

QUALITY ITE REVIEW: RESPONSE TO DISCUSSION PAPER

1. PURPOSE AND FOCUS OF THIS SUBMISSION

Thank you to the panel for this opportunity to respond to the discussion paper that is guiding the QITE review. This submission represents the perspective of the School of Education at Curtin University and focuses on the following section and statements of the discussion paper:

Part A. Attracting high-quality candidates into ITE matters

1. *Attracting high-quality candidates into ITE matters*
2. *ITE program completions and entry into a teaching career*
3. *Does the supply of teachers entering the workforce match areas of need?*

2. CONTEXTUAL BACKGROUND AND OVERVIEW

This response from the School of Education seeks to contribute to the discussion on the points below by maintaining that diversity of entry pathway contributes significantly to achieving a teaching workforce that is reflective of the many diversities of the Australian population and to social justice and further, that it need not threaten teacher quality. The School of Education is well placed to contribute to the discussion of diverse entry ITE pathways through its extended and expansive experiences. Notably, since 2009, the School of Education has delivered national fully online ITE with diverse entry criteria. This has been a successful undertaking with an average academic achievement of 71% of the included 2008 ITE graduates and their final professional experience placement result of 83% (Pelliccione et al., 2019). This achievement was not impacted by their socio-economic status (25% classified as low) nor their residing location (26% classified as regional and remote). Further, recent research conducted in this School of Education indicates that 93% of such graduates are teaching in the year following graduation with 84% indicating they intend for this to be the case for their whole career (Walker et al., 2020).

3. RESPONSE TO DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. *Attracting high-quality candidates into ITE matters*

- **What can be done to attract more high-achievers and career changers to the profession?**

Offering Bachelor and Master of Teaching ITE courses fully online enables access to candidates by:

- removing geographical barriers to accessing Higher Education on campus for outer metropolitan, regional and remote candidates, especially those with socio-economic constraints such as being first in family to attend university. This includes candidates who may have achieved well at Secondary school or who have achieved professionally in other realms
- accommodating candidates' need to maintain other work or family responsibilities while career-changing, as online study can work in with their schedules and available supports.

- **How could more high-quality candidates from diverse backgrounds be encouraged to consider a career in teaching?**

Diverse entry pathways can contribute to attracting more diverse student cohorts which are more reflective of the population including diversity factors as: linguistic and cultural background, socio-economic status, being first in family to attend university, and geographical location. There are recognised layers of disadvantage for such diversity groups that are not necessarily related to ability and capacity to succeed at university study, but which make it less likely that they will qualify for entry via the more traditional school-leaver/ATAR pathway (Pelliccione et al., 2019). Recent research shows that achievement rates are commensurate with those for ATAR-pathway graduates (Walker et al; 2019). The requirements of the TPA should provide confidence that all graduates will be classroom-ready regardless of entry pathway. Further research needs to be undertaken to identify critical factors, other than ATAR scores, associated with high achievement in ITE courses and successful career progression.

- **How could more Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples be encouraged and supported to choose a career in teaching?**

Targeted programs which recognise barriers and enablers and allow for alternative entry pathways and differential delivery and resourcing models will help. Delivering some of the learning “On-Country” recognises the significance of retaining connection to community for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students. Using blended modes of delivery enables access for such students who, in the past, were reluctant to enrol in ITE courses because of the requirement to be ‘off -country’ and away from home and family for prolonged periods of time. Such initiatives (e.g., as we are undertaking at Curtin University) address the ongoing calls, over many decades, for more Aboriginal teachers where to date programs requiring students to attend on campus have had limited success.

2. *ITE program completions and entry into a teaching career*

- **Are low completion rates an issue? What is the impact? Can low completion rates be addressed?**

Low completion rates may or may not be an issue. We would need to have confidence that the data was accurate and reflected “true” attrition in all cases and is not conflated with study gaps, course-switching or part time enrolment patterns. There is also a need for comparative data that shows the position of ITE attrition compared with other courses Australia-wide: is ITE attrition synonymous? Beyond that, there is the question of opportunity and the value of providing opportunity even where students may not complete the course. Managing the impact of attrition will depend on comprehensive interrogation of reasons and circumstances so that focus can be properly targeted.

- **Is the degree of variability in completion rates between providers ideal? What could be done to address this?**

Any conclusions about the degree to which this might be problematic need to be made very carefully and with due consideration for all factors. Achieving any social change is challenging and needs to be viewed with a long-term perspective. If institutions can provide evidenced rationales that their high attrition rates are linked to genuine attempts to provide opportunity and support the learning for marginalised groups, then some tolerance should be allowed for higher attrition. Institutions which are doing this should actually be recognised and funded accordingly.

- **Should more be done to identify suitability for a career in teaching earlier in the degree or before entry to ITE? What might this look like?**

Any mechanisms designed to measure suitability will always be imperfect, but might be helpful. The question of “suitability” is multi-dimensional and the environment, conditions and demands of the work also need examining, rather than considering only whether it is the candidate who lacks suitability. Further, longevity in the profession is a limited measure of suitability for teaching and should be used with caution: many teachers move into other related professions and career changes are considered normal and non-problematic in other professions.

- **What are the main reasons ITE students leave an ITE course before completion?**

There is a multitude of contributory factors including personal, emotional, familial and financial circumstances of the students, as well as disengagement from, or lack of capacity to meet the requirements of, the course. Conclusions should not be made without reference to empirical data.

3. *Does the supply of teachers entering the workforce match areas of need?*

- **Are there examples of incentives that have successfully worked to attract quality teachers in areas of shortage? How could these be rolled out more broadly?**

Engaging candidates in programs which enable them to remain in their communities whilst studying will help to address issues of supply in “hard to staff” regions. That includes regional, online and “on country” programs. Graduates are more likely to remain in those communities as they begin teaching – this is especially true for diversity groups such as older graduates and Indigenous graduates. Graduates will have the linguistic background and/or cultural capacity, as well as investment in the local community, which supports longer-term engagement in these locations. Resourcing and managing such programs reduces the onus on more traditional and less successful methods of staffing in geographical areas of shortage.

References

Pelliccione, L., Morey, V., Walker, R., & Morrison, C. (2019). An evidence-based case for quality online initial teacher education. *Australasian Journal of Educational Technology*. 35(6) 64-79. <https://ajet.org.au/index.php/AJET/article/view/5513>

Walker, R., Morrison, C., Beltman S., & Morey, V. (2020). Graduate perspectives of work integrated learning in fully online initial teacher education: A global imperative. In J. Fox, C. Alexander & T. Aspland (Eds.), *Teacher education in globalized times: Local responses and actions* (pp. 273-293). Springer.