work they do.

23. All these factors, and others, can contribute to a negative perception of teaching as a career. Consultation with Catholic education leaders and teachers across NSW supports this view, adding

that a negative view of teaching is perpetuated in the media and contributes to the decreasing number of university students pursuing teaching as a career.

24. The 'FIT-Choice' project is a large-scale longitudinal research study undertaken by Monash University that investigates the motivations for selecting teaching as a career, the experiences of beginning teachers and the strategies that sustain teachers in the profession. This research project may be instructive for this Review.

Response to the Review Discussion Paper

How can we further encourage high performing and highly motivated school leavers to enter ITE and choose teaching as a career?

25. In order to encourage high performing and highly motivated school leavers to choose teaching as a career, the following factors need to be addressed:
    - Increase the status and value of teaching as a career in society.
    - More clearly and transparently define the responsibilities and accountabilities required of teachers.
    - Modernise enterprise agreements. Improve pay, conditions, and promotional opportunities.
    - Lower course fees and/or provide government scholarships to become a teacher
    - Quality and inspirational modelling for students in the final years of schooling.
    - Improve qualitative post-school destination data to better support students' post-school choices.
26. CSNSW supports the NSW Government recommendation for a major national campaign to promote the teaching profession, including among high-performing school-leavers.

Innovative Practice – 'Step into Teaching'

Catholic school employers have implemented the innovative 'Step into Teaching' (SIT) scholarships to support Year 12 students wishing to pursue a career in teaching. The Wollongong Diocese's program (See: https://www.dow.catholic.edu.au/employment/step-into-teaching-scholarships/) includes:

- A total benefit of $20,000 distributed over a four (4) year period, sponsored by the Catholic Education office (subject to satisfactory academic progress)
- Opportunity for indentured, conditionally permanent, teaching positions in the diocese upon completion of the course
- Additional annual financial contribution towards living away from home costs where applicable, and
- A possible offer of classroom School Support Officer employment during four years of university study.

A dedicated member of the Catholic Education Office Learning and Professional Growth Team (LPG) team is assigned to:

- Liaise with the universities
- Promote the scholarships in high schools
- Promote the scholarships to appropriate school staff (Principals, Year 11 and 12 teachers).

What changes to admissions and degree requirements, including recognition of prior experience, would better attract and support suitable mid- and late-career professionals from other fields transition into the profession and become quality teachers?

27. NSW has some of the highest standards in the country when it comes to who can become a teacher. Teacher shortages, however, require us to consider how to increase supply through more innovative means while maintaining these standards.

28. CSNSW supports the development of more flexible pathways into teaching for mid-career professionals. However, these pathways must be rigorous and fit for purpose to maintain the confidence of the profession and employers.

29. CSNSW supports the recommendation in the NSW Government Quality ITE Review submission for the development of a new mid-career pathway into teaching that focuses on areas of shortage, is tailored for those with prior study and professional experience, and includes appropriate quality safeguards.

30. More flexible, employment-based, pathways will assist in overcoming the economic barriers for people who wish to make a career change to teaching. Paid internship models are one way to address this barrier and are already working well on a relatively small scale, in some schools and

systems. A related but separate barrier that needs to be addressed is how the prior experience and skills of graduates can be better reflected in initial teacher salaries.

31. Much has been discussed in the public domain since the release of the Review about the development of courses that fast track mid-career teachers. The NSW Government has recently announced an initiative that will have entrants, depending on their experience, in front of a class and on a salary within six months while receiving their teaching qualification.

32. While such models can have merit for specific targeted cohorts, for example in areas of shortage in Secondary schools, there needs to be a rigorous program and selection process to ensure suitability to teach and ensure that employers' confidence in such models is maintained. The graduate themselves will need to be well supported through close mentoring and ongoing, targeted, professional learning especially in quality pedagogy. The financial and administrative cost to schools and systems of taking on this responsibly for in-service teacher training and mentoring needs to be considered in the development of any model.

33. In general, more support can be provided to mid-career professionals considering teaching to ensure realistic expectations and address common myths and challenges.

How can we increase ITE completion rates so that quality ITE students graduate and pursue careers as quality teachers?

34. ITE completion rates are a significant concern. There are several on-entry and course quality reforms that could be pursued.

35. In relation to the attraction of quality candidates in the first instance, the Commonwealth should consider supported places for teaching for candidates with high ATARs, combined with a robust assessment of a personal application. In subject areas where there are teacher shortages, offering scholarships combined with guaranteed employment are likely to entice high quality applicants.

36. More generally, the following could be better utilised to support the identification of the best suited teaching candidates seeking entry:
    - psychometric screening (with proper adjustments for cultural and language diversity)
    - an interview process
    - front-ended literacy and numeracy testing to be undertaken before offers of entry
    - an extension of TCAT (Melbourne University's Teacher Capability Assessment Tool) or an adaptation of ACER's Graduate Medical School Admissions Test (GAMSAT) could also be considered.

37. Greater coherence between teacher training and teaching practice and teacher professional learning needs to be achieved to sustain ITE students. Low completion rates could be addressed by attaching ITE students to schools early in their training, ensuring that they are placed in schools and classrooms where the knowledge and pedagogy they are learning coheres with their teacher training program.

38. Differences in the structure and emphasis of ITE programs for the same teaching qualification in different institutions needs to be examined and a consistent, evidence-based approach to the

same qualification should be agreed on and developed. This would assist graduates and schooling sectors in achieving greater clarity about the training, skills and knowledge of graduates, as well as any gaps that need to be addressed.

39. One rural Catholic employer suggested that a review and restructuring of the current ITE courses should declutter the courses of all but the essential core learnings for teachers to practice effectively (effective pedagogy, curriculum, classroom management, literacy, numeracy, secondary content areas), which may result in a shortened tertiary course. All other units could be undertaken through professional development during the first 5 years of practice. This model would allow early career teachers to apply abstract and theoretical learning to their daily practice, as well as contributing to their professional development hours.

40. CSNSW notes that similar models are already possible, for example the Nexus Program offered by LaTrobe University and the United Kingdom's Now Teach program.

What more can be done to address issues with workforce supply in some subject areas (particularly mathematics) and schools?

41. Several examples of how to address teacher shortages have already been canvassed in this submission, including more flexible employment-based pathways and other hybrid ITE approaches.

42. Commonwealth supported places for high-performing students and mid-career professionals should also be considered. These entrants could then be attached to school sectors and jurisdictions for mentoring, practicum and then employment. During their ITE they could also receive remuneration as interns.

43. Catholic employers have a range of other initiatives underway including building partnerships with universities to promote targeted scholarships, including under the *Step Into Teaching Program* for school leavers, to attract students with an interest in maths and sciences.

How can we attract a more diverse cohort into ITE so that teachers better mirror the diversity in school students and society?

44. Australian schools are more diverse than other OECD countries, and hence a larger proportion of teachers are teaching students with diverse backgrounds and needs, for example students with special needs, students from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, and students from disadvantaged backgrounds.

45. However, the profession in Australia generally lacks cultural and professional diversity. Research shows that students, especially boys, benefit when they can see themselves reflected in their teachers and their teachers' experiences.

46. There is often a narrow concept of who, and what, constitutes a teacher. This narrow conception does not encourage people from different backgrounds to join the profession and when they do their experiences and the nuances of their individual and community ways of knowing and learning are not always well understood or appreciated.

47. The school sector can learn from the early years sector in this regard. The Early Years Learning Framework values diversity of educators, families, and communities, and this is evident through the standards, compliance and accreditation processes.

48. Practically, governments and employers could support greater diversity through:

- A coordinated campaign to promote teaching among more diverse communities

- A greater recognition of the barriers to achieving diversity, such as affordability, access to education and language barriers

- Commonwealth supported scholarships for teaching degrees and bridging courses

- Ensuring career-changers can personalise their teaching degrees, for example to support them take up language teaching as an option

- Supporting formal training opportunities for school-based non-teaching roles, in some cases as a steppingstone to teaching. Roles include teachers' aides, family and community liaison, and Aboriginal education workers. These roles provide meaningful employment and important role modelling to students from diverse backgrounds that a career in education is possible.

49. Considering Indigenous teachers, while 5.7% of Australia's students identify as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander, only 2% of Australian teachers and an even smaller proportion of leaders are of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander descent (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2018). Several Catholic employers are trying to remedy these figures by offering Indigenous teaching scholarships for school leavers.

50. It may also be timely to revisit the outcomes of the More Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Teachers Initiative (MATSITI) to assess the efficacy of that initiative on increasing employment opportunities for Indigenous people in schools.

51. Notwithstanding the issues around teacher diversity described above, the diversity of students themselves is an influencing factor in the way teachers work in providing assessments, learning strategies and other support. Current teachers and ITE students report that they would benefit from more specialised training and professional learning in teaching students with diverse backgrounds.

What more can we do to ensure that ITE curriculum is evidence-based and all future teachers are equipped to implement evidence-based teaching practices? Can ITE providers play a stronger role in ongoing professional development and support of teachers?

52. The link between ITE providers, employing authorities and schools should continue to be enhanced to ensure that the ITE programs are meeting the real needs of schools and students. Ensuring contemporary teacher voice in the design of courses and assessments in ITE programs is critical.

53. ITE courses must focus on evidence-based pedagogy to teach the content. Assessment should focus on the pre-service teacher's ability to effectively use this evidence-based pedagogy to teach the course content rather than solely assess content knowledge.

54. ITE students should also be taught to be critical consumers of research and evidence. They should be able to assess the impact of their teaching strategies on student growth and performance, and know how to recalibrate when they are not seeing the growth in learning they would expect.

55. Catholic employers have highlighted the current 'implementation gap' evident in ITE courses. ITE students on practicums, when included in school-based teacher professional learning, often articulate the inadequacy of their training in translating research into action. There is a stark difference in being *told* about the need to design challenging learning tasks or implement high impact teaching strategies and being explicitly taught *how* to implement them. ITE students often express gratitude for the opportunity to move beyond the theory to being immersed in classrooms where teaching strategies are used creatively and competently.

56. The new Australian Education Research Organisation (AERO) should be an authoritative source and/or partner for ITE providers in designing programs that are grounded in an evidence base and assist teachers in the practical implementation of evidence-based strategies.

What more can ITE providers and employers do to ensure ITE students are getting the practical experience they need before they start their teaching careers?

57. Much of the public commentary talks about ITE programs making students 'classroom ready'. CSNSW believes this is too ambitious a claim for any ITE course. The Australian Professional Standards for Teachers codify teaching practice with 37 descriptors. It takes time and practice to develop competence across these descriptors. A graduate teacher is at the beginning of this learning journey. Without sustained opportunities in schools to develop practice in the areas of the 37 standard descriptors, it is difficult to expect ITE teachers to be 'ready' to teach upon graduation.

58. Having said that, professional experience is an opportunity for pre-service teachers to gain hands-on classroom experience. Since beginning teachers often rate professional experience as the most useful part of their initial teacher education, it is crucial that schools and ITE providers form quality partnerships to better support and facilitate effective professional experience.

59. Partnerships and pathways beyond practicum, which connect early career teachers with an employer and schools during pre-service studies, are also seen as highly beneficial. A structured induction and onboarding program over an extend period is seen as essential in supporting the early career teacher to transition from graduate to proficient teacher.

60. All Catholic school employer submissions to CSNSW focused on the quality and management of the professional experiences provided by universities to ITE students, as well as the utility of these experiences in preparing ITE students to enter the profession. The views of employers were varied regarding the efficacy of current practicum arrangements. In the main, employers are calling for closer relationships with ITE providers and more collaborative planning and timetabling.

61. CSNSW's Rural and Remote Review (currently underway) has highlighted the challenges in attracting ITE students from metropolitan universities for practical placements. Many rural schools see ITE placements as a potential recruitment tool, but struggle to get students to take up the opportunity of a placement.

62. A key challenge for rural communities is that metropolitan based ITE students more often choose placements close to home and university placement portals often encourage this by listing placements in order of proximity to the student's home.

63. Students report having to intentionally seek out rural placements with their university and that the process of gaining professional experience in rural areas can be stressful. The placement decision is often filled with unknowns and brings with it financial implications such as travel and accommodation.

64. There are clear advantages to students completing practicums in the same school they will be employed in when they are granted conditional accreditation, particularly for rural and remote

schools. As students become familiar with a school community, they develop a good understanding of, and begin to form positive bonds with, that community.

65. Some universities are allowing a final year student (with NESA accreditation) to obtain employment at a school and complete their final practicum at that same school. CSNSW believes there are benefits to this approach, especially in rural and remote contexts.

66. An array of incentives to teach in rural and remote locations is needed, including formalised support for pre-service teachers to go to rural and remote towns, financial support to complete practicums, additional release time for professional development and collaboration, and social incentives such as organised gatherings or host families to support ITE students and early career teachers.

67. One option that deserves further investigation is the viability of educational authorities in regional and rural centres offering a hybrid model of initial teacher education that allows for a shorter tertiary course and a longer professional program/internship to gain final teacher accreditation.

How can leading teachers, principals and schools play a greater role in supporting the development of ITE students?

68. The Australian Professional Standards for Teachers (Standards) codify teaching practice. However, it takes time and practice to develop in each of Standard descriptors and a graduate teacher is inevitably at the beginning of this learning journey.

69. Given schools have diverse cohorts of students, beginning teachers need practical experience in diverse contexts, immersed in the culture of the school community and mentored by leading teachers.

70. However, this is not without its challenges as it entails reducing the allocated face-to-face teaching load of graduate teachers so that they can shadow more experienced teachers and systematically reflect on their practice with mentors. Similarly, Highly Accomplished or Lead Teachers (HALTs) would need release time to mentor graduate teachers and develop a transition-to-service plan that is individualised for each ITE student.

Conclusion

71. CSNSW has contributed to the NSW Government response to the Quality ITE Review and supports its recommendations for national action to:
    - attract more high-quality candidates into ITE and the teaching profession
    - boost the quality of ITE courses to ensure confident and capable graduates
    - ensure timely access to enhanced ITE and early career teacher data, and
    - recognise the importance of ITE changes on the Early Childhood Education workforce.

72. This submission from CSNSW provides further detail on the discussion questions in the Quality Initial Teacher Education Review Discussion Paper and makes some broad observations about the need to situate ITE reform within a wider education reform context.

73. While the Quality ITE Review has elicited passionate discussion on the quality and supply of ITE, the issues that contribute to the shortfall in teacher graduates are complex and nuanced. These issues require a holistic response with some short- and longer-term solutions.

74. If we wish to attract and retain high quality aspirants to the profession, we need greater focus, discussion and research on the big picture issues that form the eco-system in which the training and supply of teachers sits.