



Quality Initial Teacher Education Review

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Introduction

Deakin University is large provider of initial teacher education graduates in Victoria with around 1000 graduate teachers each year entering into the workforce in primary schools, secondary schools and early childhood contexts. In 2021, Deakin's School of Education has enrolled 6,238 students undertaking their studies in our range of undergraduate and postgraduate initial teacher education programs. Our suite of postgraduate professional education programs includes a broad range of graduate certificates, master's degrees and doctoral pathways that meet the professional learning needs of in-service teachers and school leaders who seek to strengthen their practice and advance their school communities through our research-informed courses. Deakin's Research for Educational Impact (REDI) is our strategic research centre located in the School of Education and our research programs have an established track record in multiple areas of research and impact across numerous areas associated with the terms of reference of this review.

Deakin University is committed to advancing Australian teacher education and school leadership and we welcome the opportunity to draw from our extensive experience and research in education in providing this submission to the Quality Initial Teacher Education review. However, we do not agree with any unwarranted assumptions at large that graduate teachers entering the classroom are broadly underprepared, under educated and lacking in the essential skills and intellectual wherewithal to be effective teachers. Such deficit assumptions are not supported by the evidence and may even contribute to poor public perception about teaching as a career. It is our hope that this current review will take the opportunity to emphasise the elements of excellence in the preparation of Australian teachers while also acknowledging new opportunities and areas that can be further improved. Our submission takes as a starting point the positive improvements in teacher education that have been seen over the past five years resulting from the TEMAG reforms. But we also engage with opportunities to build on and to refine elements of these reforms to further improve teacher education in Australia.

Build on TEMAG and address important learnings

The 2014 establishment of the Teacher Education Ministerial Advisory Group (TEMAG), and the subsequent report *Action Now: Classroom Ready Teachers* has led to substantial and wide-sweeping changes across Australia in the preparation of teachers. These changes have had impact on the quality assurance of teacher education courses, including changes in course entry and selection, providing a significantly stronger emphasis on professional experience and in developing enduring school-university partnerships, substantial changes to the final assessment of graduates, and a heightened awareness of the need for stronger national research and forward-looking approaches to workforce planning.



Professional Standards

The Australian Professional Standards for Teachers (APST) have provided an important tool in strengthening the provision of teacher education for pre-service teachers and in improving in-service teachers' systematic engagement with their own professional learning and practice. Although they are certainly not perfect, they have served as a basis to strengthen connections between teacher education and schools by providing a mechanism to support systematic, evidence-informed professional learning. We have observed that the use of the APSTs is most effective when used in a model of professional learning that recognises in-service teachers, teacher educators and pre-service teachers apply a place-based approach to using the professional standards as a tool for genuinely transformative learning. And while there are several aspects of the APSTs that could be updated to improve their implementation, we would caution against significant changes being made to them at this stage, given the extent that these standards are now incorporated into so many elements of teacher education and schools' leadership.

Teacher Performance Assessment

The introduction of a final Teacher Performance Assessment (TPA) has improved the quality, consistency, and comparability of final assessments in initial teacher education programs. Deakin University uses a Teacher Performance Assessment endorsed by the Expert Advisory Group (EAG) and the instrument is applied to all our undergraduate and postgraduate initial teacher education programs. The TPA has strengthened Deakin's assurance of our students' readiness to commence as beginning teachers when they graduate and secure gainful employment in schools. We also work very closely with a consortium of other university providers to benchmark and validate our application of the TPA, so as to ensure continuous improvement in our final year assessment.

We understand that while there may be some appetite for implementing a single TPA across all Australian providers of initial teacher education, we argue there is significant value in maintaining the limited number of TPAs currently approved across Australian providers while considering the possibility for national benchmarking of accredited TPAs. It needs to be recognised that most providers are now using one of the existing endorsed TPAs and it is likely that most of the few remaining without an accredited TPA will adopt one of the currently endorsed TPAs or should be encouraged to do so.

There has already been significant investment into the creation and implementation of the current TPAs, and while we acknowledge the challenging nature of this transformative work for the Expert Advisory Group, we argue it would be more fruitful to adopt a light-touch to any further change in the TPA arising from the current review. With many programs across Australia having recently achieved stage 1 accreditation, more time is needed to observe the benefits of full implementation of the TPA as programs complete their stage 2 accreditations. There exist other opportunities for strengthening the preparation of teachers that have been initiated by TEMAG, such as further strengthening and better resourcing scalable and genuinely enduring partnerships between schools and university.

Build on Innovative Partnerships for Professional Learning

School-university partnerships are recognised as essential in the provision of quality teacher education and fundamental for high quality professional experience. Quality professional experience and enduring school-university partnerships were also highlighted in TEMAG resulting in several innovations across Australian teacher education providers. The fact that many of these initiatives have received jurisdictional support for innovation, highlights the rise in collaboration between



jurisdictional Departments of Education and providers that has emerged since TEMAG. Deakin university's development of our Teaching Alliances and Teaching Academies for Professional Practice provide an excellent example of a large, collaborative and scalable innovation in professional experience. The model has been co-designed and implemented for five years to improve professional experience, strengthen in-service teachers' professional practice, and support school leadership.

Since 2015, Deakin university has worked closely with the Victorian Department of Education and over 80 primary and secondary schools across metropolitan Melbourne, Geelong and the Surf Coast, and the Warrnambool South West Region to implement 12 Deakin Alliances. In 2021, Deakin is also working closely with Federation University, Australian Catholic University (ACU) and the Victorian Department of Education to launch a new, multi-provider Alliance in the Horsham and surrounding regions of Victoria's Wimmera Southern Mallee. Deakin's Alliance schools are predominately located in lower SES communities and areas having trouble staffing their schools with highly skilled teachers. While most Alliance schools are from the government sector, several of our Alliances also include Catholic and independent schools and highlight the opportunity to work collaboratively across school sectors and providers to support teacher education in these communities.

Deakin's Alliance model is designed to apply a place-based approach to simultaneously strengthen pre-service teacher education and support high quality in-service teacher education in ways that are aligned with school improvement. Each of Deakin's 13 Alliances (including the new multi-provider Teaching Academy) are comprised of a cluster of primary and secondary schools in a localised community. A locally based and experienced teacher is employed as a Site Director (Teaching Fellow). The Site Director's role includes working across school-university boundaries to implement evidence-based formative assessment strategies (Assessment Circles) using the APSTs for all the Alliance's pre-service teachers, mentors, and university-based teacher educators.

The model has been highly effective in strengthening professional experience over the past five years while simultaneously improving mentor teachers' practice in ways that support school leadership and school improvement. The initiative also provides a systematic mechanism for 'feeding forward' continuous improvement into Deakin's teacher education programs. Several Site Directors employed by Deakin since 2015 have also undertaken their PhDs in education supported by the Alliances pathway. All of Deakin's Site Directors are registered and highly experienced teachers and the model serves as an excellent mechanism for ensuring currency of practice remains a significant feature of Deakin's initial teacher education programs.

Another innovative partnership program directed at encouraging high-performing students into schools with the greatest needs is the *National Exceptional Teaching for Disadvantaged Schools* (NETDS) program. The program provides specific preparation for high-performing preservice teachers to enable them to meet the demands of diverse and disadvantaged school settings.

Deakin has a dedicated Professional Experience Office specialising in ongoing support to preservice teachers while placed in schools. Our courses have been specifically designed to ensure that there is continuity between the professional experience our preservice teachers are engaged in, complemented by the course work they undertake. Overall course work is tailored to meet the specific needs of different strands within our courses. Course work has been designed to ensure connections are maintained to authentic teaching practice. Deakin employs experienced teachers with strong links to their discipline background who are engaged in both teaching and research. Our staff maintain close connections with their discipline associations.



Deakin is a leader in blended learning, providing students with flexibility in their learning and opportunities otherwise unavailable for those seeking to transition into teaching from another career. This has proved invaluable during the transitions necessitated by the COVID-19 pandemic, with Deakin being able to continue to provide impactful learning experiences to our preservice teachers, drawing upon our decades of experience in online and blended learning options provided across our courses.

It is clear significant variability exists in the completion rates of ITE providers, however, some level of variability is inevitable. Different providers attract very different cohorts of teacher candidates, and this is often dependent upon the location of the provider. These different cohorts in turn have significant differences in their social, cultural and economic backgrounds, and therefore in their abilities to engage in the rigors of academic study. Teacher education courses are academically rigorous and often prove personally challenging to many preservice teachers across all ITE providers. The teaching profession suffers from the perception held by too many in the community that because they have witnessed effective teaching, they themselves would make a good teacher.

There is an important and timely opportunity for this current *Quality Initial Teacher Education Review* to learn from innovations in professional experience and school-university partnerships, such as, the large and scalable Alliance example provided by Deakin's School of Education. Such innovations are critical for further improvement in teacher education because they recognise that improvement in teacher education is not just about adding more elements to the ITE curriculum. Quality partnerships for the provision of teacher education are based on seeing the continuum of teacher education and recognising the need for evidence-informed approaches to teaching so that these can be consistent across school and university settings. The challenges faced in teaching early reading provide an excellent and contemporary example of how teachers' professional learning across pre-service and in-service stages of their careers need to have a degree of synchronicity to avoid significant discontinuities in understandings about effective practice. Such examples highlight the importance of research in fully understanding these challenges and their effects on teacher education within attempts to transform practice.

We recommend that the current review seriously consider the possibility of a national program of Teaching Fellowships designed to better support the implementation of a model like Deakin's Alliances. Such a program would involve Teaching Fellows employed in a boundary-crossing capacity working with providers and school clusters to strengthening professional experience partnerships and the provision of evidence-informed teacher education at all stages. There exists significant potential to gain strong support from the jurisdictions for such a program given there already are several similar innovations existing across Australian states. A national program of Teaching Fellows would provide a strong network of boundary-crossing teacher educators, which is a uniquely Australian innovation, while maintaining the important place-based dimensions of effective teacher education. The cost of funding such an initiative could be found in savings gained by reducing the costs associated with less effective reforms from TEMAG, such as the current implementation of LANTITE.

LANTITE and Testing Non-Academic Attributes

As was noted in the current Review's discussion paper, most providers achieve around 90% of their candidates passing the required literacy and numeracy standards in the LANTITE test. Deakin is, of course, committed to the principle that effective teachers have strong literacy and numeracy capabilities, however, we do question what patterns exist in the cohorts of students who do not successfully pass their LANTITE, given the other ITE entry requirements include an ATAR above 70 for



undergraduate teaching programs, and the completion of a bachelor's degree for post graduate programs. We are concerned that the implementation of the LANTITE may be inadvertently discriminating against some groups of people in our communities and that this may subsequently work against the desire to support diversity in Australia's teaching profession. We are particularly concerned about patterns of potential decline in relation to potential teacher candidates' representative of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders, disability, low socio-economic backgrounds, regional and rural candidates, and candidates from culturally diverse and non-English speaking backgrounds.

We strongly recommend that further research be undertaken into how the LANTITE is impacting the diversity of candidates entering Australia's teaching profession, and that serious consideration be given to acknowledging successful completion of recognised Year 12 English and Mathematics programs as evidence of expected literacy and numeracy capability. It is possible the LANTITE test could be used as an exception for candidates who have not demonstrated their literacy and numeracy capabilities through their completion of approved Year 12 English or Mathematics subjects, or through the completion of a recognised degree for post graduate candidates. It is also desirable that more consideration be given to resourcing capacity-building approaches designed to strengthen pathways into teaching for underrepresented communities who may otherwise be disadvantaged by the LANTITE.

TEMAG requires providers to introduce approaches to test and ensure candidates entering an accredited teacher education program demonstrate key capabilities, such as, motivation to teach, willingness to learn, resilience, self-efficacy, conscientiousness, organisational and planning skills, and strong interpersonal and communication skills. Like many other providers, Deakin has utilised the CASPer online screening test for this purpose, and we note other methods, such as, personal statements, are used by some other providers. It has been acknowledged in the Review's discussion paper that there exists no current evidence linking the implementation of these TEMAG recommendations on testing non-academic attributes to any positive impact on teacher effectiveness in the Australian context. However, we also remain concerned about potential unintended consequences of non-academic testing in relation to candidate diversity. We strongly recommend that research be undertaken, as a priority, to investigate the impact of testing non-academic characteristics on candidate diversity entering initial teacher education programs to assess if there is any evidence of impact on teacher effectiveness. Given the importance of evidence informing practice in the teaching profession, it would be very prudent to establish and draw upon a more appropriate evidence base while considering the implementation and impact of both the LANTITE and the non-academic testing procedures that have now been implemented by Australian providers over several years.

Support and Strengthen More Flexible Pathways into Teaching

Our close partnerships with schools have enabled Deakin to establish strong pathways to employment for our graduate teachers in metropolitan, rural and regional contexts across Victoria. However, we have also seen first-hand the difficulty many schools and early childhood education contexts are facing in their ability to employ qualified early childhood, primary and secondary teachers across the state. We are acutely aware of teacher shortages in early childhood education and across the subject disciplines, such as STEM, Applied Learning and VET, languages, and that these are particularly concerning in regional and rural areas.

Deakin has been working in close partnership with the Victorian Department of Education to address these challenges through the successful implementation of our accelerated, employment-based



pathways for early childhood education and a range of in demand secondary schooling specialisms. We have also been working to implement our Graduate Certificates in Science and Maths Education, as well as in Applied Learning, to support professional learning for teachers working out-of-field across Victorian schools. The uptake of these innovative pre-service and in-service programs that seek to address workforce supply and essential professional learning for teachers has been very strong with enrolments supported by funding from the Victorian Department of Education.

These initiatives have highlighted the important role currently being played by more flexible, accelerated and employment-based pathways through our postgraduate teacher education programs, and through our very successful accelerated Bachelor of Early Childhood Education initiative. These programs are delivered using Deakin's unique Trimester system to ensure the full volume of learning is maintained for each qualification but in which this learning is accelerated through the implementation of Trimesters. The financial incentives offered to students make a significant difference to participation in these programs. Successful outcomes are similarly more likely where financial support is provided to the employer to help facilitate a reasonable workload for the candidate who is both studying and working. Each of these programs enables a closer alignment between Deakin's provision of teacher education and to employer demand for skills in specific geographic locations.

We note the current reports of teacher shortages across Australia may lead to a return of suggestions for a one-year Graduate Diploma of Education. However, we would caution against this and that Australia's commitment to the two-year master's degree be maintained for graduate entry teaching. Nonetheless, we do see an important opportunity to provide systematic support for more flexible and accelerated pathways into the profession, particularly in those areas that are currently experiencing pockets of success in meeting employers' needs. A national approach to better resourcing these pathways on scale would potentially address some of the financial and workload barriers to participation faced by candidates and employers alike. It is important to note that the jurisdictions currently vary in the degree to which they are implementing more flexible and employment-based pathways, and there is a need to learn which approaches and providers are proving the most successful and sustainable programs if scale and quality is to be achieved. Although the current review is silent on early childhood education, this is an area experiencing the most significant workforce supply shortages and thus full consideration should be given to supporting accelerated and employment-based programs on scale for early childhood education.

Better Understand What Attracts and Retains People into Teaching

We are broadly concerned about wider public perceptions that conceive of teaching as being a poorly rewarded and overworked profession. Unfortunately, some elements of these perceptions are reinforced by many teachers themselves, including many graduate teachers, who report limited job security in their first years upon entering the profession. The challenge to attract and retain effective and committed teachers in the profession is certainly more than just a problem for providers of initial teacher education. Indeed, it could be argued that providers have limited capacity to address these negative elements impacting teacher workforce supply, and that more regulation of ITE programs is unlikely to be productive in that regard. While research, and our own experience as a large ITE provider, has highlighted that people motivated to become teachers are often inspired by intrinsic factors, such as making a difference in the lives of young people and their communities, the deleterious effects of excessive workload and poor public perceptions of teaching as a career cannot be ignored. It would be productive for the current review to seriously consider how more capable and motivated candidates can be attracted into teaching by shifting public discourse portraying



negative perceptions about teaching and simplistically attributing declining PISA performance to poor teacher education.

We note that there exists significant diversity across providers in the retention and completion rates of candidates for ITE programs. Courses with low retention and completion rates are the responsibility of the provider, and such providers are required to implement suitable quality assurance and continuous measures according to the Higher Education Standards. Deakin university's ITE courses have amongst the highest completion and graduation rates in the sector. Nevertheless, we consider there exists sufficient regulation in Australian higher education provision to address poor performing providers in relation to poor completion rates, and that any further regulation targeting teacher education specifically would be counterproductive to the many providers who are responsible.

As noted in the discussion paper, there is a dire need to collect better national data and for this to be made available regarding subject shortages, retention, and attrition rates of both graduate teachers and teachers in general. From our experience, we consider that far too much of the information available is anecdotal. A case in point being the attrition rates of teachers in their first five years of teaching. ATSL, in a review of the data available concerning this question, placed the proportion of early career teachers leaving the profession in the first five years at somewhere between 8% and 50%. Such a broad range cries out for better data and makes it impossible to propose policy solutions that could in anyway be considered 'evidence based'. While the definition of teacher attrition is more complicated than is generally assumed, providing better data around this issue is a necessary first step.

Deakin University conducts extensive research into teacher professional identity and wellbeing in relation to preservice and in-service teachers. For many rural, regional, and socially disadvantaged schools, there is a demonstrable shortage of teachers qualified to teach in a range of subject areas. While much attention has been paid to the shortages that exist in teachers able to teach in STEM subjects, teacher shortages are in no sense limited to these subjects. Our research has shown that the burden of these shortages, particularly involving teachers needing to work 'out-of-field', too often falls on early career teachers. That is, while there is much talk of ITE providers producing classroom-ready teachers, the high rates of early career teachers teaching outside of the subject areas in which they have formal training undermines their ability to demonstrate their own capability, while simultaneously undermining their self-confidence to perform as competent professionals.

While the subject associations do remarkable work in supporting out-of-field teachers in this space, this is clearly not why such associations were formed, nor is it directly linked to their mission. There is a significant opportunity to increase the role of teacher education providers in providing assistance to early career teachers in their first years of teaching, particularly those expected to teach out-of-field. Often early career teachers are employed in schools with no other qualified teachers teaching in that field, and so they are left without the support of those with pedagogical or content-knowledge in a subject that their ITE course offered them no training in.

The shortages in STEM are particularly acute, nevertheless, recent Australian government changes to the fee structure of many under-graduate degrees are likely to impact the supply of Arts and Humanities students due to the added cost of these undergraduate degrees. We recommend that the current review consider the potential for impact these changes may have on the supply of English, humanities and arts teachers over future years.



More needs to be done to understand what attracts people into the teaching profession. We maintain that those likely to enter the profession do so due to a desire to make a difference. However, many of the concerns expressed in policy in this area focus almost exclusively upon a moral panic related to Australia's falling PISA or NAPLAN scores. These overly simple measures tell us much less about the quality of the Australian education system than is generally assumed. There are no simple or single measures of system wide quality and an over-reliance on such measures works to undermine confidence in the Australian education system while concurrently lowering the esteem in which that system, and the teachers within that system, are held.

Support for Graduate Teachers

Over the last three years, Deakin University has worked with the Victorian Department of Education to provide Graduate Teacher Conferences designed to provide teachers in their first (and this year also their second) year of teaching with an opportunity to engage with other graduate teachers, to assist them in developing communities of practice, to focus on effective strategies designed to maintain their wellbeing and to build resilience within their identity as a professional. These conferences have been remarkably successful, with almost 90% of attendees stressing how useful they found the content and how grateful they have been to interact with fellow graduate teachers.

While we have already noted the difficulties in knowing the exact attrition rates for early career teachers, research makes it clear that the first years of teaching are extremely challenging. It is clear from our experience that early career teachers too often feel under-siege and that this encourages them to develop 'defensive pedagogies', the very opposite of the effective teaching strategies they learn in their ITE courses. Such ineffective pedagogical responses are unfortunately a reactionary response to the realities of the employment situation too many early career teachers face – particularly in their early years in the profession while they are 'earning their stripes'. The need to provide early career teachers with supports, including mentoring, access to communities of practice, and in-field and out-of-field pedagogical content knowledge is too often lacking. Nevertheless, these approaches prove a highly effective strategy for teacher retention and improving teacher effectiveness in contexts that may otherwise contribute to their attrition from the workforce.

There is unequivocal research showing that early childhood educational experiences provide students with advantages that last well beyond the early years of their schooling. This is particularly true when these experiences are provided by an early childhood professional teacher. Such experiences provide high learning impacts, something recognised in copious research internationally. Early childhood learning attracts significant funding across the highest achieving school systems. And yet, this current review of initial teacher education makes no mention of early childhood education or of early childhood professional teachers. The needs of this sector are complex and remain as varied according to location as do those of any other sector within the educational field. The need for a comprehensive strategy across all jurisdictions and sectors is required, one that recognises the complexity and diversity of challenges existing across education, not merely in terms of the age of students, but according to the factors influencing disadvantage.

Clear barriers exist that too often discourage or even make it impossible for mid-career people to transition into the teaching profession while they continue to work or provide caring responsibilities. A clear disincentive to such a career transition is the transaction cost involved in gaining a two-year master's degree, something that generally involves sacrificing two-year's salary in the process. Few potential teaching candidates have the luxury of being able to forego earnings for such a long period in the hope that their new career will prove rewarding enough to justify such a transition. As noted above, we need to provide more flexible, employment-based models and modes of learning to allow



career-changers an opportunity to access the teaching profession in ways that recognise the realities of their life situations.

We need to better deploy resources that already exist to provide greater support to early career and all teachers more generally. As mentioned in detail above, Deakin's strategy of developing Alliance schools and employing Site Directors (Teaching Fellow) provides such a model helping to network the supports available and to draw connections between already existing resources to optimise these via these connections.

Summary

In this submission we have drawn from our experience as a large ITE provider with a solid research track record in education to consider the potential for further improvements in the provision of teacher education. The recommendations provided below arise from that experience and they focus upon means to provide high impact improvements to initial teacher education, teacher retention, the perception of the teaching workforce and to facilitate networked responses across the education system while providing limited disruption. These recommendations arise from our abiding belief in the professionalism, care and skills displayed by early career teachers. This belief is overwhelmingly supported by the evidence of the capabilities displayed by these teachers. More needs to be done to overcome deficit opinions held across the community of the teaching profession. We are concerned this review may inadvertently reinforce such deficit opinions. If the aim of this review is to help find ways to attract the best and brightest into the profession and to retain them once they have entered, we believe this can only be achieved by working to highlight the professionalism of teachers while also providing them with opportunities to extend their professionalism. The potential exists for all of those involved in education (government, teachers, schools, and ITE providers) to forge deeper and more enduring connections designed to foster excellence in teacher professionalism. It would be a shame if this opportunity was lost, and the primary outcome of this review was further regulation of limited evidence that inadvertently made the profession even less diverse.

In summary, we have recommended

- There be minimal changes to APST
- Light touch to changes in TPAs with the possibility for national benchmarking
- Consideration be given to developing a national program for Teaching Fellows to support substantial investment into professional experience and teacher education
- Closer relationships between teachers, schools, Departments of Education and ITE providers be fostered beyond initial teacher graduation.
- Ensure ITE providers meet the requirements and expectations of Higher Education Standards.
- There is a priority need for evidence to assess impact of LANTITE and non-academic testing on diversity and whether it makes a difference to effectiveness.
- Consider making LANTITE an exception for candidates who done have Year 12 English and maths for the undergraduate degree for post grad studies
- National resourcing for more flexible, accelerated and employment-based pathways
- Greater support needs to be paid to programs strengthening Early Childhood Education and in attracting teachers to this field
- Promote teaching as a high-status professional career
- National program for supporting Graduate teachers to support employment retention



- Invest in programs of research that evaluate innovations in program design, evidence the diversity of career outcomes and establish national longitudinal studies of career preparedness and retention
- Support out-of-field teachers
- Consider what can be done to improve the job security of early career teachers as short-term, insecure work undermines their ability to develop creative, engaging pedagogical practice