

July 16, 2021

Quality Initial Teacher Education Review Secretariat C50MA8
Department of Education, Skills and Employment
GPO Box 9880
Canberra ACT 2601
Australia

Re: Quality Initial Teacher Education Review submission

Current pre-service teachers from the Student Advisory Group for Education Committee at Southern Cross University are pleased to provide the following feedback on the Quality Initial Teacher Education Review.

ATTRACTING AND SELECTING HIGH-QUALITY CANDIDATES INTO THE TEACHING PROFESSION:

Teaching should be a career of choice, a preference of school-leavers and attractive to mid-career professionals. To encourage this, we believe it is necessary to influence not only the school leavers, but the parents of school-leavers. With marketing that promotes teaching as a worthwhile career choice with sound career prospects, job security, and a financially viable future in return for the years of study required. To attract high-quality candidates, the teaching profession must meet the following:

- **Job security:** Providing ongoing secure employment is necessary. We have noticed more teacher jobs being advertised for contracts by term with no casual loading rather than by half-year or calendar year. The current perception among our community is that there is minimal job security and the likeliness of securing permanent employment in metropolitan regions after transitioning from graduate to proficient teacher is slim. It is critical that this perception is changed by increasing the availability of permanent, full-time teacher positions across every Australian state and territory, particularly in metropolitan regions.
- **Recognition:** Providing acknowledgment for the work, such as awards for teaching excellence for individual teachers by school, locality, region, state, and at the national level, is an important step towards making the teaching profession more attractive. We also feel that recognising teacher excellence through financial incentive be attached to achievement at every level. This would encourage high-quality and high-achieving candidates into the profession as they would understand they would receive remuneration for their effort and commitment to the role.
- **Salary:** Providing income commensurate to other degree-qualified careers is vital. Young high-achieving students are heavily influenced by salary when deciding on career paths and teacher salary over the duration of a career falls well below the salary of other professions. Among our committee, we discussed a 27-year-old office worker

with no degree earning the same amount per annum as the graduate teacher's salary. A member of our group at 23 years old was an administrator managing the staff of several real estate offices in Brisbane and Gold Coast with no degree, earning \$80,000 per annum before deciding to change careers. The pay rate for teachers must be increased to encourage people to choose this profession over others.

- **Incentivise mid-career professionals:** There is presently minimal incentive for mid-career professionals to change career paths. For the duration of their study, career professionals would sacrifice high paying income. Then, upon registration, they are placed on the same Band and Step as a 4-year trained high school graduate. Recognising prior learning is important however not necessarily for credit points off initial teacher education which is vital to being able to undertake the task of becoming an effective teacher. We suggest offering financial incentive in the form of higher pay rate to recognise the diverse and valuable experience that years of working in an alternate field and engaging with other career professionals will bring to not only a classroom but wider school community.
- **Career advancement:** Providing and promoting career advancement prospects and pathways for higher achievement in the education industry is crucial in attracting more high-achieving school leavers and mid-career professionals. By creating a clear and structured career path that recognises excellence in teaching, these potential teachers will see opportunity and growth in the career. Increasing the salary of senior, experienced senior, highly accomplished and lead teachers will support this.
- **Public image:** Improving the public image of the teaching profession. There is much news in the general media about the drawbacks of being a teacher:
 - "Parent allegedly stabs teacher with scissors at Byron Bay Public School" (ABC News, 2019).
 - "Everyone's bailing: Australian teachers speak on stress and uncertainty of increasing casual contracts" (The Guardian, 2021).

The viewpoint generally is that teachers must "put up with a lot – overwork, lack of appreciation." We note the negative image of the teaching industry needs to be changed from the top down. Comments from our Prime Minister in April 2020 echoed the consensus of a broader society when he spoke to his daughter's education during the transition to online learning "*because they weren't getting taught at school in that last week, I mean, they were sitting in a room looking at a screen; that's not teaching, that's childminding*". Politicians and people of influence must be seen to hold the teaching profession in high repute.

Discussions of our personal experiences when selecting teaching as a profession saw friends and family responding with comments to the like of "Why would you want to do that?".

A positive media campaign is needed to improve the teaching profession's reputation (after increasing pay and availability of permanent full-time employment opportunities and reducing workloads).

- **Don't exclude passionate teachers:** We would like to see acceptance of teaching degree candidates with lower ATARs who are still able to pass the LANTITE test. People with

high ATARs may be good students but may not necessarily become quality teachers. From our personal experiences, we have seen some students with a low ATAR display evidence of high-quality teaching. We, therefore, recommend against restricting teaching degree admission to only those with high ATARs but suggest that those with lower ATARs are first required to achieve a satisfactory LANTITE result before progressing. From the personal experience of a committee member, it was disappointing to experience LANTITE for an Australian literacy and numeracy test via remote proctoring in August 2019 through an international call centre located in the Philippines. Use of Australian companies and Australian staff is preferred.

CHANGING ADMISSION REQUIREMENTS TO ATTRACT AND SUPPORT MID AND LATE-CAREER PROFESSIONALS FROM OTHER FIELDS TO BECOME QUALITY TEACHERS:

- **Completion rate:** We note that the teaching degree completion rate is circa 52%. We see this as a positive sign as it means students who realise that teaching is not for them leave the profession. Perhaps teaching was not their first choice, or they have the teaching degree as a pathway to enter their preferred course. If they are not passionate about teaching, they are not the quality teachers we want to be teaching future generations.
- **Causes for discontinuation of teaching degree:** In our personal experience of students around us, reasons seem to include health issues (including stress from the overwhelm of having to work and study at the same time), inability to cope financially with at least sixteen weeks of unpaid full-time teaching practicums, and the withdrawal of many on-campus opportunities for learning towards majority online study. We received many student comments that they prefer face-to-face learning in their teaching degree, but many cite difficulties going on campus due to having to work to satisfy their financial obligations.
- **Caution against the quick fix:** We understand that bringing already degree-qualified, mid-career people into teaching may appear to be the 'quick fix' to fill predicted teacher shortages. We note that such professionals will also be looking for sound career prospects, job security, and a financially viable future in return for the study required as mentioned above. They are also likely to encounter the same financial difficulty with unpaid practical experience requirements.
- **Paid internship programs or a pre-registration period:** We note that proposed paid internship programs are a good idea, but we would prefer the paid internship form the fourth year of the ITE program for all ITE students rather than being exclusively offered to those who already have a degree. Offering paid internships would enable a preservice teacher to undertake a duration of immersive experience within a classroom. Their pay rate would be considerably less than other support services required to assist students with additional needs and would certainly improve student outcomes by increasing opportunities for differentiation and one to one support within the classroom. In addition, it would support classroom teachers with existing duties, in turn alleviating burnout and reducing the risk of losing more quality teachers from the profession. Pre-registration training occurs in other professions (e.g. pharmacy), where

students undertake a one-year period of practice under the guidance of a qualified mentor prior to qualifying to become registered in the profession.

- **Expediting evidence-based curriculum and pedagogy education:** We note that a mathematician or engineer, for example, may not necessarily have the attributes to become a quality teacher. We emphasise that mid-career ITE students still require a good grounding in evidence-based curriculum and pedagogy and believe that this should not be rushed. We suggest a minimum of two years of full-time study for those already degree-qualified to refine teaching and pedagogy and suggest a more attractive higher pay rate when gaining their qualification via a master's degree. We feel that less than two years of ITE education will not support those new teachers to become quality teachers.

INCREASING ITE COMPLETION RATES SO THAT QUALITY STUDENTS GRADUATE AND PURSUE CAREERS AS QUALITY TEACHERS

- **Attracting supportive mentor teachers:** We note that the current teacher training system appears to be theory delivery by the university with schools providing practical teacher training in the classroom. This system relies on the mentor teacher being willing and able to provide a safe place for the ITE student to learn teaching skills. In our experience, if the ITE is faced with a mentor teacher who is not willing or cannot support the ITE to learn those skills, the preservice teacher is at risk of withdrawal from the teaching degree. We recommend that quality mentor teacher training be fully funded so there is no cost to mentor teachers and mandated to ensure the best support for ITE students in attaining quality teaching.
- **Face-to-face learning opportunities:** From personal experience, we recommend that universities offer more teaching units on campus because this supports students in building a personal and professional support network. This network of colleagues going through similar experiences throughout the degree can be vital to progressing through to completion.
- **Employ teachers to teach teachers:** From personal experience, we would recommend that universities use mathematics teachers rather than mathematicians to teach ITE students the foundations mathematics unit to inspire new teachers to specialise in mathematics.

INCREASING WORKFORCE SUPPLY IN SUBJECT AREAS OF NEED AND ATTRACTING A MORE DIVERSE COHORT INTO ITE:

- Points noted above apply here also.

SUGGESTIONS TO ENSURE THAT ITE CURRICULUM AND PRACTICES ARE EVIDENCE-BASED

- We agree that our university (Southern Cross University) already does this exceptionally well.

SUGGESTIONS FOR ITE PROVIDERS AND EMPLOYERS TO ENSURE ITE STUDENTS GET THE PRACTICAL EXPERIENCE THEY NEED BEFORE THEY START THEIR TEACHING CAREERS:

- We learn evidence-based theories and would like more opportunities to practice using them. Perhaps schools can work closely with universities to integrate the knowledge of the evidence-based practices into the schools to better supervise the demonstration of those practices.
- We suggest that universities provide a hands-on practical classroom training workshop to ITE students before going out into schools to provide the basic skills and understanding of working in the classroom. We propose that ITE students would gain experience in front-of-room presenting, learning how to stand to not block students from seeing the board, which whiteboard markers to use to make words easier to see and read, to experiment with their voice projection, what words to use or eliminate such as saying 'thank you and not 'please,' how to use body language effectively, how to move well around the room, and what to expect in a typical classroom day from a practical perspective.
- A paid internship with the sole purpose of immersive classroom experience.

STRENGTHENING THE TEACHING PERFORMANCE ASSESSMENT TO ENSURE GRADUATE TEACHERS ARE WELL-PREPARED FOR THE CLASSROOM:

- From the personal experience of one of our committee members, doing the GTPA in the final practicum creates a focus on collecting evidence throughout the practicum rather than allowing the ITE student to concentrate on delivering a high-quality teaching experience, constantly having to stop mid-teaching to capture evidence of the teaching process along the way. This is felt to impact the development of quality teaching.
- We are apprehensive about the interpretation of the word 'strengthening'. We caution against giving ITE students more to do in such a short time frame. It is suggested that universities explicitly teach ITE students to collect GTPA evidence throughout all their practicums as evidence of their teaching practise to form one submission, rather than placing so much importance on their final practicum.
- We suggest that the GTPA in the form of a portfolio of annotated evidence is sufficient to demonstrate quality teaching and suggest that an extra five-thousand-word essay is perhaps superfluous.
- Additionally, we feel the GTPA should not be a graded submission, rather it should be satisfactory / not satisfactory. Placing a weight of 80% on this task increased the focus on this report and took away from engaging meaningfully in the final practicum.

SUGGESTIONS FOR HOW LEADING TEACHERS, PRINCIPALS AND SCHOOLS CAN PLAY A GREATER ROLE IN SUPPORTING THE DEVELOPMENT OF ITE STUDENTS

- We recommend the running of quality mentor sessions with teachers who are considering taking on ITE students. These should be at no cost to the mentor teacher and can be run in school by the principal, by the university, or by an expert mentor teacher in the region or state.

- Schools should compensate mentor teachers while they have ITE students by way of reduced duties, decreased covering of other classes (pick-ups), and increased non-contact time. This will allow more time for mentor teachers to support ITE students to further develop quality teaching skills and practical classroom knowledge.

SUGGESTIONS FOR HOW ITE PROVIDERS CAN PLAY A STRONGER ROLE IN ONGOING PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT AND SUPPORT OF TEACHERS

- We agree that Southern Cross University does this very well as it offers training to local teachers in mentoring ITE students and offers other professional development opportunities to teachers.

In summary, in order to attract and keep quality teachers, and to provide the quality education to our young people that they are entitled to, we must ensure that expertise, experience, skill and commitment are recognised. This can be achieved by providing a nationwide pay review which offers an attractive pay rate commensurate with those in other degree-qualified careers. Job security in the form of widely available ongoing, full-time permanent job opportunities in all states and territories of Australia is vital. Improve the public image of teaching, starting with our leaders. Offering recognition and remuneration for high quality teaching by creating career advancement pathways and significantly increased salaries for these positions. Support teachers within the classroom to eliminate burnout and excess work, which could be solved by incorporating a paid internship into the ITE program.

Yours faithfully,
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on behalf of
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References

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- The Guardian. (2021, July 4). *"Everyone's bailing: Australian teachers speak on stress and uncertainty of increasing casual contracts."* <https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2021/jul/04/everyones-bailing-australian-teachers-speak-on-stress-and-uncertainty-of-increasing-casual-contracts>