

16 July, 2021

Dear Expert Panel Members,

Thank you for the opportunity to share our thoughts on the issues raised in the Quality Initial Teacher Education Review Discussion Paper. We would like to begin by recognizing that the initial four-year cohort prepared under the initiatives recommended by the latest review of Initial Teacher Education (ITE) initiated by TEMAG in 2017 is just completing their program this year. It is thus premature to judge the effectiveness of the changes mandated under that review and determine what future change may be needed. We would also like to remind the Panel that preservice teachers completing their ITE program are registered at the graduate level. Teaching is a profession of life-long learning, and experience and further professional development are required as graduate level teachers transition into proficient teachers. This transition requires multiple stakeholders to provide the support necessary to assist with the development and retention of these graduate level teachers. Specific responses to the individual questions raised in the Discussion Paper are provided below.

### **Attracting and Selecting High-Quality Candidates into the Teaching Profession**

#### *1. What improvements can be made to ITE to encourage high performing school students to choose teaching as a career?*

It is well acknowledged that the pursuit of becoming a teacher for many high performing school students is related to a range of complex factors including: socialization influences (e.g., positive prior teaching and learning experiences and family influences), self-perceptions of teaching ability, intrinsic value (interest and enjoyment of teaching), personal utility value (job security and time for family), social utility value (e.g., enhancing social equity or making a social contribution), task demand (level of expertise required and working conditions), task returns (salary and social status), and value of alternative careers (Watt et al., 2012).

Many of these factors are external to ITE programs and need to be addressed at a State and National level. Policy decisions have important implications for practice.

Suggested improvements include:

- A clear national strategy to shift public perception in relation to the valuing of education and the teaching profession in Australia. This includes more positive and/or balanced messages conveyed through media outlets and increased engagement between educators/teachers and media about teachers' work.
- Making teaching more attractive in terms of careers, salaries, and working conditions (OECD, 2019). Policy levers for making teaching an attractive career typically include: offering competitive salaries that are matched to other tertiary-educated professionals, and improving working conditions when entering the workforce such as reducing class size and understanding teacher workload (e.g., Ingersoll & Merrill, 2011). Such conditions

are recognised as important in other leading educational jurisdictions (Sahlberg, 2021). Highly accomplished and lead teacher status are steps in the positive direction.

- Educating parents and guidance counsellors to institute a change in the advice given to high performing students concerning the selection of teaching as their career choice.

ITE can play a role in tapping into a student's strong commitment to public service and social impacts of teaching (OECD, 2019). It would be argued that this already is present in ITE programs.

Other suggestions include the opportunity to attract high performing secondary students by allowing them early entry into ITE to commence their education degree in Year 12.

Scholarships and bursaries with attachments to post graduate employment would also be strong enticements.

*2. What improvements to admissions and degree requirements, including recognition of prior experience, would better support suitable mid- and late-career professionals from other fields to become teachers?*

High quality teachers require programs with strong entry standards.

Alternate routes through teacher preparation are not always the best pathways. Fast-tracking students may be instigated for the best of intentions but does not necessarily produce better quality teachers (Darling-Hammond, 2000; Feiman-Nemser & Ben-Peretz, 2011; Rowan et al., 2017). Rather, these programs tend to be light on preparation and supervised time in the classroom. With the culturally and linguistically diverse populations in our Australian classrooms, teachers need more preparation, not less, to be successful in their role, as evidenced by the change from the Grad. Dip to a Master's program in teacher preparation (Darling-Hammond, 2000; Feiman-Nemser & Ben-Peretz, 2011; Rowan et al., 2017). Additionally, these alternative pathways tend to be costly, and the retention of these teachers is poor (25% more likely to leave the professional early), making the programs even more costly (e.g., Clark et al., 2017; Glazerman et al., 2006).

The 'teach for' phenomenon, for example, has reconstituted educational provision but not necessarily enhanced educational practice (Crawford-Garrett & Thomas, 2018). Achievement of students in reading, maths, and language was significantly higher for those who were taught by traditionally certified teachers than those in an abbreviated pathway program (Laczko-Kerr & Berliner, 2002). Program length is not necessarily a deterrent. UQ experienced an initial dip in enrolments in the switch from the one year to the two years Master's program. That dip is no longer evident; enrolments have increased across Queensland in both the primary and secondary two-year M.Teach Programs.

Government support such as loan forgiveness for those entering high need areas (in terms of content, geographic location, and/or high need school settings) would be an enticement for suitable mid and late career professionals. With appropriate mentoring once in the schools, these programs have proven successful and cost-effective (e.g., Robert Noyce Teacher Scholarship Program).

*3. How can we improve ITE completion rates so that quality ITE students become quality teachers?*

Often, students who choose to exit an ITE program leave when they self-determine their suitability for a career in teaching. This is the reason why there are early and frequent placements built into the programs so as to provide the preservice teachers with classroom experiences that either solidify their desire to teach or help them realize a different career pathway may be more appropriate. Leaving the pathway toward a teaching profession while in an ITE program is a more positive outcome than: (a) graduating students not suited to the profession; or (b) graduating students who will leave the profession early and need to reskill for different career pathways.

ITE completion rates can be improved through individual support and mentoring for struggling students. Progressing through the program on a part-time basis is also an option. These can also help in retention of under-represented groups and/or first-generation university students (Aruguete & Katrevich, 2017).

Completion and retention seem to be better when entry standards are higher.

*4. How can we improve diversity in the ITE graduate cohort?*

Enhanced diversity in ITE may occur if we support postgraduate programs that can lead to the preparation of a diversity of academics who can act as role models for ITE students (e.g., HDR scholarship programs).

As noted above, it is crucial to provide specific mentorship and support programs and/or to allow students to progress through the ITE program at a slower pace to assist underrepresented students.

Public campaigns highlighting diversity in the profession could assist in diversifying our cohorts as well. Again, targeted scholarships and bursaries with attachments to post graduate employment would also be strong enticements.

*5. What more can be done to address issues with workforce supply in some subject areas and schools?*

As aforesaid, we need to make teaching more attractive in terms of careers, salaries, and working conditions (OECD, 2019). Policy levers for making teaching an attractive career typically include offering competitive salaries that are matched to other tertiary-educated professionals and improving working conditions when entering the workforce such as, reducing class size and understanding teacher workload (e.g., Ingersoll & Merrill, 2011; Sahlberg, 2021). We also need to change the public perception of teaching and have teachers respected as the professionals they are.

Financial incentives (scholarships, loan forgiveness programs and the like) could be made available for high need content areas and for teachers who agree to teach in certain high need schools (including rural/remote) for a specified period of time.

## **Preparing ITE Students to be Effective Teachers**

*6. How can we improve ITE course accreditation arrangements to support a focus on evidence-based teaching practices?*

Accreditation and annual review practices already in place ensure that ITE programs are designed and delivered based on evidence-based teaching practices. ITE courses are underpinned by international best practice that has been researched and proven successful.

What appears to be lacking is the translation of this into school systems. School systems have determined 'best practice' without always ensuring that there is an evidence base for these decisions and strategies. They mandate teachers to teach specific approaches or curriculum despite current research in the field to the contrary. This disempowers and de-professionalises classroom teachers and is a reason some leave the profession. What is required instead is a respect for a research-informed profession that is able to draw upon the research base in education and apply this to their teaching practice (Lingard & Renshaw, 2010).

These system issues are also reflected in education policies which are at times underpinned by a limited evidence-base (e.g., whole language v. phonics and the over-reliance on the flawed National Reading Panel study from 2000; and thinking of things as either or, as in phonics/whole language or inquiry/ didactic—in truth, research shows a combination of methodologies is required and that is what is taught).

*7. How can ITE providers and employers better manage professional experience to ensure graduate teachers are meeting the graduate stage of the Australian Professional Standards for Teachers?*

Currently, it is often difficult to get schools to commit to taking preservice teachers into their buildings to complete field experiences. Some schools limit which universities they partner with while others have limited numbers of teachers willing to take on a supervisory role. It would be helpful if ALL schools would be required to open their doors to all ITE programs and do so at times required by the different programs. This could be achieved through systemic arrangements requiring major education providers/employers/systems (particularly state-based departments of education, but also the respective Independent Schools and Catholic Education Commissions and Dioceses throughout Australia) to provide access to ITE students to all schools.

Additionally, professional experience can vary depending on which teacher is assigned to supervise a preservice teacher. A potential way forward could be mandatory training and professional learning for teachers who have students on professional experience placements. This could be managed by the ITE providers, registration bodies and the employing schools.

Ensuring joint assessment of preservice teachers during their final prac by both the supervising teacher and a knowledgeable facilitator (university liaison person) who has observed the student's teaching practice would help to moderate and remove subjectivity of the final assessment. This could be useful to ensure that graduate standards are being met.

8. *How can Teaching Performance Assessment arrangements be strengthened to ensure graduate teachers are ready for the classroom?*

It is important to recognize that multiple measures are in place to assure quality, job ready graduates from ITE programs. First, all programs are accredited following AITSL standards, and these assessments occur in different stages as well as in conjunction with annual reviews. Second, all preservice teachers are prepared and assessed to meet the graduate teacher standards. Preservice teachers must successfully complete a prescribed number of supervised and assessed days teaching in a diverse range of placements. Aside from meeting university graduation requirements, the preservice teachers must also pass the LANTITE literacy and numeracy exams with a score that places them in the top 30% of the Australian adult population. The TPA is yet another of these measures.

The TPA is a robust assessment and moderation standards in place for the TPA ensure graduates are ready for the classroom. The TPA examines preservice teachers' skills, knowledge, and professional judgment in relation to their engagement with the full teaching cycle.

While this type of assessment is common internationally, in Australia it is still too early to determine the impact it has had on the quality of teacher preparation. It is also important to note that the TPA does not stand alone as an indicator of quality of ITE outcomes but is just one element of a broader suite of educational experiences that ITE students experience within their degree programs that help ensure they are classroom-ready.

It should also be noted that while preservice teachers undertake a program of study to prepare them to teach at certain grade levels and, for secondary, in specific content areas, teacher registration is blanket. A registered teacher can teach at any grade level in any content area. This can lead to less than optimal teaching assignments, impacting student learning.

9. *What greater role could Highly Accomplished and Lead Teachers play in supporting the development of ITE students and new teachers?*

Highly Accomplished and Lead Teachers could assist both in supervision of preservice teachers and mentoring of novice teachers to assist in the transition from pre to inservice teaching. This includes more active roles in ITE in universities, as well as *in situ* in schools and classrooms.

Similar to the model used in Singapore and elsewhere, beginning teachers could start their first year of teaching with a reduced load. These teachers are then partnered with a mentor or more experienced teacher – this could be a Highly Accomplished or Lead Teacher. In Chile, this mentorship by expert teachers is part of the teacher's workload (OECD, 2017). This assists the beginning teachers to begin the journey of progression from the graduate to the proficient stage of the teacher professional standards and enables them to better access and engage with further professional development and support throughout their first year in the profession.

In closing, it must be noted that research into accountability of teacher education programs have concluded that it is insufficient to focus on teacher quality alone:

“Policymakers must acknowledge and address the multiple factors—in addition to teacher quality—that influence student outcomes, including in particular the impact of poverty, family and community resources, school organization and support, and policies that govern housing, health care, jobs, and early childhood services.” (Cochran-Smith et al., 2016, p. 4)

Yours sincerely,



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