

Quality Initial Teacher Education Review - Terms of Reference

Teachers and school leaders are the largest in-school influence on student outcomes.

With the development of the Australian Professional Standards for Teachers; the [Accreditation of Initial Teacher Education Programs in Australia: Standards and Procedures](#); and reforms arising from recommendations made by the Teacher Education Ministerial Advisory Group, the last decade has been a time of significant positive reform in initial teacher education (ITE).

A key goal of the reforms to ITE has been to ensure that graduate teachers start their teaching career with the necessary knowledge, skills and dispositions to be successful teachers in any Australian school.

This review will build on the significant progress to date and inform the next evolution of reforms to continue to improve our capacity to attract high-quality candidates into teaching and equip them to become highly effective teachers.

The Review will consider the following questions and other important matters that may arise during the Expert Panel's deliberations.

Our response to this discussion paper comes from [Thomas Aquinas Teaching Schools \(STATS\)](#). We are a newly established teaching school in Tasmania for the Catholic Schools' system. The purpose of [STATS](#) is to meet the needs of students wishing to take on a career in teaching, support them throughout their university course and immerse them in the classroom to give them a wraparound preparation for teaching. [STATS](#) operates in partnership with the Alphacrucis Hub model. We aim to grow quality teachers for the future, focusing on preparation for teaching and workforce retention, specifically in our case, in Catholic Education Tasmania. As a Teaching School, we aim to provide our trainee teachers/cadets with an authentic view of teaching and their future career in education. We work to support their development from their first day and help bridge the gap between university and schools and believe the structure and support offered by embracing this model gives trainees a more rounded development in their chosen field. We believe there is a way forward to attract high-quality teachers to the future of education and grow and retain those readiest and most suited to the profession.

Issues outlined in the [Quality Initial Teacher Education Discussion Paper](#) have been of concern for several years. As principals of many years, we support the need for change in ITE so suitable applicants are attracted to and sustained in their teaching careers. The [STATS](#) staff are all experienced educators, principals and leaders who have embraced the Teaching schools' model as we see this as the future for ITE and the future teaching workforce. The three-pronged continual 1) support for studies, 2) in school immersion from the beginning of training at least one day per week, and 3) weekly Insight sessions where students gather for tutorials, collaborate and support each other, seek advice and gain further insight into teaching.

In our response to this discussion paper, we hope to add what we consider to be an essential viewpoint for considering others looking to improve the future for ITE. Work in this area of the Teaching Schools hub model is still in its infancy, so evidential research is somewhat thin. However, retention rates and job satisfaction are already proving to have success in similar hubs. Feedback from our school principals and staff of Catholic Education Tasmania and our current cadets has been positive and appreciative of the model. We found recent evidence of this in cadet feedback surveys which showed they highly value the Teaching Schools model and the practical support it provides for their training.

PART A - Attracting and selecting high-quality candidates into the teaching profession

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

Selection criteria for applicants pursuing a career in this field should consider evidence of high academic achievement or the aptitude for high academic application. We believe every learner deserves a competent and skilled quality teacher. We acknowledge TEMAG review recommendations currently implemented in order should help strengthen ITE in Australia. Testing of Literacy and Numeracy standards of individual trainees ensures they have the necessary skills to teach in Australia and are one of the criteria for teaching. Attracting high-quality teachers who know they make a difference to students' learning is paramount to improving student outcomes. John Hattie's (2003) evidence of the impact of teachers (30% variance) has been vital in discussions concerning ITE for many years.

Aside from academic capabilities, great teachers also need personal characteristics to be effective. These have been well documented in the past and ensure the workforce has the necessary personal attributes suited to the role of a teacher – patience, care, emotional intelligence, a clear desire for a career in education, employment history displaying persistence, teamwork, and reliability a few of these. In Catholic Education Tasmania, there are different expectations, including evidence of lived faith and an understanding of the Catholic perspective.

Adopting the Alphacrucius Hub, St. Thomas Aquinas Teaching Schools Model supports the trainee teacher and enhances their learning and development over time. It allows trainees to grow in the other essential skills necessary to be an effective teachers over time rather than when they graduate. This model immerses the trainee teacher in schools from the beginning of their study and supports them in their training most efficiently and effectively. The STATS staff and partnering schools walk the journey with the cadet, setting them up for likely future success.

We have found practicum placements can benefit trainee teachers but are usually spread over the years with weeks in an unfamiliar school. Such experiences do not allow trainees to gain confidence and build relationships with students and staff over some time. Consistency is necessary when learning the craft of teaching. We believe there is consistency and ongoing immersion in a school environment the trainees' teacher gains a more comprehensive understanding of schools and classrooms. A highly skilled, experienced mentor is the best asset here. The trainee teacher can develop gradually in a school environment, where they have an authentic experience and quality support of a mentor. They can be problematic because schools are often reluctant to take on a student-teacher sight unseen. Teachers give up their own teaching time to accommodate a student-teacher at prescribed times of the year, which does not always suit the school. Placing the trainee with a suitable mentor and enabling relationship building with the students and teacher can be inconsistent.

- 2) 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 to transition into the profession and become quality teachers?

Clinical Teaching Model or Teaching Schools model may assist people transitioning from other fields of work. Many applicants have an individual story to their career path. Mid or late-career professionals may be more attracted to the profession if they see the benefits of the career change. For example, a full-time study load may negatively impact the recruitment of capable and professionals who want to transfer to teaching, mainly if the trainee sees themselves as sacrificing their lifestyle and time to make the change. Making allowances for part-time study and including the offer of part-time paid teaching experience as a trainee teacher at the same time may help to soften the impact and allow the applicant to continue to fulfil their financial commitments. Training on the job may be an alternative. In this way, suitable trainees can continue in some form of employment whilst they learn. Support for their learning through Insight days with other students would also be beneficial. They navigate the change in their career path and benefit from providing mutual support for their training. Alongside this, acknowledgement of prior study and expertise, be it in another field of study, could shorten the need for the trainee to complete the teaching degree from the beginning.

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

We believe the Teaching Schools model could be the best solution to this issue.

From experience, many students perceive the university study to be far removed from the career they have chosen and somewhat lacking in the practical experience in the classroom or school.

We see evidence of this in the well-documented attrition rates of both a) students leaving their university course or b) leaving their career within the first five years of teaching. As school leaders, we have all experienced increasing difficulties in attracting and retaining the highest-quality teachers. Rural and remote schools often have great difficulty in finding any applicant for positions. We have journeyed with many new to scheme teachers trying to manage the many tricky challenges of teaching in a complex setting and are not prepared to give up their lifestyle in major cities.

Aside from the ever-increasing workload and responsibilities of teaching, other factors contribute to the issue. Early career teachers often express feelings of being overwhelmed and unprepared for working in schools in the first couple of years. They are often feel overwhelmed by things they did not know or were unaware of about school life and responsibilities. In a sense, teaching often remains a mystery until they enter the workforce. As a result, the new teacher often needs much support to navigate the environment and the distractions.

Collaborative approaches to teaching are consistent with current research on effective teaching, but working and negotiating with fellow staff members who often do not share their ideas can be a daunting task at the best of times and even trickier for a new teacher. Good communication is paramount when dealing with relationships and families, which a good mentor who has built skills over time can help them learn. We believe more time in schools is the main answer to this problem, where cadets can benefit from the wisdom and strategies of experienced teachers. STATS cadet teachers immersed in schools from the beginning of their training report growing confidence and competence in navigating the previously unknown challenges of the job. They are gaining a realistic view of the world of teaching. They are currently building a unique skill set to deal with people and their needs. They take some joy in learning to handle different situations and report back on their successes or ask for advice for other times.

Alongside the academic study of subjects such as 'Inclusive Education' or 'Child and Adolescent Development, cadets experience firsthand and respond effectively to the variety of needs in a classroom from day one. A suitable mentor teacher daily models their interactions and responses to every child and passes on their strategies and understanding. Mentors help trainees bridge learning theory study with the practical reality of the classroom and prepare them well for the teaching profession.

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

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

We find there to be a very diverse cohort as teachers in our schools who can be well-tuned into the needs of their students. Quality research-based professional development and adequate resourcing and upskilling are most effective in dealing with the diversity of students and families in the school. Specialised training in various pedagogical approaches fits hand in hand with quality, expert, caring and understanding teachers.

PART B – Preparing ITE students to be effective teachers

6. What more can we do to ensure that the ITE curriculum is evidence-based and all future teachers are equipped to implement evidence-based teaching practices?

Ensuring an evidence-based ITE curriculum is paramount to reform. This curriculum needs to target the needs of the trainees learning how to teach. There is a reliance on universities to complete the task of preparing teachers for schools. The quality of the courses is evident, but we believe there is much more to learn and know about teaching than this. Effective ITE needs to also focus on the practical skills and characteristics teachers need in the classroom. We believe the STATS/AC model increases the trainee's chance to gain a deeper and broader understanding of the art and craft of teaching. Direct application of the ideas and skills becomes possible through a gradual release of classroom experience and a learning environment that the Teaching Schools provide alongside their mentor.

7. 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?

We believe the Teaching Schools Model such as Alphacrucius College, St Thomas Aquinas Teaching School(STATS)) provides thorough preparation for trainee teachers embarking on a career in education and adopting the Clinical Teaching School model (AC, STATS). The Teaching Schools Model delivers on the job practical teacher training and one-to-one personnel and academic support that inducts trainees into the art and craft of teaching.

At STATS we believe, this model will help students gain a fuller understanding of teaching, build skills, knowledge and deeper insight into the complex nature of working with students, staff and families and other stakeholders in a school environment. There are three main components of the Clinical Teaching model:

strengthen cadet teachers' readiness and resilience to embark on their careers. Although evidence of success is somewhat anecdotal, there is very positive direct feedback from the cadet teachers and schools regarding the model.

- A) **Immersion** in a classroom at least one day per week, paid at a teacher assistant rate, beginning in their first year of study and ongoing for the period of their training gives cadet teachers direct contact with students and continually developing classroom experience. It helps them navigate the school environment and reduces the mystery around teaching itself. Cadets add value to the classroom, not only as a colleague and critical friend but also on the best outcomes for the students. Cadets and mentors are both honing skills together.
- B) The support of a well-chosen classroom **mentor teacher** is vital to success, as students are supported as they grow in confidence and competence over time. The mentor teacher helps the cadet develop skills in the classroom environment by sharing their expertise in behavioural management and classroom organisation, usually through modelling and natural conversations. To this end, the school principal plays a vital role in choosing a high-quality mentor for the student-teacher. Mentors also need to be supported by the school with professional development and in defining their role. Feedback from mentors has been very positive to date, and they see the benefit to their self-reflection and improved teaching.
- C) **Insight sessions** are integral to the success of this model. Having the cadet teachers come together for one day per week during each term offers them the wrap-around support of experienced and qualified staff to walk with them on their journey. We know teaching is an efficient occupation. As each cadet embarks on the university journey, particularly in Covid times, much of their learning can be primarily online or via Zoom, increasing feelings of isolation and lack of support. The Insight sessions allow them to come together and support each other and share thoughts with staff. These sessions also offer the cadets further opportunities to learn and grow by the gradual release model. It allows the students to ask questions explore further learning through tutorials, gain academic support for study and reflect on their experiences and growth as trainee teachers. These sessions are times of collaboration and mutual emotional support, a time to ask questions and express ideas in a safe environment.
- D) Fostering a good **relationship with the university and schools**, quality induction practices and support networks can benefit students. In short, students need to have an efficient idea of where they are going, how to find

resources needed and who to go to for academic help during their learning is paramount. Once again, the Clinical Teaching Model can help build the bridge between the university and a career in teaching in convenient ways. This model is constructive if there is a liaison person for the university itself involved. They can be a resource for practical advice and help students navigate their way through their studies. For example, generalised help in how to read assessment tasks and rubrics, what a literature review looks like, or group discussions have been ways to support the success of the cadet teachers, particularly in areas where students feel less confident. From a practical point of view, school principals can be connected to high-quality cadet teachers and view them as potential employees.

8. How can Teaching Performance Assessment arrangements to be strengthened to ensure graduate teachers are well-prepared for the classroom?

In our experience, a reflective approach to teaching ensures growth and effectiveness in choosing the best activities to enhance students' learning. Trainee or cadet teachers have opportunities to become reflective educators. This reflection can happen in several ways; mentor feedback, self-reflective tools, peer feedback and quality assessment of their performance at specific training points would benefit. As the trainee teachers progress through their course, they must become increasingly aware of the expectation of the teaching standards and set goals towards achieving these.

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

Weekly, in-school immersion opportunities allow cadets to be integrated into the school thoroughly. They become part of the staff and get to know the rhythms and complexities of school life. They gain insight into the curriculum, timetables, duties and extra-curricula activities. It can also provide them opportunities to take part in professional development days or staff meetings and equip them with a direct insight into the nature of school life.

10. Can ITE providers play a stronger role in ongoing professional development and support of teachers?

Following initial teacher training, effective and quality support of early career teachers is imperative. As they grow in knowledge and learn to balance and implement effective teacher practices, almost all new teachers need the help of a critical friend/mentor, at least in the early stages of their career. Despite the support they may have already experienced in their training, taking on a whole class load brings

new challenges. They become more reliant on their professional judgement in the minute-to-minute activities. Ongoing school and system support can most effectively lighten their load and help them gain the necessary skills and confidence to enjoy and value their contribution to education.