A submission to the Teacher Education Expert Panel

Discussion Paper consultation

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Dear Members of the Teacher Education Expert Panel,

On behalf of Alphacrucis University College (AC), I wish to thank the Panel for the Discussion Paper and the opportunity to provide input into the future of teacher education in Australia.

As one of the largest providers of faith-based teacher training, and a dual-sector provider delivering both Higher Education (HE) and Vocational Education (VET) pathways, AC is highly invested in equipping teacher education students with the knowledge, skills and practical experience to ensure that they are classroom ready and set up for success.

AC is now widely known as an innovator in the ITE space, shifting the standard 'retail' model of tertiary, to a school industry / tertiary partnership: 'B2B'. We are the initiator of the now much emulated [Clinical Teaching Schools Hub model](), which commenced in 2018 with St. Philip's Christian College, and is now operating in networks that administer over 100 schools in NSW, Tasmania, QLD, ACT and WA, with hundreds of new teachers moving through its programs. In 2023, the model was also launched in a cluster of NSW State schools in the NSW Riverina. The model orients around strategic partnerships with local clusters of schools (of about 3000 total enrolments) that have gathered together to form a Teaching School. In this model ITE students are involved in schools from the commencement of the program and are supported by school teacher mentors and weekly insight sessions throughout the program: with over 300 days in school, starting from day one of their degree. This model has radically enhanced ITE student retention and the formation of classroom-ready graduates.

In light of this success, we have provided a number of responses to the questions raised in the Discussion Paper based on our experience with this successful model.

Thank you for your important work, and we would be happy to contribute further upon request.

Warm regards

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Reform Area 1: Strengthen ITE programs to deliver effective, classroom ready graduates

Evidence-based teaching practices: Are there other evidence-based practices which should be prioritised in ITE programs?

The areas of evidence-based practice included in the discussion paper highlight some key areas for inclusion in ITE programs and we support the inclusion of these areas in ITE programs. The Alphacrucis ITE programs already include these areas and we continue to develop and strengthen our coverage of these areas as we teach them.

In addition to these areas we would suggest broadening the scope to focus on wellbeing especially in relation to brain development. Currently our courses include a focus on the brain and the relation to well-being and emotion (1) linked to classroom management within the context of creating safe classrooms and best learning practice. These could be included under enabling factors for learning. In addition focussing on the holistic development of the learner through the consideration of developmental stages, theories and learning and how brain theory informs this is important.

However, while we acknowledge that covering core information is important, students also need to be equipped with essential skills that will enable them to reflect on and improve their practice and to engage with new evidence theory as it emerges throughout their teaching career. Embedding and developing these skills throughout the program is important. In addition these skills need to be embedded in the graduate standards.[1]

Amending Accreditation Standards and Procedures: How should the Accreditation Standards and Procedures best be amended to ensure all ITE students learn and can confidently use these practices? Should the Accreditation Standards and Procedures be amended to require TPAs to assess these practices?

NESA and AITSL already specify what should be included in national and NSW courses. Additional requirements could place pressure on programs especially the primary programs such as Master of Teaching Primary which has a range of requirements which leave little room for contextualisation or addition of new units. In the light of this there would need to be

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[1] Christenson, S. L., Reschly, A. L., & Wylie, C. (Eds.). (2012). Handbook of research on student engagement. New York, NY: Springer Science + Business Media.

Clarke, A. Sorgenfrei, M., Mulcahy, J., Davie, P., Friedrich, C. McBride, T. (2021).Adolescent mental health: A systematic review on the effectiveness of school-based interventions. Early Intervention Foundation.

Immordino‑Yang, M. H., & Damasio, A. (2007). We feel, therefore we learn: The relevance of affective and social neuroscience to education. Mind, Brain, and Education, 1(1), 3-10.

Lawson GM, McKenzie ME, Becker KD, Selby L, Hoover SA. The Core Components of Evidence-Based Social Emotional Learning Programs. Prev Sci. 2019 May;20(4):457-467. doi: 10.1007/s11121-018-0953-y. PMID: 30443846; PMCID: PMC6544145.

a streamlining of national and state accreditation requirements so that there are not too many additional requirements and providers have room to be able to offer elective and contextualised units.

Accreditation procedures also need to allow for updates and changes to programs that are not at the review or accreditation stage so that providers can respond in a more timely fashion to feedback and accommodate required program adjustments.

It is acknowledged that TPA's should include a focus on core practices. This is perhaps best monitored through the quality assurance process that the various consortiums engage with.

Curriculum specific content: What steps should be taken to ensure curriculum-specific ITE content embeds the evidence-based practices?

Given that if specific detail around current curriculum is included in programs, then this requires substantial change when curriculums change or new evidence needs to be included.   We would therefore suggest that accreditation requirements are not too prescriptive regarding curriculum and provide space for providers to include board descriptors around this.   We would suggest setting additional processes in place to support more detailed curriculum coverage requirements such as:

- Required professional development sessions for providers where staff (and school partners) which cover the curriculum and contemporary evidence-based theory around learning. NESA already runs sessions such as these for schools of education. Similar sessions that target a wider audience that includes teaching staff would be welcome.
- Set up communities of practice across ITE providers and include schools in these.
- Establish ways of sharing evidence-based practice that are easily accessible for ITE's and teachers.
- Educate NESA panels (and other accrediting authority panels) who review courses to ensure that new courses include evidence-based practice and ensure that the panels are familiar with literature and research in these areas.

Ensuring consistent, robust delivery of evidence-based teaching practices: What changes to the authorising environment are required to ensure consistent application of the Accreditation Standards and Procedures and implementation of core content in ITE programs?

There needs to be consistency across state regulating authority requirements given that many providers work with students and schools across different states. A national approach with state bodies working with the ITE providers to find ways to share information around evidence-based practice within their state (perhaps at a Council of Deans level). If additional requirements are added through regulating authorities then ensure that programs retain quality and consider practical aspects of delivery i.e. there is a tension around providing teaching ready students asap and covering all the requirements in teaching programs.

Reform Area 2: Strengthen the link between performance and funding of initial teacher education

ITE performance measures: Are there additional indicators that should be considered? To what extent should the performance measures form the core part of the evidence requirements in provider's Plans For Demonstrating Impact required in the Accreditation Standards and Procedures?

The four indicators mentioned on p.26 of the report are not all within the locus of control of the provider in terms of outputs. Therefore, using these to measure providers performance could be problematic. For example, Alphacrucis has been allocated CSP's for underrepresented groups but there are more systemic barriers around attracting students who meet the criteria. The lack of secondary schools in some regional areas presents a challenge in drawing cohorts from these areas and encouraging them to stay in their region to study. While the Alphacrucis Clinical Hub Model (see appendix 1) attempts to address this and to work with schools in regional and rural areas these initiatives require broader support such as scholarships and other incentives. It is recommended that careful consideration is given to any criteria that are specified for inclusion in plans for demonstrating impact. Flexibility needs to be allowed for the ITE provider to specify criteria related to their context.

The size of the provider and number of students also needs to be considered when adding requirements. Support for smaller providers to design and implement impact plans would be welcomed.

Public reporting: Should the Australian Teacher Workforce Data collection be the basis for reporting and publicising the performance measures? Are there other approaches for reporting the performance measures?

If results are published then there needs to be comparable measurements so that smaller institutions who do not have similar resources to larger institutions are not overshadowed in this process.

Public transparency: If made publicly available, are these performance measures sufficient to drive quality improvement in ITE?

If performance is going to be measured and made available then:

1) It needs to be ensured that the criteria against which performance is measured is within the locus of control of the provider.
2) Smaller providers are not discriminated against and students in viewing the results select larger providers who have the resources to meet the criteria.

However, most providers would be working within a quality assurance cycle and within their performance plan to ensure that their programs are of high quality. Publicising results is not seen to be a mechanism that would improve their quality in any way. These resources could be better allocated to supporting them to achieve quality in other ways. The notion of 'name and shame' operates on a paradigm whereby trust and good faith is absent: this is not a sustainable paradigm if ITE is to improve. A collaborative approach is needed.

Transition funding to support performance improvement: How could transition funding be used to set higher education providers on a path to improving the quality of their programs?

Transition funding would be a good support, however this funding should be linked to assisting providers actually improve rather than linked to rating criteria.

Excellence pool for higher quality programs: How could a system of reward funding be best designed to support high performing ITE programs and encourage them to increase their enrolments? Are there any risks to such an approach and if so, how should they be addressed?

If linked to the right criteria then this would be a good incentive. Again it would be important to ensure that smaller providers are not overlooked. For example, Alphacrucis has well above average QILT reviews and a high trainee teacher retention rate due to the Clinical Hub Model. However, the model and the University College has had to build the pilot with zero support from Federal Government and no CSP's (having only received a limited and temporary amount for the first time this year).

Students who apply to study with AC therefore often cannot afford our fees and we cannot be their provider of choice, despite the excellence and innovation of the program. This became most evident last year in the Wilcannia-Forbes Teaching Hub where a number of Regionally-located Indigenous trainee teachers were ineligible for scholarships and CSP's and were therefore paying $60,000 for their degree - four times more than students in the large Sydney universities .

AC would therefore recommend that the system for awarding CSP's to providers, including smaller providers, who are achieving well in specific areas is given urgent consideration.

Reform Area 3: Improving the quality of practical experience in teaching

System level agreements: Would establishing more comprehensive system level agreements between school sectors/systems and higher education providers address challenges in the school matching process and deliver more effective placements? How could these agreements complement current localised arrangements?

Alphacrucis UC is widely known for its innovations and leadership in tertiary / School Partnerships. The Alphacrucis Clinical Teaching School Hub model provides an arrangement where the University College enters into an MOU with partner schools so that students are involved with schools in paraprofessional roles (prior to conditional accreditation) and with 'wrap around' support from the commencement of the program. This provider to Teaching School model works well and it would be important that providers continue to have the ability to enter into partnerships with groups of schools who select them as the provider of choice (see Appendix 1 for the Clinical Hub Model case study).

Establishing and sustaining these partnerships, however is far more complex than first appears, and needs to be driven by social capital theory approaches- activating local trust networks. We have become experts in this field across multiple Hubs and Multiple jurisdictions, and so any systemic moves in this direction should seek our pragmatic wisdom.

Given that many providers work across states a national framework around agreements could support their work across states. However, providers need to still be able to work with autonomy and flexibility in terms of setting up more localised agreements.

Centres of excellence: Would encouraging centres of excellence, such as hub schools, support high-quality practical experience? What are the impediments to delivering these centres of excellence?

Centres of excellence are a micro solution to a macro problem. Many good examples of high quality professional experience exist. Finding ways of sharing this information rather than setting up centres of excellence would be considered a more appropriate approach. Siloing schools into good/ not so good, is not a long term solution to education reform.

National frameworks: Would higher education providers, schools and teachers benefit from more specific guidance in delivering practical experience? What guidance would be beneficial to address key barriers to high-quality practical experience?

Identifying and implementing ways to support each school to demonstrate good practice around mentoring and placement support would be valuable and assist providers. A more robust system implemented by the Department of Education to develop, support and incentivise school mentors needs to be considered.

Placement is one of the most highly resourced and therefore costly component of delivery for providers and requires additional funding to support this. The current NSW system of

paying school mentors is a significant cost for providers. Exploring ways in which the Department of Education could include their incentive in a broader payment or recognition system would take some of this financial stress off providers so that they invest in other areas to strengthen placement. Each state jurisdiction should mandate and fund a comprehensive ITE mentoring system in every school.

Student support during placements: What support for students would be beneficial to assist in managing their practical experience requirements?

AC recommends considering scholarships for students while they are on placement. This could be linked to specific criteria. There are incentives for rural/regional teaching but this needs to be extended to support students who have to give up work for periods of time to complete their placements. Consider formalising an internship model based on academic performance where the student is employed by a school at a percentage of full time to financially support the student. This practice is modelled in the Alphacrucis Clinical Hub model but can be better structured within a paraprofessional internship model supported with financial incentives.

Integrating theory and practice: How can practical experience be better integrated with the academic component of ITE programs to support ITE student learning and preparedness to teach?

The Alphacrucis Clinical Hub model presents a premium example of how practical experience can be better integrated into the academic component of ITE programs. In this model students work as Teaching Assistants in schools for one or two days a week while also studying their degree in their local context. Groups of schools form a Teaching School under an established agreement and support the students by allocating a school mentor and facilitating weekly insight sessions. Through 'codesign' the academic program is adjusted to support this mode and meet particular practical goals of the schools and students, varying across different hubs according to local requirements. Tertiary Supervisors report that these students demonstrate a high level of preparedness on placement.

Role of schools in supporting practical experience: What incentives can be offered to schools to be more active participants in ITE placements?

There needs to be a system-wide, national introduction of in-school Prac programmes and supervisory structures, including time in lieu, financial incentives and career advancement for participating mentors. The current NSW system of providers paying mentor teachers within a state agreement, needs to be reconsidered and a national approach developed. We suggest that the role of lead teachers as mentors could be investigated within this system, if not as specific mentors then perhaps playing a strategic role in supporting the placement process at a school level. In addition, mentoring of students on placement could be included as a lead teacher qualifying requirement. School incentives could be linked to meeting future staffing needs such as in the Alphacrucis Clinical Hub model. Schools need to be proactive in having practical experience students rather than being reactive.

Reform Area 4: Improve postgraduate ITE for mid-career entrants

Better pathways for mid-career entrants: How can Masters degrees be structured so that mid-career entrants can assume roles in the classroom within 12-18 months instead of two years? What changes to regulatory arrangements are needed to enable this?

The current NESA conditional accreditation supports Master of Teaching students working in schools after they have completed their first year of study. Most of our Master of Teaching students are conditionally accredited after about 12 months of the course and through the clinical hub model secure employment in a school affiliated to one of the Teaching Schools.

In considering the Master of Teaching structure, AC recommends that:

- practice and theory are integrated through design and assessment and that providers partner with schools in which students are working as paraprofessionals.
- ITE students are supported in the school by a mentor that works with them on practice and provides mechanisms to recognise this counting towards units of study.

The panel should also consider the introduction of another paraprofessional role (in addition to the Teaching Assistant role) which could support an internship and which could be counted as some of the professional experience days.

There are challenges around students continuing to engage fully in their studies when they are working as conditionally accredited teachers in schools, as often their teaching load and additional teaching requirements take priority over their studies. A national regulatory process needs to ensure that teaching students who are working as conditionally accredited teachers are able to continue to engage with maximum benefit in their studies.

Fast-tracking does not make the course easier but can result in a significantly higher cognitive load and pressure on students, which may result in burnout and withdrawal from their program of study.

Mortgage relief would also be worth exploring for mid-career candidates, who would need to reduce income for the retraining period.

Building the evidence base: Would a framework for assessing the success of mid-career programs assist in sharing lessons learned in designing mid-career programs?

AC recommends considering funded research projects whereby providers with a similar focus, in states (or across states) work together on specific projects and produce research in this area that is published in accessible forms.

Increasing flexibility: Is there sufficient flexibility in providers delivery of ITE to cater to the circumstances of mid-career entrants?

AC is currently reviewing their Master of Teaching program to ensure maximum flexibility for students and to accommodate student workload after conditional accreditation (i.e. the second half of the program). Modes of learning are being considered so as to accommodate students working and on placement. Again not all of these factors are within the control of the higher education provider. Loss of income during study is a key factor for many mid-career entrants. Many of our students have families that they need to support while studying. Teacher pay levels are also a determining factor when they consider leaving other professions.

Appendix 1: Case study –
The Clinical Teaching School Hub

St Philip's Christian College - Central Coast / Hunter Region, NSW

The [St Philip's Teaching School](#) was the pilot school cluster for the **Clinical Teaching School Hub** model. The SPCC Teaching School was set up as an entity of the St Philip's Christian Education Foundation - a central think-tank and administrative Hub attached to a cluster of schools (the SPCC schools) in the NSW Hunter Region. It was designed in partnership with the dual-sector tertiary provider, Alphacrucis University College, in 2017 to provide a range of accredited courses, including the Bachelor of Education (Primary and Secondary) and Master of Teaching (Primary or Secondary). We found that this in-situ teacher training model was a uniquely better approach to teacher training.

The SPCC group consists of four K-12 schools situated in varying socio-economic and geographical location. Three of the four schools are co-located with a DALE school (Dynamic Alternative Learning Environment). SPCC DALE offers small cohort education for students with social and emotional disorders, Autism and intellectual disabilities. Additionally, cohorts of remote indigenous students attend the DALE schools, particularly to address entrenched literacy issues compounded by prolonged non-school attendance. The DALE Young Parents School provides school-age teenagers, who have become parents, with the opportunity to complete their schooling. Some 37% of these students come from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander backgrounds, and several of the campuses are located in lower SES drawing areas. The DALE Young Parents school currently operates in Newcastle and Wyong,and is about to commence another campus.

In 2018, the SPCC Teaching School's Cadetship programme commenced with a cohort of 8 Initial Teacher Education (ITE) students. Half of these students came directly from graduating Year 12, alumni of St Philip's, but also surrounding schools, several as mature age students, already working in teacher-support roles, and two transferred from a public university when learning of the dynamism of the programme. The average ATAR score for the Trainees was 85.

Throughout 2018 this pilot progressively demonstrated that this was a uniquely better approach to training. Teachers are being both professionally and contextually prepared to teach both within the St Philip's Christian College cluster and well beyond due to their extensive experience across a range of educational settings throughout the degree. There are some rich examples. In Term 3, 2018, the cohort focused on Inclusive Education, as part of their coursework in the Bachelor of Education programme. They spent four days working at the DALE school, where the primary focus is to provide support to students who do not

thrive in the mainstream schooling environment. When studying the Indigenous and Multicultural Education unit, the cohort spent time with Indigenous students in the DALE school, including students from remote communities in the Northern Territory. The experience was something of a revelation for most of them, as they encountered different cultures of communicating, power dynamics and alternative 'kinetics' of pedagogy. This assisted the ITE students to develop a greater understanding of course work, but also enabled them to put theory into practice, and to transfer this knowledge to the mainstream classroom. According to direct school leaver ITE student, Caleb:

"The training school hub allows for great integration between the skills and content taught in lectures and in reading to the real-life classroom. It has been an incredible journey thus far to see how concepts that may seem removed from the classroom in a reading come to life when watching other teachers in practice or using skills for myself."

The continuous in-service model, or Clinical Teaching Model (CTM) at SPCC has placed Trainees in classroom experiences that most graduates would not experience until commencement of their teaching career. For example, the ITE cohort experienced parent teacher interviews in the first week of their training. At the completion of their first year of study, the Trainees have testified that the opportunity to engage in the 'real' experience of a classroom has provided them with a depth of understanding about the nature of teaching, that they would not have received in the traditional model of pre-service teacher preparation. After a year, they also gained a greater pragmatic understanding of the cycle and rhythms of a typical school year. The CTM has provided them with a wealth of experience in curriculum development, assessment, small group teaching, parent interaction, problem solving, conflict resolution, and many other parts of the broader life in a school.

To develop a sense of the differentiated classroom, all teaching cadets spent the first year in primary classrooms, regardless of secondary subject specialisations. This also served (for the immediate school leavers) as a foil for over-familiarity with the late teenage classroom. The Trainee teachers were also employed and remunerated as Teachers' Aides in the classroom for at least one day a week, in addition to their practicum experience. They gained deep insight and skills under the watchful eye of their (trained) Mentor teachers.

The profound community experience of the cohort has also become a key feature, with ITE students embraced by the school communities. According to Bethan, who was previously a Teacher's Aide:

"The incredible support you get when immersed in a school … doing study with like-minded people is a game changer"

Another mature age student, Jarrad, who himself became a young parent in his final year of schooling, testified to the effectiveness of the community embedding:

"The teaching model this year has been the only reason I have been able to continue my studies…. being overwhelmed with losing two loved ones in a year, planning a wedding, getting married, and navigating fatherhood around this all. However, the teaching model was continuously there to support me each time I needed anything. I wasn't just seen as a number, but they knew me personally and knew everything I was going through and gave

me everything I needed to get through the year successfully… As a mature age student, it has made study possible when I didn't think it could be."

At the completion of the first year, the SPCC Christian Education Foundation found the level of confidence and skill in the Trainees well exceeding expectations. Many of them supervised small groups, delivering content and actively engaging in report writing and parent teacher interviews. Throughout 2018, the Trainees engaged in regular meetings with the staff at the Teaching School who provided support and monitored their progress.

One of the unique benefits of the programme is that there is not a 'one size fits all' approach to the placement of the Trainees. An individual pathway is determined for each Trainee, to ensure that they are challenged and supported in their development as a teacher. In 2019, three of the 2018 cohort remained at their current school whilst the other six Trainees were assigned to another St Philip's school. Our purpose is that all Trainees will be offered a breadth of experience throughout their training. Trainees engage in practice in a number of SPCC schools, including DALE. In addition to this Trainees will be required to undertake their formal Practicums in State schools and other non-SPCC schools.

Weekly Insight Sessions are a key distinctive feature of the Teaching School programme. Interactive workshops where key areas including pedagogy, theories of education, wellbeing and faith formation are run by exemplary educators from both within the St Philip's Christian Colleges, and other organisations. Topics are determined on the basis of current issues, trainee interest, degree course content and identified areas if needed, building a full teacher toolkit.

In 2019, entry to the SPCC Teaching School became more competitive, with the reputation and incentives in the programme attracting an increasing number of applicants for the limited number of (ten) places. This enabled even greater rigour to be introduced into the selection process, as candidates were required to teach a small group of students, as a second stage of the interview process. This provided the interview panel with valuable insight into the applicant's ability to work with children, and more importantly, their ability to respond to feedback as they were asked to teach the activity to a subsequent group of students.

The 2019 cohort comprised of ten Trainees: two Year 12 graduates, three students transferring from a public university with a desire to actively engage in the classroom, four mature-age students (including one who will complete his study at Avondale College whilst engaging in the CTM in a SPCC school), and one international student.

By the end of enrolment in 2019, St Philip's Teaching School, in partnership with Alphacrucis College, was providing a uniquely better model of teacher training to nineteen Trainee teachers. By the end of selections in 2020, that number had reached 28. Throughout 2020 the reputation of the Teaching School as a uniquely better way of teacher training was widely known. The Teaching School received 51 expressions of interest for the 2021 intake with only 12 places on offer. 27 interviews were conducted from this group and 12 students were offered a scholarship place. Another development throughout 2020 was the relationship which was built with two other local Schools, Hunter Christian School and Maitland Christian School. This allowed for a further two students from the 27 to be offered a place in these schools. These two students were employed and placed in the partner schools and will

complete their tertiary theory through Alphacrucis with the rest of the cohort. As of 2023, there have been 188 students enrolled in the program since 2018.

Another expansion to the St Philip's Teaching School throughout the last five years has been the growing number of teachers desiring to be considered for the role of Mentor Teacher. To date the Teaching School has engaged 70 St Philip's staff in this capacity. The staff see this responsibility as an honour, and they take the role on with dedication. We have also observed that teaching staff who take on this responsibility are refining their craft in the process. To ensure that they are teaching the Trainee current and best practice, they are ensuring that they are modelling this themselves in how they teach in the classroom. Through this, we are constantly developing our teachers and in turn are improving student outcomes through best teaching practice.

Increasing numbers of other schools are now sending their students to the SPTS for training and are participating in other elements of the integrated Hub pathway (VET, Masters, HDR degrees, continuous professional learning etc) which the existence of the Hunter Valley Hub has made available to the region. The current plan is an equal playing field in place funding for students being available to grow the Teaching School to 80 ITE cadets, and to continue to expand the pathways to include Early Childhood teacher training, professional learning and research elements of the Hub, eventually realising perhaps a total enrolment of around 150 FTE enrolments across the cluster, and in the service of other schools in the region. The ever-increasing pool of trained and experienced Mentor Teachers at each of the St Philip's schools, will continue to support Trainees on their journey to become teachers who are both professionally and contextually ready and, most importantly, who have a love for teaching and empowering students.

"I am constantly hearing from teachers how they would have loved this to have been available when they were training. Because of this model, I'm not wondering if after four years of university I will enjoy teaching or if it is what I want to do. I know now through my classroom experience, that I'm made for teaching and I love it."

- Bethan