

July 2021

The University of Southern Queensland (USQ) welcomes the opportunity to make a submission to the *Quality Initial Teacher Education Review* consultation.

As a foundation member of the Regional Universities Network (RUN), USQ supports the feedback provided by RUN. Additionally, there are a number of points which USQ wishes to emphasise as outlined below.

### **Attracting quality candidates into Initial Teacher Education**

Universities in Australia have undertaken an enormous amount of work over the last six to seven years to implement the recommendations of the TEMAG *Action Now: Classroom Ready Teachers Report* (2014). Given the short timeframe since implementation, it would be useful for the sector if these initiatives were reviewed to assess their effectiveness in achieving their goal of improving the quality of students entering into ITE and the profession.

A number of these activities have focused on the issue of attracting quality graduates, including the implementation of a non-academic entry requirement to assess student 'fit' with the profession. A recent report by the Queensland Council of Deans of Education (Pendergast, et. al, 2021), for example, indicates that most students find this a useful reflective tool for self-assessing whether or not teaching is the profession for them. While the number of students who successfully complete the test is high, there has not been research undertaken to understand if this is because the test is acting as a disincentive to some students who decide not to do it, and not to apply for a place in an ITE program or if there is a positive self-selection of suitable students applying for entry into ITE programs. Additionally, it would be useful to understand the merits and limitations of the various other tests (e.g. LANTITE) that are being used in Australia. This would allow for any modifications to improve this mechanism to be undertaken, consideration to be given to the cost implications for universities of any proposed changes, and a cost-benefit analysis to be undertaken.

A positive outcome of the TEMAG Report is the standardised performance benchmarks that have now been set for all ITE programs across Australia. This allows for an assurance of quality in teacher education programs, while at the same time allowing universities to offer programs that are fit for the region and the workforce needs of their local areas. Again, given the short timeframe since implementation, data on the success or otherwise of these benchmarks is only now beginning to emerge. An analysis of the impact of these reforms would provide further information about whether they have achieved their objectives.

While ATAR is an important indicator of future success, it is not the only indicator. For regional universities such as ours, the ATAR in combination with other indicators (including the non-academic entry test; LANTITE; and prior experience and non-school qualifications) provide a more robust measure of potential success. Including other measures is particularly important for regional universities such as ours which have a higher proportion of mature-aged students. Positive aspects of this mature cohort in regional and remote areas, is that these students have context-specific life experiences,

and they tend to stay in their regions, where there are teacher shortages, both of which are important to the long-term health of the profession and sustainability of regions and regional centres. Multiple entry pathways into ITE programs supports diversity in the profession. The non-academic entry requirement indicates that both disposition and cognition are important for student teachers.

If a greater number of career-changers are to be attracted into the profession, issues such as ATAR as a primary entry requirement needs to be reconsidered. Career changes also face potential loss of income, and this barrier could be reduced through a return to study scheme which might include scholarships and stipends, along with guaranteed permanent employment on graduation.

In relation to improving diversity in the profession, targeted scholarships (similar to other schemes such as the Destination Australia program) to support students from diverse backgrounds would serve as an incentive to attract students into the profession. These could support student fees and study/living expenses and include a guarantee of employment, initially in regional areas or schools that face staff shortages. Scholarships could also be offered to attract students to discipline areas in which there are teacher shortages, however, the system would need to be agile enough to change along with changing workforce needs to prevent moving through cycles of shortage to glut to shortage.

In looking to Finland and Singapore as examples of ITE success, there are a number of contextual factors that the review panel could consider. For example, both have much smaller populations than Australia (approximately 1/5<sup>th</sup>), and in Singapore there is only one provider of ITE; consequently, these systems are able to function in quite different ways (for example, undertaking entry interviews in Singapore). Students in Singapore receive stipends and a guarantee of employment, and in Finland, salaries are high and certain students (such as indigenous students) are provided with additional supports to ensure success.

Finland and Singapore also have societies in which teachers and the profession are held in high esteem, and the salary, conditions and progression pathways are attractive. This is sadly in contrast with much of the political and social/media narrative in Australia about the profession of teaching (Bahr and Ferreira, 2018). A recommendation is that the Government lead a shift in the narrative around the quality of teachers, of schooling and of initial teacher education and actively seek ways in which to enhance the status of the profession. This could include, for example, a media campaign on the rewards of teaching, showcasing innovation and excellence in teaching, highlighting the diversity of staff and students in schools, etc. All of these will allow people to “see themselves” in the profession.

The shift from one-year Graduate Diplomas to two-year graduate entry Masters of Teaching programs acted as a disincentive in some instances. In terms of accelerating teacher education programs, most universities now offer Masters-level ITE programs that can be undertaken in 18 months, as university calendars shift to take full advantage of the whole calendar year. Any further shortening of the time taken to become a qualified teacher needs to take into account the impact on the quality of graduating teachers.

LANTITE is another mechanism to ensure we have quality candidates in ITE courses. Initial university-based data is indicating that approximately 90% of students successfully complete both components of the LANTITE after the first attempt, and 94% after the second attempt. This test should be opened up to allow anyone to undertake it. This would allow prospective teacher education students to know early whether or not they will be able to meet this requirement and, if applicable, make a decision to transition into another program. Many postgraduate ITE students are frustrated that they have obtained a Maths or English undergraduate degree but still have to pay and sit

the test. A review of requirements for sitting the LANTITE would be appreciated by students.

### **Preparing Initial Teacher Education students to be effective teachers**

All ITE programs in Australia are accredited to ensure they meet the AITSL standards, and therefore are already preparing ITE students to be effective teachers. The performance assessment that students must complete is another indicator that ITE is preparing students to be effective teachers. The Graduate Teacher Performance Assessment (GTPA), which USQ is part of, is a rigorous assessment tool. Working in a consortium has allowed for benchmarking between universities to occur which has, anecdotally, also impacted on the quality of assessments and on marking standards and mechanisms. Evidence of impact since implementation is now being gathered in order to assess whether this particular reform initiative has led to enhanced quality assurance and improvement not only in ITE but also in the teaching profession. A review of the TPA tools would provide further information on their effectiveness.

Regarding practicum placements there are two key issues for ITE. The first is the issue of finding enough placements for students. Some jurisdictions, for example, Queensland, are trialling a centralised placement tool which will begin to alleviate some of the problems faced. However, this does not address the issue of how to attract a greater number of practising teachers to take on ITE students. It would be useful if this Review could explore how to ensure that the practising teachers not only understand the importance of supervising students to the future quality of the profession; but are also willing to take on ITE students.

A second issue concerns the quality of placement and the variability of experience for ITE students. USQ provides a system of multiple, shorter placements, in a variety of schools and this alleviates some of the variation in teaching quality that ITE students may be exposed to. Longer placements or placements in one school, while having several benefits, also has some risks. For any such initiatives to succeed, mechanisms will need to be implemented to ensure high-quality, practice-based, learning in context experiences are had by all students.

### **References**

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