

Quality Initial Teacher Education Review

Response to the review from Flinders University, Adelaide, South Australia

The following response has been developed in response to the review terms of reference and questions, engagement in forums with the Australian Council of Deans of Education, consultation with staff and students from the College of Education, Psychology and Social Work at Flinders University and consultation with other Deans of Education from universities in South Australia.

PART A Attracting high-quality candidates into ITE matters

Questions

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

The disruption caused by COVID-19 provided evidence of the importance of teachers, and for a change, media recognised the importance of the profession providing support for teachers' knowledge, skills, and critical role in education Australia's future citizens. We need more a sustained media campaign that acknowledges the complex work of teachers and upholds the profession as significant and desirable. The review discussion paper documents how countries such as Finland and Singapore (both relatively small in population and geographic variation) hold teachers in high regard and working conditions for teachers in these countries are far more supportive of educators than condition in Australia. As per models of teacher education in the 1970s pre-service teachers in many countries are provided with a stipend and guaranteed position on graduation. Teaching as a profession would become far more appealing to people if they were provided with scholarships and guaranteed employment. There could be caveat that people awarded scholarships for their undergraduate degree would be expected to complete at least two years in a rural or regional location. Unfortunately, many education students are required to work full- and/or part-time to meet living requirements and career changers in particular are unlikely to give up a well-paid position to undertake a teaching degree.

The income in many other professions is significantly higher than the maximum income that is generally achieved by teachers following several years of experience, e.g., starting salary of \$73K through to level 9 salary of \$109K in South Australia. The salary for educators five years into the profession in South Australia is approximately \$88K whereas SA lawyers 5 years into their profession can expect to earn \$102K per annum.

Enhancing the status, working conditions and income of teachers will be fundamental to attracting more high-achievers and career changers into the profession.

2. What factors influence the higher education course selection of high-performing school students? What features of the current ITE system may prevent high-quality mid- to late-career professionals transitioning to teaching? Has the move to a two-year masters affected your decision to enter ITE?

The response to question one is highly relevant to this question too. The final question re the two-year Masters degree appears to have limited affect on intake at Flinders University. Our Master of Teaching program has always been two years in length since its inception and the only impact on intake recently has been a slightly lower international intake (other than in our Early Childhood cohort which has been delivered online in response to COVID in the hope students will be able to enter Australia soon to complete their in-country requirements). Our Master of Teaching students often comment that it is still difficult to feel fully prepared for the profession with all that is now required in two years of the degree. One area in which our Master of Teaching numbers have decreased is in our special education qualifications. We are no longer able to offer a Master of Teaching degree in primary and secondary special education due to increased requirements for content specialisations at both levels. This is disappointing as the Special Education Master of Teaching degree was a popular choice for career-changers often come from health and related disciplines. Providing some greater flexibility in accreditation of Master of Teaching (Primary) which now requires the additional completion of a specialisation in English, Mathematics, Languages and/or STEM with a minimum of 4 topics in one of these areas. We could continue to offer a Master of Teaching (Special Education) program for career changers if special education content, which is so critically required to support successful inclusive schools, was recognised as a specialisation.

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

Australia is a diverse and multicultural country yet diversity in the teaching workforce is still limited. Teaching as a profession has been identified as a skilled migration option for secondary school teachers and a nominated visa for other sectors of the education system. The results in limited migration of teachers to Australia given the lack of permanent position from our national graduates. Many international students identify teacher degrees as an opportunity for an immigration pathway but recent requirements such as LANTITE and the lack of permanent employment in some schooling levels (e.g., urban primary) is reducing international students' interest in education degrees. Early childhood is one area in which demand is still high given the opportunity to be employed in early childhood childcare settings.

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

Six percent of children in Australia identify as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people but only two percent of educators identify as ATSI people. This is a critical area for attention but requires working in collaboration with Indigenous communities and the Indigenous Centres of Higher Education at the university level. A recommendation from the 2012 More Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Students report highlighted the need for more social, financial, and academic support for first nations people to succeed in their tertiary courses. We would recommend specific funding be identified to support young first nations people to consider careers in teaching with an understanding they will be well-supported financially, culturally and academically at universities. Flinders University offer a nationally recognised indigenous students' support program and we would welcome increased enrolments of first nation students in our teaching degrees.

5. What evidence is there that the introduction of assessments of non-academic characteristics has had an impact on admission, progress, completion, and retention of ITE students?

The introduction of assessments of non-academic characteristics appears to have had little effect on admission, progress, completion, and retention of ITE students. The admission of students into Education degrees at Flinders University has certainly fallen in recent years but this may be due to a range of factors including a preference for other professions including health and IT (as noted in the review paper). The additional requirement of non-academic assessments potentially ensures those applying to Education degrees are indeed motivated to become teachers, but the reliability of these processes is yet to be researched or analysed in any depth. Some universities using a more psychology-based assessment are often graduate-entry programs who also rely on undergraduate GPAs as part of the assessment process. This may influence outcomes for graduate entry assessments but again aligns to academic performance as well as non-academic characteristics. The time, effort and financial resources required to assess non-academic requirements is yet to be realised in achieving increased quality of teaching graduates.

ITE program completions and entry into a teaching career

ITE completions at Flinders University are commensurate with completions in other courses and our attrition rates of 17% for commencing students and approximately 6% for continuing students have either fallen or remained steady for several years. The attrition rates have not varied for many years and reflect the same data as reported in the AITSL report on attrition in teacher education courses from 2012. However, entry to our Education programs has shown a decline in recent years and this will have implications for future workforce needs. Suggestions as detailed above are certainly needed to increase school leaver and mid-career changes to consider

teaching as a career, and attrition rates may also be improved with the implementation of scholarships and secure employment pathways.

Does the supply of teachers entering the workforce match areas of need?

There has been a shortage of secondary mathematics and science teachers for many years. Areas such as the teaching of digital technologies are also experiencing shortages. Regional, rural, and remote schools continue to experience shortages of appropriately qualified teachers. The employment rates for graduate teachers from Flinders University are approximately 80% within two years from graduation. The reduced intake of students in recent years and the rising retirement levels would indicate that there may be increased shortages in the years to come across a greater range of areas and needless to say even greater challenges for attracting graduates to regional, rural and remote locations.

Part B. Preparing ITE students to be effective teachers

Are graduate teachers ready for the classroom?

Questions

1. Are the Australian Professional Standards for Teachers (Teacher Standards) fit for purpose in identifying the key skills and knowledge pre-service teachers need to be ready for the classroom? Do the Teacher Standards adequately reflect the role of teachers in supporting pre-service and graduate teachers? See: <https://www.aitsl.edu.au/teach/standards> for more information.

The Australian Professional Standards for Teachers have been a valuable addition to the profession and provide a shared language, understanding and growing understanding of evidence that can represent graduate teacher readiness for transitioning to the profession. However, it appears timely to review the standards and consider extending the scope to reflect the work of educators in early childhood and alternative educational settings. Some focus areas are repetitive while others more complex and require detailed analysis in assessing whether graduate teachers have a deep understanding of the implication of the focus areas (e.g., 1.3, 1.4, 1.6).

2. Are ITE programs preparing graduates for teaching diverse student cohorts, including through cultural competency and inclusive education?

At Flinders University we offer topics specifically focused on understanding and teaching first nations students. The topic was developed in partnership with our Indigenous staff and prioritises the employment of first nations people in teaching of the topic. The topic is highly valued by our students and generates a greater sense of efficacy in planning for the teaching of first nations students and also in teaching the histories and cultural beliefs of first nations people. The topic has won local and national teaching award. From 2022 all students in all courses from early childhood to secondary teaching will undertake an explicit topic on inclusive education to

complement the existing topic on differentiation. The increasing diversity of students in mainstream school is positive evidence of more inclusive schooling however this requires educators to have developed sound understanding of the importance of inclusion and practices to effectively include all students in not only accessing mainstream schooling but making sound progress in the education as well. Research, including AITSL's annual ITE report continue to indicate graduate educator still lack confidence in the area of inclusion of all students in their classroom and in classroom management skills as well. From 2022, the programs at Flinders University will certainly increase topic offerings in these areas.

3. What are the benefits and costs of the number of TPAs in operation?

The implementation of the TPA has had many benefits in creating greater consistency across universities in the expectation of graduate teachers' knowledge and skills. The engagement of partnership schools in the process has also generated a more reliable assessment of graduate teachers' capacities for entering the profession. Graduate teachers have also recognised the importance of the TPA in displaying evidence of their readiness to transition to the profession. However, the costs of achieving approval of the various TPAs across Australian Universities has been inequitable. For example, some jurisdictions received significant public funding to develop their TPAs while other universities received nothing and were forced to direct significant resource to the development of either independent TPAs or when their TPAs were not approved by the expert panel they were often forced to join existing consortiums without the benefit of having been involved in the development of the TPA.

Flinders University is one of only six universities who have successfully developed and had approved their TPA. This has been a valuable but costly learning exercise for the Education staff and their partnership schools. The increased expectation of the involvement of schools in the assessment process has resulted in much time being spent in professional learning program and development of reporting tools. The outcomes have created greater clarity and consistency of expectations for meeting the TPA expectations but lack of any funding to support this process while other universities have significant public funding to support their development should be reviewed. Resourcing the ongoing implementation of the TPA will continue to require additional funds to be directed to the assessment and reporting processes and we would urge the Australian Government to consider more equitable funding of all universities to implement this important assessment.

4. How could the TPA endorsement process be improved? Are the current arrangements leading to quality outcomes?

There is certainly room for improvement in the endorsement process as there were at times mixed messages about expectations and indeed some changes in expectations with variation in advice on different university's submissions. We believe the approved TPAs are certainly rigorous in expectations of graduate teachers and those

involved in the assessment process. However, as noted above the resourcing implications will need attention if the standards of the current TPAs are to be maintained.

5. Do the current professional experience arrangements support the preparation of ITE students for the classroom and school environment? How could these be improved?

The length and spacing of professional experience placements in the Flinders University courses provides appropriate developmental opportunities interspersed with important content knowledge development and reflection on learning needs in preparation of for following placements. Flinders University offers a wide range of placement options from standard placement experiences through to extended rural placement, and urban and rural internships along with highly supported placement in remote indigenous schools. All third- and fourth-year placements are supported by university liaison staff and we prioritise the development of close relationships with our placement schools. We often employ staff working in our partnerships schools to teach in our courses and have provided opportunities for some of our topics to be delivered at school sites to support successful internships programs.

At Flinders University, we believe the implementation of the TPA has generated greater clarity of expectation of pre-service teachers in their placement by their mentor teachers and university liaisons.

One of great challenges is to locate sufficient placements for some secondary ITE students. Secondary schools are less likely to offer places due to the complexity of the schools' organisation and teaching majors, e.g., not all schools offer the combination of topics taken by some of our students. There are often regional and rural secondary schools offering placement, but student financial hardship often makes it difficult to take up these positions. At Flinders University we offer scholarships and are greatly of the Tyne Reid Foundation scholarship funds, but we can often only offer \$1000 - \$1500 dollars and this is often insufficient to cover all living expenses for a period of eight weeks. Additional incentive to support pre-service teachers to undertake a regional, rural, or remote placement may also lead to these teachers considering ongoing employment offers in these schools. In our recent placement of several pre-service teachers in rural schools for the final professional experience many of these students we offered immediate employment. The investment in supporting pre-service teachers to take up professional experience placement in regional, rural, and remote setting could generate significant benefits for all.

6. Do the current course accreditation arrangements support ITE students being taught evidence-based high-impact teaching strategies? How could this be improved?

The current course accreditation arrangements ensure a detailed review of all courses on offer in by ITE providers and as such the review panel are able to assess the inclusion of evidence-based high-impact teaching strategies. However, it is also important to analyse the quality of the research on many so called 'high-impact'

teaching strategies as the research is often context specific. Australia is an exceptionally diverse country geographically with diverse cohorts of students and as such, respect must be paid to local ITE providers knowledge of evidence-based high-impact teaching strategies that have been generated from relevant educational contexts, e.g., indigenous ways of knowing and teaching, trauma-informed teaching etc.

The current course accreditation processes are onerous and again demand significant resourcing from the ITE providers in addition to the review panel time but with each iteration clarity of expectations is increasing. The various teaching regulations bodies across Australia appear to work in collaboration and the use of consistent course standards should lead to increased confidence in the quality of ITE course offerings across the country.

The role of teachers and school leaders in supporting the next generation of teachers

Questions

1. How can ITE providers best support teachers in their ongoing professional learning?

ITE providers are ideally placed to support all teachers at all levels in their ongoing professional learning as a major element of their work is educational research. Flinders University can present multiple examples of high-quality research outputs that have served to enhance practising teachers' professional knowledge and as part of our partnership commitment to schools we have offered reduced fees on postgraduate courses, free professional learning session, sustained partnerships on research projects and developed digital tools to support teachers' learning around areas such as self-directed learning (an outcome of an ARC grant). Researchers from Flinders University have engaged with the SA Department for Education (DfE) in the development of a range of tools including the PEACE PACK to support teachers in implementing anti-bullying programs and recently the SA DfE provided scholarships for 80 teachers to develop their expertise to support other teachers in the inclusion of students with autism in mainstream classrooms. Such initiatives are critical to ensuring research outcomes are translated to teachers' practice and at the same time to fostering strong partnerships between ITE providers and schools, pre-schools, and other educational sites.

The Australian Government in the early years of this century created the Australian Government Quality Teaching program which provided valuable funding for partnerships between schools and universities. The outcomes of the many projects explicitly required schools and universities to work together, and this laid the foundation for quality partnerships and support for teachers' professional learning and leadership. We would certainly encourage the Australian Government to consider a similar initiative in the near future.

2. Do the current HALT arrangements support the education ecosystem, particularly in relation to ensuring quality mentoring and supervision of ITE students?

The HALT program is an important initiative for career progression, leadership formation and importantly for the mentoring and supervision of ITE students. The HALT program appears to be managed through educational sectors in SA, e.g., SA DfE, SA Catholic Education and AISSA. However, there appears to be scope for greater engagement between the sectors and ITE providers in providing professional learning support for HALTs and their mentoring of pre-service teachers and graduate teachers transitioning to the profession. It would be ideal for HALTs to work in Community of Practice to support ITE and graduate teachers in a network of school to share effective practices and supporting networking on graduate teachers as well.

3. Should ITE providers continue to support the development of newly graduated teachers? What would this look like?

ITE providers are often engaged in research with graduate teachers and as such it would be ideal to develop more structured collaborative programs with educational sectors to ensure successful transitions and support for the retaining early career teachers in the profession.

4. How could teacher and school leader workloads be made more manageable to allow them to provide more support to pre-service and newly graduated teachers?

For the profession to ensure the ongoing availability of high-quality teaching graduates who are highly motivated to commit to a long-term career in the profession highly supportive transition programs are an excellent investment. Providing schools leaders and HALTs with additional time to co-plan, engage in classroom observations and quality feedback and motivate graduate teachers to engage in ongoing professional learning would be a welcome addition to increasing the professionalism of educators, the provision of leadership opportunities and hopefully long-term networking which would allow graduate teachers to continue to connect with mentors as they continued in the profession.