

Submission to the Quality ITE Review 2021

Focus – Initial teacher education to contain compulsory gifted education component to optimise educational outcomes for gifted students

From: Tasmanian Association of the Gifted (TAG)

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In this submission, the term gifted is used to describe a student's potential (i.e. gifts), and talent describes the exercising of those gifts as skill proficiency and high achievements (Gagné, 1991, 2004, 2008, 2009).

1 Tasmanian Association for the Gifted

1.1 Who are we?

The Tasmanian Association for the Gifted (TAG) is a voluntary, non-profit organisation of parents, teachers, psychologists and professional educators who are committed to improving educational outcomes for gifted children in Tasmania. Our key roles include:

- advocacy and lobbying for improved legislation and education for gifted children;
- the provision of information to parent and teachers;
- networking opportunities;
- professional development for teachers; and
- activities for gifted children (e.g. lego robotics programs).

1.2 Our goals

The Quality Initial Teacher Education (ITE) review's opening statement - *"Every child, regardless of circumstance, has the right to a quality education to help them be the best they can be"* - is the central vision of TAG and underpins the advocacy and lobbying we have undertaken at both state and national levels for several decades.

All students, including those who are gifted and talented, need to have learning experiences that they find engaging and challenging. Engaging and challenging gifted and talented learners can only be achieved by educating and supporting teachers in developing the necessary knowledge and skills during their training, and subsequent professional development to identify, measure, support, engage and nurture gifted learners. TAG's mission is reflected in the Alice Springs (Mparntwe) Education Declaration (Council of Australian Governments Education Council, 2019).

1.3 Our work

TAG hosts regular live online information sessions with specialists in the field of gifted education for educators and parents covering topics such as gifted learner profiles, differentiation, acceleration, ability grouping, underachieving, early entry, twice exceptionality and friendship considerations for gifted children. Since early 2020, our advocacy and information sessions for parents and professional development sessions for teachers have built a national following.

Before COVID, our focus audience was predominantly Tasmanian, although we have regularly lobbied at the federal level for many decades. Before 2020, TAG ran biennial conferences and regular information sessions to support and inform parents, teachers and professional educators on gifted issues, practices and recent research. We look forward to resuming those events in the future.

2 Gifted and talented learners

2.1 Definitions

The Australian Curriculum (Australian Curriculum Assessment and Reporting Authority, 2016) webpage relating to Gifted and Talented students states:

Although a number of different definitions have been proposed over the years, there is no universally accepted definition of students who would be identified as having particular gifts or talents. However, a shared understanding of giftedness is important in order to address their needs. In Australia today, Gagné's (2008) model provides the most generally accepted definition of both giftedness and talent.

Gagné's Differentiated Model of Giftedness and Talent (2008) provides research-based definitions of giftedness and talent that are directly and logically connected to teaching and learning. According to Gagné, gifted students are those whose potential is distinctly above average in one or more of the following domains of human ability:

- *intellectual*
- *creative*
- *social*
- *physical.*

*Talented students are those whose skills are distinctly above average in one or more areas of human performance. Talent emerges from giftedness through a complex developmental process and via a number of influences, including the teaching and learning opportunities. Gagné's model recognises that giftedness is a broad concept that encompasses a range of abilities; it also recognises that giftedness is only potential and that it must go through a transformative process in order to become a talent. As such, **Gagné makes it clear that adequate school support is necessary if students are to develop their gifts or high abilities into talents or high achievements.***

Applying Gagné's research, the term *gifted* describes the possession of untrained superior, natural abilities. A child may be gifted, but their potential may never be realised or achieved if they are not supported, nurtured and engaged by informed, knowledgeable teachers. Gifted children in our schools do not routinely receive the necessary learning opportunities or the engagement and challenges they require to be able to convert giftedness into skills and talents to reach their full potential.

Gifted students often learn faster and in more complex ways than their peers. Some gifted students are very capable just in one area, for example mathematics or music, while others are exceptional across a range of areas. It is possible to have a physical or learning disability, at the same time as being gifted. Inclusion of gifted education into pre-service teacher

education would rectify a huge gap in the professional development of the school workforce, as would ongoing professional development in respect of gifted education.

2.2 The needs of gifted children

The needs of gifted student have long been neglected in our education systems. While much focus is placed on efforts to bridge the gap for those with special needs at the lower end of the academic scale, whether they are there because of environmental or innate factors, only a small fraction of effort and expenditure is allocated to those with special needs at the other end of the scale, where the students are also disadvantaged in terms of opportunities to meet their potential. Personalised learning is a 'must' for all students, including those who are gifted (Gonski et al., 2018).

TAG proposes that significant reforms to ITE are needed to produce teaching graduates with the skills and knowledge to drive positive student outcomes for all children *including* gifted children in Australia. We need to have a strong, considered educational system in each state that is fully committed to:

1. Unlocking and fulfilling the potential of every child;
2. Every child achieving at least a year of growth, every year, throughout their schooling;
3. Providing every child with a pathway to a successful future; and
4. Strengthening support for teaching and excellence in the classroom.

TAG champions the ***Every Learner - Every Day*** philosophy for childhood education, including the often ignored 10% in any class (Gagné, 2013) - the gifted children. Giving a gifted child 1-2 hours of accelerated content (e.g. online) once a week, or extra work after completion of the class/year level work does not meet the needs of gifted learners. A 4-5 year old emerging reader, shouldn't be instructed to complete pre-readers before they can pick up their early chapter book. Completing grade four maths questions (e.g. an 8-9 year old learner with maths proficiencies at 13 year old level) is *not* a requirement of the Australian Curriculum before the child can be given level appropriate extension/enrichment maths problems (e.g. grade 7-8 pre-algebra). We should not be 'teaching' bright, gifted, students to dumb down and underachieve (Merrotsy, 2013), because the teacher "doesn't have time to help them" or to the system they are unseen, unheard, insignificant or unimportant.

TAG agrees that quality teaching is the most significant in-school driver of student outcomes, accounting for up to 30 per cent of the variance in students' achievement. TAG proposes that this could well be even greater for gifted students, when excellent quality, sensitive, gifted education programs and teachers are made available for gifted students. To build such programs, and lock in high end achievements from gifted students, firstly gifted education must become a compulsory requirement in all Australian ITE programs.

3 Terms of Reference

The subsequent discussion of gifted education training for all forms of initial teacher education specifically ties into the following questions raised in the Terms of Reference in the discussion paper:

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

Q1. How can we further encourage high-performing and highly motivated school leavers to enter ITE and choose teaching as a career?

Part B – Preparing ITE students to be effective teachers

Q6. What more can we do to ensure that ITE curriculum is evidence-based and all future teachers are equipped to implement evidence-based teaching practices?

Q7. 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?

Q8. How can Teaching Performance Assessment arrangements be strengthened to ensure graduate teachers are well-prepared for the classroom?

Q9. How can leading teachers, principals and schools play a greater role in supporting the development of ITE students?

Q10. Can ITE providers play a stronger role in ongoing professional development and support of teachers?

4 Discussion of the ITE Review paper

Past experience has taught us all that policies related to ITE should be worded to ensure commitment. The changes you are making need to be mandated (i.e. 'must' comply, rather being directory or discretionary in nature). Mandatory means that there are consequences if the action is not carried out. We know in Tasmania that the *Extended Learning For Gifted Students* procedures are full of directory statements, for example "if....this... this may happen....". But experience shows us that these procedures are not implemented.

4.1 Attracting and retaining high quality teaching students

For the consideration of retaining quality teachers TAG proposes that the Review should specify professional development on issues to do with giftedness as a priority in all teacher education.

Meeting the needs of students is rewarding, and understanding and helping the gifted children in your class could be life changing. If your degree has not prepared you to meet the needs of 10% (likely 2-3 students) in your class you may feel lost, unprepared, incompetent and unable to access the help and resources you need to teach with both confidence and excellence. Teacher training is the critical start point in exposure to skills and research on how to teach a diverse student body. If the teacher training is high quality, focussed and encompassing, the graduates will have exposure, fledgling skills and resilience to differentiate and engage diverse students with the support of a like-minded workforce.

Gifted students can be nurtured to become talented, high performing and highly motivated school leavers – the kind of people you are specifically wanting to attract into a teaching career. Gifted learners can understand learning diversity and may make excellent teachers. Additionally, gifted adults who have had positive learning journeys as children, were regularly exposed to engaging and challenging content, engaged with adult mentors and had understanding teachers are typically successful adults, lifelong learners, open to retraining, diversifying and changing careers. Some of the best teachers we have engaged with were science, IT or engineering professionals before undertaking teacher training.

4.2 Producing effective teachers

The recommendations of the 2001 Senate Report into the Education of Gifted and Talented Children (Commonwealth of Australia, 2001) provide a systematic structure of recommendations to improve pre service teacher training. The hard work of identifying the issues has already been completed and implementing those outcomes will improve the learning outcomes for gifted students and strengthen the knowledge and experience of graduate teachers to manage diversity in the classroom.

Dr. Michelle Banister-Tyrell was a member of the Learning and Teaching team within the School of Education, University of New England. She specialised in gifted and talented pedagogy, with a focus on disadvantaged and under-represented gifted students. Dr. Michelle Banister-Tyrell noted in 2017 that:

Two Senate Inquiries (1988 and 2001) examined the education needs of gifted children and recommended that both pre- and post-service teachers receive compulsory training in gifted education. A national approach is required.

Both Senate inquiries recognised that students who are gifted have unique learning needs which require teachers to have the knowledge to: identify them, implement appropriate teaching strategies and engage them in their learning. This can only occur through teachers being effectively trained.

There are only a few universities that provide gifted education in Australia and even fewer that offer a subject at the undergraduate level. Only three universities provide a compulsory undergraduate subject in gifted education.

Bannister-Tyrrell (2017) added that most of our new teachers leave teacher training lacking essential skills to deliver foundational strategies needed for gifted students.

Despite the clear recommendations of the 2001 Report of the Senate Select Committee (Commonwealth of Australia, 2001), the ongoing lack of commitment to delivering graduate teachers that have specific knowledge and meaningful, practical skills to identify, support and cater for gifted students tells us that teacher training in gifted education needs to be mandated. In Australia, teacher training is mandated for special needs, Indigenous and English as a second language (ESL) students. Significantly, there is no mandated training in gifted education.

The 2001 Report of the Senate Select Committee made a number of recommendations that have still not been implemented in teacher training in most states. TAG request that the ITE review considered the recommendations of the 2001 Report of the Senate Select Committee and clearly and comprehensively mandate gifted education in all teacher education programs. The recommendations relating to improved gifted education for teachers in the 2001 Report of the Senate Select Committee are summarised in Appendix 1, and briefly discussed below.

The Senate Inquiry report (2001) made the following recommendations;

a. Better teacher training is required in gifted education

TAG propose that the ITE Review mandates the inclusion of a significant component of gifted education into all pre-service teacher education and ongoing professional

development for the school workforce. As a minimum, this should include one semester of study that covers the following topics and recent research findings on:

- characteristics and identification of gifted students;
- identification of gifted underachievers, including visual spatial learners and those with dual exceptionalities or asynchronous development;
- social and emotional development of gifted students;
- understanding of the myths versus the facts about gifted students;
- development of attitudes and beliefs that enable the lauding of academic achievements and dispelling our national hobby of cutting down tall poppies; and
- curriculum options for gifted students, including:
 - Grade telescoping;
 - Subject acceleration;
 - Pretesting and subsequent curriculum compacting
 - Multi age groupings;
 - Concurrent enrolment
 - Grade skipping; and
 - Use of mentors.

TAG considers it is critical that pre-service teacher education (and school workforce professional development) needs to include the current research, considerations and the benefits of acceleration, along with best practice guidelines for implementing acceleration as an intervention for gifted students. It is important to ensure that classroom teachers have an accurate understanding about the needs of gifted learners in their classrooms and misinformation can lead to negative educational outcomes (Geake & Gross, 2008). There are many myths about the negative outcomes of acceleration for gifted students (Gifted and Talented Association of Montgomery County, 2010, Feb 24). Research and longitudinal studies by Emeritus Professor Miraca Gross from the University of NSW, GERRIC, on accelerated students has long proven that acceleration has distinct positive social and psychological benefits for gifted learners (Gross et al., 2007; Gross, 1989, 1999, 2006; Gross et al., 2011; Hoekman et al., 1999). All ITE programs need to teach gifted education informed by evidence, expertise and experience.

b. *Ensure that that teachers are able to differentiate the curriculum for gifted children*

Significant adjustments to the educational programs of highly gifted students are necessary to meet their learning needs. Research shows that without challenging learning opportunities, gifted students may not reach their potential and are at risk of becoming bored and disengaged from learning.

Being able to differentiate the curriculum is an essential skill for teacher education so that graduates can meet the range of individual needs of students and TAG believes this needs to be more strongly identified, practiced and assessed within all teacher education programs as a mandated, key skill requirement for teaching gifted students. In being able to differentiate the curriculum effectively, a classroom teacher's job is potentially made easier by being able to address not only the range of levels of learning but the range of learning styles and preferences within the classroom,

potentially better engaging the entire range of students and understanding the individual learning needs of all children *including* gifted children.

c. Expand national reporting framework for school education to focus on not only minimum benchmarks but also high achievement targets for gifted children

TAG propose that ITE review mandates that teacher training must educate the pre-service teachers in relation setting high goals for gifted students with effective assessment and reporting practices. Particular emphasis will need to be placed on this in respect of the Australian Curriculum which needs appropriate training in interpretation to use it to best cater for the needs of gifted students.

d. Teachers need to be trained to identify gifted children

Complexity is added to the teaching and support of gifted learners because not all gifted learners overtly display their abilities. ***You cannot understand, identify or support what you cannot see or understand – or what you do not know exists.*** Identifying and understanding gifted students, and their varied, diverse learning profiles and needs, is the first step in learning to support, engage and challenge them.

The pre-service teacher training and subsequent professional development for teachers should pay particular attention to the need to identify gifted children who have disadvantages such as low socio-economic status, rural isolation, physical disability or Indigenous background. Untrained teachers are more likely to identify gifted children of the dominant culture and less likely to notice giftedness among minority or underprivileged groups (Commonwealth of Australia, 2001).

Research (Plunkett & Kronborg, 2007; Rogers, 2007; Rowley, 2012) has clearly shown the benefits for students who are gifted having teachers who have participated in training in gifted education. Lassig (2009) demonstrated a link between training in gifted education and teachers' attitudes towards students who are gifted (high potential), talented (high performing) and gifted education programs.

e. *Negative attitudes and mistaken beliefs about gifted children appear to be widespread*

In order to achieve gifted education skills in pre-service teachers it is critical that our school workforce also understands the difference between substantiated fact and urban mythology with respect to gifted students in order to be able to make informed decisions about appropriate educational opportunities for them.

Graduate teachers will also need work environments where the management and the existing school workforce recognise and support gifted interventions, including acceleration and modifications to curriculum so that these interventions can be implemented efficiently and effectively. There is no benefit teaching new skills if old ways prevent a graduate teacher delivering engaging and challenging content to gifted children who need it.

5 TAG'S proposals to the ITE review

Engaging and challenging gifted and talented learners can only be achieved by supporting and training teachers in the necessary skills during their training, and subsequent professional development to identify, measure, support, engage and nurture gifted learners. TAG propose that significant reforms in ITE are necessary to produce teaching graduates with the skills and knowledge to drive student outcomes for gifted children in Australia.

- ***Approved Initial Teacher Registration Programs must include a compulsory semester of gifted education.*** All newly graduated teachers have at least a semester unit on the special needs of gifted children in their degrees. This should include training in identification of gifted children and the pedagogy of teaching them.
- ***State and Territory education authorities should require, as a condition of employment, that newly graduate teachers have at least a semester unit in the special needs of gifted children in their degrees.***

TAG's recommended list of key gifted education topics to be included in all Australian ITE have been listed previously (see section 4.2 a).

6 Conclusions

Students who are gifted have unique learning needs which require teachers to have the knowledge to identify them, implement appropriate teaching strategies and engage them in their learning. This can only occur through teachers being effectively trained.

TAG request that the Quality Initial Teacher Education Review consider the recommendations of the 2001 Report of the Senate Select Committee and clearly and comprehensively mandate gifted education in all teacher education programs.

TAG proposes that the ITE mandate gifted education for pre-service teacher education for all newly graduated teachers. All teacher training must include at least a semester unit on the special needs of gifted children in their degrees. This should include training in identification of gifted children and the pedagogy of teaching them. The gifted education unit should cover such aspects as:-

- Negative attitudes and mistaken beliefs about gifted children;
- Identifying giftedness, with particular attention and training on identifying gifted children who have disadvantages such as low socio-economic status, rural isolation, physical disability or Indigenous background;
- Setting, tracking and reporting high achievement targets for gifted children;
- Acceleration – understand the research, purpose, benefits and application of complete (grade-skipping) and partial (subject) acceleration along with best practice guidelines for implementing acceleration as an intervention for gifted students; and
- curriculum options for gifted students, including:
 - o Differentiation – current research, practices and implementation;
 - o Curriculum compacting and telescoping;
 - o Ability grouping – understand the benefits, purpose, application and support of ability as a way of meeting the needs of the gifted, whether in selective or comprehensive schools; and

- Acceleration – understand the research, purpose, benefits and application of complete (grade-skipping) and partial (subject) acceleration along with best practice guidelines for implementing acceleration as an intervention for gifted students.

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Appendix

Recommendations from the 2001 report of the Senate Select Committee on the Education of Gifted and Talented Children specifically relating to education of pre-service teachers and professional development to improving the provision of with gifted education in Australia.

In the 1988 Senate inquiry:

the committee recommends to teacher training institutions that a pre-service training course include sufficient information about gifted children to make student teachers aware of the needs of those children and the special identification techniques and teaching strategies which the students teachers will have to use with gifted students (Commonwealth of Australia, 1988, p. 177).

The 2001 inquiry went even further stating that:

The Commonwealth should propose that State and Territory education authorities should require as a condition of employment that newly graduate teachers have at least a semester unit in the special needs of gifted children in their degrees, This should include training on identification of gifted children and the pedagogy of teaching them. (Commonwealth of Australia, 2001, p. xvi).

The 2001 Senate Report made a number of recommendations, many of which have STILL not been implemented. TAG propose that ITE review implement significant changes to teacher education to embed the skills to be able to implement these recommendations immediately that have been identified as necessary to produce teaching graduates with the skills and knowledge to drive student outcomes for gifted and talented children in Australia.

Recommendations made in the 2001 Senate Report include;

- *better teacher training ... essential to ensure that that teachers are able to differentiate the curriculum for gifted children*
- *MCEETYA should expand the national reporting framework for school education to focus on not only minimum benchmarks but also high achievement targets for gifted children.*
- *Negative attitudes and mistaken beliefs about gifted children appear to be widespread.*
- *Teachers need to be trained to identify gifted children. Untrained teachers are more likely to identify as gifted children of the dominant culture and less likely to notice giftedness among minority or underprivileged groups.*

This training should pay particular attention to the need to identify gifted children who have disadvantages such as low socio-economic status, rural isolation, physical disability or Indigenous background.

- **Recommendation 4 (paragraph 3.38)**

Training for teachers to identify giftedness should pay particular attention to the need to identify gifted children who have disadvantages such as low socio-economic status, rural isolation, physical disability or Indigenous background.

There is overwhelming research evidence that appropriate acceleration of gifted students who are socially and emotionally ready usually has highly advantageous outcomes. However, willingness to use acceleration varies considerably from state to state. ...

- **Recommendation 6 (paragraph 3.94)**

The Commonwealth should propose that MCEETYA develop a consistent policy encouraging suitable acceleration for the gifted.

- **Recommendation 14 (paragraph 4.67)**

The Commonwealth should propose to MCEETYA that State and Territory education authorities should require, as a condition of employment, that newly graduated teachers have at least a semester unit on the special needs of gifted children in their degrees. This should include training in identification of gifted children and the pedagogy of teaching them.

- **Recommendation 15 (paragraph 4.72)**

The Commonwealth should specify professional development on issues to do with giftedness as a priority in the Quality Teacher Programme.