



Quality Initial Teacher Education Review

July 2021

Introduction

The Queensland Catholic Education Commission (QCEC) provides this submission to the *Quality Initial Teacher Education Review* to inform the Expert Panel's (leading the review) consideration of reforms to initial teacher education and continue to raise the quality of teacher education in Australia, the preparedness of graduates to teach and improve student outcomes.

QCEC is the peak strategic body with state-wide responsibilities for Catholic schooling in Queensland. This submission is provided on behalf of the five Diocesan Catholic school authorities and 17 Religious Institutes and other incorporated bodies which, between them, operate a total of 309 Catholic schools that educate more than 156,000 students in Queensland.

Background

In April 2021 the Hon Alan Tudge MP, Australian Government Minister for Education and Youth, launched the Quality Initial Teacher Education Review (the QITE Review) with the announcement of the [Terms of Reference](#) and an Expert Panel. The review acknowledges that quality teaching is the greatest in-school influence on student outcomes. It is important to ensure that the expertise, experience and skill of teachers in the classroom are supported by quality Initial Teacher Education (ITE), which plays an integral role in selecting and training the future teacher workforce. The QITE Review acknowledges the significant progress that has been made to date in ITE with the goal of ensuring that graduate teachers start their teaching career with the necessary knowledge, skills and dispositions to be successful teachers in any Australian school.

The purpose of the Review is to inform ITE reforms to continue to improve capacity to attract high-quality candidates into teaching and equip them to become highly effective teachers. To do this, two key themes are addressed in the [Discussion Paper](#) which include:

- Part A: Attracting and selecting high-quality candidates into the teaching profession
- Part B: Preparing ITE students to be effective teachers

This submission responds to the key themes outlined in the Discussion Paper.

Consultation

QCEC has developed this response to the QITE Review in consultation with the 22 Queensland Catholic School Authorities (CSAs).

Issues

As noted in the QITE Review Discussion Paper, much work has been done since the 2014 Teacher Education Ministerial Advisory Group (TEMAG) Review to improve the preparation of pre-service teachers in ITE programs. The Discussion Paper importantly acknowledges the significant work that has been done and recognises that the full impact of previous reforms and reviews will take time to be seen. For this reason, QCEC recommends that an independent evaluation of the impact of the TEMAG reforms should be undertaken to form a foundation for future actions.

QCEC strongly advocates that any strategy designed to support the teaching profession needs to incorporate both improvements to ITE programs with ensuring ongoing professional learning to already-trained teachers. The role of ITE is important to ensure that high-quality teachers are attracted, trained appropriately, given regular and varied exposure to different school environments within their training, and supported upon graduation as they enter the teaching workforce. However, while ITE is important, it is vital to ensure that support remains and is increased for qualified teachers through the provision of ongoing professional learning to continually increase the expertise, skills and knowledge of the current workforce.

Part A: Attracting high-quality candidates into ITE matters

1. Attracting high-quality candidates into ITE matters

All CSAs identify that more needs to be done to attract young high-achievers and career changers to the teaching profession. In fact, many identify that the foundation for attracting high achievers should commence within students' secondary school education, where students should have the opportunity to learn about and consider the benefits of undertaking a career in teaching. A career in teaching should be promoted as a rewarding, worthwhile and respected profession. As identified in the *Looking to the Future: Report of the Review of Senior Secondary Pathways into work, further education and training*¹ parents and families have the greatest influence on students' career-related decisions. QCEC considers that the National Careers Institute which provides careers advice for students and families could play a key role promoting the benefits of teaching careers and help improve the perception of the profession. In schools, teachers and careers advisors could help encourage high achievers to choose teaching as their future profession by sharing positive experiences of their own careers and the benefits of working in schools.

Some CSAs have identified that they consider there has been a shift in the public narrative around the teaching profession towards one of greater respect and appreciation towards schools and teachers as a result of teachers' dynamic response to the disruption caused by COVID-19. COVID-19 highlighted the essential nature of the teaching profession and the rapid movement to online learning demonstrated the profession's expertise, flexibility and resilience. This shift provides a solid platform on which to build and enhance the esteem in which the broader public views the profession and influence the career choices of high achievers and career changers.

CSAs identified the following key factors affecting high achievers and career changers choosing teaching as a career path:

- the perception of the status of the profession
- the remuneration of teaching versus other professions
- the variety of challenging issues facing teachers both within and beyond the classroom including family issues, behaviour, child protection and safety
- the length and inflexibility of ITE courses

For career-changers in particular, the requirements of extended unpaid practicum placements throughout ITE degrees which inhibit student's ability to maintain other paid work make ITE courses unsustainable for many. This represents a significant challenge because practicum placements are an essential element of ITE courses and in fact our CSAs consistently identified the need for ITE students to spend more time in the classroom throughout their ITE degrees. To achieve this, CSAs recommended that ITE courses need to involve a form of paid internship/cadetship, whereby ITE students can gain experience in the classroom and ongoing mentorship from an expert teacher while also receiving financial support.

The option of paid internships would motivate both career changers and young high achievers to choose ITE courses.

While providers such as Teach for Australia have run initiatives designed to offer alternative entries into teaching, these programs have received mixed responses and further work would need to be undertaken to build on the strengths of these models and address challenges from them. Additionally, programs that provide new and diverse opportunities for certain jurisdictions (such as the *Future Leaders Program* by Teach For Australia in rural and remote areas) need to be made available for teachers in all jurisdictions.

Some additional practical suggestions include:

- providing scholarships and financial support
- short term (i.e. day or week) placement opportunities prior to course commencement, so that persons considering ITE courses can gain greater insight into the demands of the profession before undertaking ITE study
- guaranteed employment following successful course completion.

2. ITE program completions and entry into a teaching career

The QITE Review Discussion Paper provides evidence of declining completion rates for ITE undergraduate degree students overall and a significant variance in the completion rate for students depending on the Higher Education Provider. Without a system for recording why pre-service teachers do not complete their teacher training or commence a teaching career, it is not possible to accurately identify why completion rates are low for some providers and declining overall.

The low completion rates indicated in the data may be due to a lack of exposure for ITE students to classroom environments earlier in their degrees. Many ITE students may not complete a practicum placement within a school until well into their studies and the experience may be overwhelming or not what the pre-service teacher expected. Better completion rates could be achieved by exposing ITE students to classroom environments earlier in their ITE degree and gradually building up to the practicum placements where ITE students having increasing responsibility for managing a class(es). This is particularly important for ITE students studying externally, who may not receive the same degree of informal preparation for school environments or support as those studying via an internal mode of attendance.

QCEC strongly asserts it is important to ensure that any increase in the amount of classroom experience within ITE degrees should not result in an extension to the overall length of the ITE program. Further research is needed to understand how the length of practicum placements within the current programs impact the quality of ITE courses, as minimal evidence exists for the current mandatory placement lengths. Indeed, there is already variation in the length of mandatory placements and little evidence as to the impact of placement length on teaching quality. Changes to the current arrangements need to be underpinned by evidence, to ensure that the balance between the theoretical and practical components of the course provide the best preparation of pre-service teachers for classroom contexts.

While completing their practicum placements, ITE providers should ensure pre-service teachers are partnered with an expert supervisor who is able to give them explicit, direct and personalised feedback. Some CSAs highlighted that often an absence of sufficient expert supervising teachers results in pre-service teachers completing practicum placements with mentors who are inexperienced, who do not hold the required skills or interest in mentoring the pre-service teacher, or who do not demonstrate excellent teaching practices themselves in order to model them to the pre-service teacher. A practicum placement experience with a mentor who models best practice and provides support is critical to ITE students receiving an enriching practicum experience.

Some CSAs suggested that entrance into a teaching career could be well supported by a paid internship to assist in the transition from university study to full-time employment. An internship could allow for ongoing mentorship from an expert teacher, support with the “non-teaching” elements of the job (i.e. communication with parents), and a mandated maximum teaching load.

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

The QITE Review Discussion Paper points out that there is no national model of teacher supply and demand. QCEC and CSAs support the development of a national model to address teacher supply which would give consideration to teacher supply and demand issues across all subjects, levels of schooling and regions including metropolitan, rural and remote. All CSAs with remote and rural schools indicated that they had experienced teacher shortages and difficulties in filling positions. Moreover, they indicated that it is equally difficult to secure early career teachers as it is experienced teachers in these communities. This is a national issue, and one that needs cooperation and long-term planning involving governments, universities, education systems and employing authorities.

Several CSAs have their own incentive schemes to attract teachers to rural and remote schools to combat some teacher supply issues. These include:

- i. Cairns Diocese has partnered with Australian Catholic University, James Cook University and Central Queensland University to offer scholarships to support pre-service teachers with accommodation assistance and living expenses while completing their practicum placements. The initiative is part of Cairns Catholic Education's commitment to attract, develop and retain graduate teachers at schools in the region.
- ii. Toowoomba Diocese offers teachers additional incentives to work in remote and rural schools. Incentives include:
 - A lump sum retention benefit (currently \$6,000) paid upon the completion of the initial three years of service (remote schools only)
 - Weekly accommodation allowance depending on location ranging from \$107 to \$209 per week (rural and remote schools)
 - Paid relocation, storage and packing (rural and remote schools)
 - Additional leave entitlements and paid return airfares for teachers (and immediate family members residing with them) each year (remote schools only).
- iii. Townsville Diocese offers incentive payments and allowances (ranging from \$1,500 to \$9,750 per year); as well as additional leave days, relocation benefits, accommodation assistance, graduate teacher start up assistance (which covers the first five weeks of rent for a beginning teacher), air-conditioning partial reimbursement, study assistance and priority transfers for teachers in remote areas.

CSAs report that these incentives have assisted in attracting teachers to rural and remote schools, however ongoing work is needed to ensure the supply of teachers matches the demand across regions and learning areas. It was also noted that increasing proportions of teachers are not seeking ongoing teaching positions, given the demands for planning, assessing and reporting. CSAs reported that they have greater success filling positions in rural and remote schools by offering casual/relief work or short-term contracts rather than permanency. While this can address an immediate need, it is detrimental to the school and the students themselves, as it undermines continuity for students or schools (including in leadership positions) and places an increased burden on permanent teachers to undertake the required long term curriculum planning and program development.

A key factor impacting schools' abilities to employ teachers within their correct teaching areas is the availability of teachers qualified in the needed Learning Areas when recruiting. This is again a planning issue where nationally a greater collaborative effort is required to more effectively match supply with demand at a learning area level. To assist this planning and to understand the supply and demand issues in certain Learning Areas, terminology should be used carefully to avoid assumptions with how schools approach the organisation of their curriculum. Teachers train in Science, Mathematics or Technologies (in Secondary) or in all Learning Areas as Primary teachers. Schools may choose to organise their curriculum in diverse ways including multi-discipline or cross-discipline approaches. Therefore, the QITE Review should be mindful of the use of terminology in this area to ensure clear and accurate evidence is collected to support the supply of teachers in areas needed most and to more clearly identify and understand the many nuances around supply issues and concerns regarding 'out-of-field' teaching.

While recognising that there are issues with supply in some areas and in some subjects and Learning Areas, it is vital that any measures undertaken to increase the number of teaching graduates do not diminish the quality of teacher graduates. Quality should not be compromised for quantity. There is strong evidence that teachers with a low level of teaching quality on entry to the profession remain at a low level of quality despite increasing years of experience. Any reduction in quality of teacher graduates therefore has a long-term impact on students and schools, as the majority of teachers remain in the profession for many decades.

Part B: Preparing ITE students to be effective teachers

4. Are graduate teachers ready for the classroom?

While CSAs generally recognise that graduate teachers are entering the workforce with sufficient discipline knowledge, more needs to be done to prepare the pedagogical skills of graduate teachers.

CSAs indicated that preservice teachers need greater capacity to differentiate the learning effectively. To do this ITE providers need to shift the focus within teaching degrees from “what” to teach (content) to “how” students learn. This is relevant in terms of teaching students with diverse needs as well as teaching diverse student cohorts. It is important for pre-service teachers to be aware of the diversity that can be represented within a classroom including the impact of teaching students in Out-of-Home Care; with refugee status; who identify as LGBTIQ; from diverse cultural backgrounds; Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students; students from rural and remote areas; gifted students and students with disabilities. This understanding requires experiencing first-hand the diversity within a classroom in addition to strong foundational theoretical understanding of catering for diversity. Accordingly, ITE students would benefit from more opportunities for diverse classroom placements.

A factor that compounds the preparedness of graduates to be effective teachers is that many ITE providers send students to schools for their practicum placements at the end of each school term when assessment is taking place. ITE students are rarely in a school from the beginning of a term to establish base line data on students in order to more effectively determine the impact of their teaching, to see or implement the initial planning for curriculum delivery, relationship development and classroom management. Therefore, ITE providers need to ensure that pre-service teachers receive an increase in number and variety (timing and location) of classroom placements.

Most CSAs identified that the Australian Professional Standards for Teachers (Teacher Standards) are fit for purpose in identifying the key skills and knowledge that pre-service teachers need to be ready for the classroom. When understood as a continuum that describes the growth required to transition between Graduate and Proficient teacher status, they can aptly provide clear guidelines and expectations around quality teaching and learning. The Teacher Standards are also useful as a framework for those who support pre-service and Early Career teachers, as they provide structure and consistency for goal setting, feedback, and reflection conversations.

We note that the use of the Teacher Standards varies between schools. While some schools use the Teacher Standards to underpin professional conversations and embed them as part of the professional practice and growth throughout a teacher’s career, other schools only use them to support processes at a specific point in time, such as transitioning from Provisional to Full teacher registration. More work is needed in this area, and it would be helpful for ITE providers to strengthen the understanding of the ongoing role of the Teacher Standards throughout a teacher’s career within their programs.

Several CSAs identified that supervising teachers have experienced difficulties and a lack of support from ITE providers when they identify that a pre-service teacher is not sufficiently meeting the Teacher Standards to pass their practicum placements. These situations demonstrate additional need for both rigour and consistency across ITE providers and schools to ensure a shared understanding of the Teacher Standards and a willingness to offer support where a student is unable to demonstrate the appropriate professional standards. Importantly, teacher quality must not be compromised by a lack of willingness by ITE providers and/or schools to delay student progress until the student does meet the standards.

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

All CSAs highlighted the need for graduate teachers to receive ongoing support throughout their early career stages. Many highlighted that this should be in the form of mentoring from an expert teacher, goal planning meetings and reviews focused on the Teacher Standards and, where possible, an internship or cadetship at the end of their teaching qualification to support the transition from pre-service teacher into early career teaching.

While experiences of the role of Highly Accomplished or Lead Teacher (HALT) Certified teachers in supporting the next generation of teachers varied across CSAs, many highlighted that HALT teachers could be excellent mentors. Additionally, taking on a supervisory or mentoring role could assist in addressing numerous aspects of the Highly Accomplished Career Stage descriptors for those aspiring to HALT certification. However, at this stage there are not enough HALT certified teachers or HALT aspirants to play a significant role in supporting pre-service teachers. Nevertheless, it is timely to consider the role of HALTs in supporting ITE students and early years teachers, recognising that the role could take many different forms and draw on a variety of strategies which would ameliorate any undue impact on the workload of HALTs.

It is also recognised that increasing demands on expert teachers to provide support for early career teachers presents challenges particularly with respect to managing competing demands on available time. While several CSAs indicated that the support of early career teachers should remain the responsibility of employing authorities rather than ITE providers, further consideration could be given to the potential for ITE providers to partner with schools to support early career teachers upon graduation.

Conclusion

In summary, QCEC recognises the significant work that has been done through previous reviews and reforms of ITE programs to support improvements in the quality of teaching in Australia and student outcomes. It is imperative that any future reforms be built on an independent evaluation of the success of previous reforms and evidence from current research, to support both ITE students and the already-qualified teaching workforce. ITE courses, including practicum placements, need evidence-based review to ensure graduating teachers receive sufficient preparation through their ITE course to respond to the diversity of students, schools and communities. As well as improving ITE programs and continuing teacher professional learning, further work needs to be done in strengthening support for early career teachers to assist them in navigating the transition into the teaching profession.

Should you wish to discuss any aspect of this submission, please contact Hannah Orchard, Education Officer at hannaho@qcec.catholic.edu.au.

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ⁱ Council of Australian Governments Education Council (2020) Looking to the Future – Report of the review of senior secondary pathways into work further education and training, June 2020 <https://www.dese.gov.au/quality-schools-package/resources/looking-future-report-review-senior-secondary-pathways-work-further-education-and-training>