



THE UNIVERSITY OF
SYDNEY

Debra Hayes

Head of School, Sydney School of Education and Social Work
Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences

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Ms Lisa Paul AO PSM
Chair

Quality Initial Teacher Education Review Expert Panel
By email, ITEReview@dese.gov.au and submitted online

Dear Ms Paul,

The Sydney School of Education and Social Work (SSESW) welcomes the clear support by the Minister for Education and Youth, the Hon Alan Tudge MP, for the 2019 *Alice Springs (Mparntwe) Education Declaration*, and its ambition for 'a world class education system that encourages and supports every student to be the best they can be, no matter where they live or what kind of learning challenges they may face.'

We look forward to working collaboratively with the Expert Panel and Minister Tudge, and we provide this submission in response to the *Quality Initial Teacher Education Review Discussion Paper* with this intention. We have contributed to the submissions from Universities Australia, the Group of Eight Universities, the NSW Council of Deans of Education, and the Assessment for Graduate Teaching Consortium. Our submission is intended to complement those made by our peak bodies by emphasising the key issues from the SSESW's perspective.

Recognising that the Discussion Paper seeks to stimulate conversation and the sharing of ideas informed by evidence, expertise and experience, we welcome the opportunity to provide feedback beyond its specific questions, informed by the SSESW's extensive experience as a provider of initial teacher education (ITE) to high-performing students who consistently achieve excellent rates of retention and strong graduate outcomes.

As the Discussion Paper notes, there are many challenges to providing a world-class education system and ITE is a shared responsibility between the Commonwealth, states and territories, education providers and the profession. Minister Tudge has previously highlighted the joint challenges of raising school standards and academic performance. It is not surprising then that the Discussion Paper begins by linking Australia's declining outcomes on the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) to the need to focus on quality teaching to return Australia to the top group of nations.

Building upon the significant reforms arising from the Teacher Education Ministerial Advisory Group (TEMAG) report of 2015, we argue that good evidence and an ongoing shared commitment to make genuine, sustainable change are the keys to identifying the problems that are holding Australia back from achieving our shared vision.

There is a growing body of evidence that explains why Australian school students' academic performance has declined, including a mounting expert consensus arising from the array of official reports, task forces, committees and working groups that have been looking at what has happened and what can be done. Below we outline some of these points of consensus that deserve the Expert Panel's consideration, before addressing briefly the two key questions that form the scope of the Review: how best to attract and select high-quality candidates into ITE and how best to prepare them to become effective teachers?

Sydney School of Education and Social Work
Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences
Rm 340, Education Building (A35)
The University of Sydney
NSW 2006 Australia

T +61 2 9351 2422
E ssesw.hos@sydney.edu.au
sydney.edu.au

ABN 15 211 513 464
CRICOS 00026A



- **Prioritise testing to improve education rather than improve test scores**
When used for the purpose of improving education, testing provides useful timely feedback to teachers to improve learning. When used to improve test performance on measures used to rank schools, however, there is strong evidence that it constrains the practices of teachers and narrows the curriculum, even when this is an unintended consequence (Hardy, 2015; Comber, 2015). Although the stated purpose of the National Assessment Plan - Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN) is to lift school standards, when John Polesel and colleagues (2014) conducted a major study of over 8,000 educators, they found that, according to participants, the most cited purpose of NAPLAN was as a school ranking tool.
- **Get the best out of teachers by supporting rich pedagogical repertoires**
During the pandemic, teachers have demonstrated their capacity to adapt quickly and comprehensively to the challenges of supporting students to learn at home. We need to support them to tap this creativity and professionalism, which is not supported by standardising teachers' work and requiring them to adopt what has been shown to work elsewhere. Within a year of NAPLAN being introduced, Barbara Comber (2012) witnessed substantial changes in practice in her case study school, such as excluding students from testing to maintain the school's results and jettisoning established successful practices and curriculum areas to prepare students for the format and expectations of tests.
- **Share the benefits of schooling**
Too many Australian students are still failing to thrive at school. We must not forget that at the heart of schooling is learning, and that learning should be enjoyable, compelling, and challenging. Over the same period in which Australia's PISA achievement has dropped, the degree to which students report a sense of belonging at school has also dropped from 88 per cent in 2003 to 68 per cent in 2018. As the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) explains, school belonging matters because 'it is only when students are physically present, and are mentally ready to learn, that they can make the most of the opportunities schools provide' (OECD, 2017, p 30).
- **Ensure more young people complete school**
Too many young people leave school early and there is increasing evidence that this is happening because it is in the interests of schools, not in the interests of students for whom a different kind of provision, if available, might work better. In Australia, there is no national database to track school exclusion, and states have different policies. Research conducted by Linda Graham (2018) in the state of Queensland, however, reports that for the 12-year period 2006–17 inclusive, enrolment cancellations increased by 320 per cent and suspensions increased by 110 per cent.

We provide the following feedback regarding the two key themes outlined in the Discussion Paper.

- **Attracting and selecting high-quality candidates into the teaching profession**
To attract more high-performing students to the teaching profession, including from under-represented groups, we urge the Expert Panel to consider recommending that the Australian Government implement and fund an ongoing national campaign to promote teaching as a profession, especially in disciplines and communities experiencing persistent teacher shortages.

There is evidence suggesting significant opportunity costs exist for people already in the workforce who may be interested in seeking a career change to teaching (i.e., lost income while studying), and that the likelihood of people being deterred from making the switch increases with age (Commonwealth Productivity Commission, 2017). These concerns could be addressed in several ways, for example:

- By exploring and encouraging through policy and funding incentives, changes to the delivery time and structure of existing Master of Teaching programs, while still maintaining the content, quality and learning outcomes of the programs. The current two-year MTeach program could be completed



to the same standard in 12-15 months by adopting intensive teaching strategies within trimesters or even within four terms in one year. This would enable career changers to complete their degree in a shorter time, thus reducing the loss of income while retraining.

- A compressed MTeach program could be complemented with paid Professional Experience internships, thus further reducing the amount of time a potential career changer would be without income. Models of how these paid placements could be explored, include, for example: two initial teacher education students could share one full-time Professional Experience internship (i.e., 0.5 of a position each) thus covering a full-time position within a school. This approach would provide teacher education students with authentic teaching experiences under the supervision of school-based educators. Critically, it would still allow for supportive university-based teaching and learning to continue during the remaining 0.5 of the time.
- Formally recognising a career changer's related professional experience and knowledge could assist with attracting high-quality candidates into the teaching profession. This recognition of prior learning could also enable tailored programs to be developed and consequently enable the fast-tracking of suitable applicants through MTeach programs. For suitable candidates, intensive practical ITE programs, potentially modelled on the approach the legal profession has taken through the Colleges of Law, could be considered for development in partnership between universities and the public, private and independent school systems.
- To attract a more diverse cohort of candidates into both undergraduate and postgraduate ITE programs, we recommend a strong and continuing media campaign and financial incentives. We also support early identification of these potential candidates so that they may be provided with targeted assistance to support their enrolment, retention, and success.

We acknowledge that these types of changes would require additional funding and resourcing for schools, universities, tertiary mentors, supervising teachers and initial teacher education students.

- **Preparing initial teacher education students to be effective teachers**

The recent introduction of Teaching Performance Assessments (TPAs) into ITE programs in Australia has enabled students to produce evidence of their teaching effectiveness at point of graduation. A major flaw in some Australian TPAs, however, is a lack of means by which they can be compared to increase confidence in the comparability of their passing standards. To ensure that TPAs continue to evolve, cross-consortia moderation needs to be introduced to support their ongoing validity and reliability.

Appropriately introduced TPAs have also enabled stronger school/university partnerships. For example, at the University of Sydney, TPA marking moderation activities have involved supervising teachers, practicum co-ordinators and school leaders (who have all had experience with the TPAs during Professional Experience placements). This model is currently being extended through trial arrangements with the NSW Department of Education to have school-based educators seconded to teach and support ITE students through their internship units. This approach not only strengthens relationships with school partners but adds to the richness of the assessment moderation. In addition, the approach contributes to the school-based educators' professional learning. Such arrangements should be explored further.

Formally expanding similar school/university partnerships post-graduation could also assist ITE students as they transition into and through various stages of their teaching career (i.e., proficient, highly accomplished and lead teacher). These induction and professional development processes should be co-designed by schools, universities and other key stakeholders to ensure a collaborative, valid and viable approach to teacher education is implemented. This approach could also assist in fostering and supporting quality ITE research, which could be used to underpin future policy making. This style of induction, continual collective professional learning and evidence-based policy development are characteristics of strong and coherent education systems (Darling Hammond, 2017).



We also believe there is potential for school/university ITE delivery partners to benefit from exploring the successful aspects of other profession/university partnership models. For example, the clinical education and deep research partnership models used to educate and train doctors, dentists, nurses and other health professionals may provide learnings that can be applied to improve Australia's system of ITE. Building on the strong progress we have made strengthening our partnerships with schools around the TPAs, we are currently investigating options for joint appointments of the type common in the health professions and other ways to recognise and reward school leaders and educators committed to partnering with us to produce the next generation of ITE professionals.

In conclusion, we appreciate the briefings and consultation sessions that you and panel members have provided to date, and we wish you well in completing the important and complex task of summarising and assessing multiple contributions to the Review.

Yours sincerely

Dr Debra Hayes
Head of School, Professor, Education & Equity
Sydney School of Education and Social Work
Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences

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