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This submission is tendered by the Australian Council for Educational Research (ACER) in response to the *Teacher Education Expert Panel Discussion Paper*. We appreciate the opportunity to offer feedback in line with our organisational mission, which is concerned with **improving learning across the lifespan**.

Introduction

We acknowledge the limited terms of reference for the expert panel's review of initial teacher education (ITE) and understand that this review sits within a broader context of efforts to address education workforce issues. Nevertheless, our stance is that **teacher education is a career-long process** and that **ITE programs constitute a single component of an interdependent system**. Successive reviews have sought to address the quality of ITE in isolation and have arrived at similar recommendations (e.g., ET2020 Working Group on Schools Policy, 2015; International Task Force on Teachers for Education 2030, 2019; Louden, 2008; TEMAG, 2014). As identified in the discussion paper, previous Australian reviews have engendered changes to content requirements, accreditation processes and accountability frameworks for ITE programs. While there is always room to review and tighten existing practices, we are concerned that a relatively narrow focus on content and accountability processes beyond those already highlighted by or implemented from previous reviews is not adequate. Specifically, revisiting those elements is unlikely to appreciably reduce systemic barriers to teacher recruitment and retention or address the structural conditions that will enable teachers across career stages to thrive.

We anticipate that the panel will receive multiple submissions addressing specific content, process, assessment, and regulatory adjustments suggested in the discussion paper. The paper provides a thorough description of key content for ITE programs based on research evidence about student learning and effective teaching. We agree that high-quality ITE programs should enable preservice teachers to understand contemporary evidence-based practices and provide authentic opportunities for applied learning alongside experienced mentors. We support rigorous assessment of essential knowledge, understanding and skills commensurate with the graduate level of the Australian Professional Standards for Teachers. We also endorse a robust accreditation system in which agreed program standards are applied consistently and fairly across ITE programs. However, rather than duplicating other submissions that address these areas, we offer a more general perspective on the nature and scope of effective teacher education for consideration by the expert panel.

Consistent with contemporary understandings of teaching as a career-long learning profession (Hálasz et al., 2018), **we encourage a more expansive and contextualised view of teacher education beyond the quality of ITE programs.** The recruitment and preparation of outstanding future teachers must be understood in terms of a broader constellation of issues related to induction, professional development and retention of current teachers and leaders. While not direct components of ITE programs, issues such as remuneration, workload intensification, the status of teachers, and opportunities for career progression in education shape the desirability of teaching as a profession. By implication, these issues influence the

capacity to attract high-quality candidates into ITE programs. A 2014 ACER report for the Teacher Education Ministerial Advisory Group (TEMAG) concluded that:

> best practice principles for teacher education must consider more than the content and organisation of university courses. The successful preparation of a high-quality teaching workforce depends on close attention to, and the alignment of, all elements of a country's teacher preparation system (Ingvarson et al., p. 3).

This sentiment remains relevant almost a decade later and is reiterated in seminal international policy papers (e.g., ET2020 Working Group on Schools Policy, 2015; Hálasz et al., 2018; International Task Force on Teachers for Education 2030, 2019).

Teacher education is broader than ITE programs

Teacher education is frequently discussed as though synonymous with ITE programs. Globally, high performing education systems regard teacher education as a much more comprehensive process aligned with career progression (Darling-Hammond et al., 2021; Masters, in press). **Designing effective teacher education involves outstanding practices in recruitment, initial teacher education, transition, induction, ongoing professional learning, and support for diverse and personalised career progression to ensure a sustainable workforce** (ET2020 Working Group on Schools Policy, 2015; OECD, 2019).

Conceptualising teacher education more broadly than ITE programs requires rejection of an artificial theory-practice divide, where it is assumed that universities are responsible for teacher *education* while schools and education systems are responsible for teacher *practice*. This false dichotomy attributes beginning teachers' lack of competence or confidence to inadequate ITE programs that are too theoretical, while school-based educators are assumed to be experts in current evidence-based practice. Contrary to this assumption, recent research by Gore et al. (2023) found that early career teachers employ effective classroom practices to the same extent as more experienced colleagues, which suggests that teachers enter the profession with practice-based competencies developed through their ITE programs. At the same time, fewer than half of classroom teachers report using evidence from current research to guide their practice unless supported to do so (Australian Education Research Organisation, 2022), which suggests that knowledge of current evidence-based practices cannot be assumed for all practicing teachers. Pitting ITE providers against school educators based on a supposed theory-practice divide will not achieve a coherent system of teacher education.

The process of transition to the teaching profession straddles both university and school and is ideally supported at all levels of the system. Perspectives from established theory, research, and practice are important across the full continuum of teacher preparation and ongoing development. **We support efforts to ensure that graduate teachers are 'classroom ready' but suggest that classrooms, schools, and education systems must also be 'graduate teacher ready.'** The alignment of multiple parts of the system is essential for effective (and ongoing) teacher education.

Assuming the initial selection of high-quality candidates and their engagement in high-quality ITE programs, new graduates can enter the profession as outstanding beginning teachers. They cannot, by definition, enter the profession as outstanding experienced teachers, and it is therefore unsurprising that many graduate teachers initially feel unprepared for the complexity and conditions of full-time teaching in diverse schools. Graduates hired to address shortages outside their teaching specialisation, who are not provided with existing well-developed curriculum materials, and who do not have access to effective induction, mentoring and professional learning in their first years in the profession are likely to feel especially

challenged (ET2020 Working Group on Schools Policy, 2015; OECD, 2019; Perryman & Calvert, 2020; Tournier et al., 2019).

Depending on the schools into which they are employed, graduate teachers may have limited opportunities to apply their knowledge of effective evidence-based teaching practices and to systematically develop these competencies. For example, the discussion paper endorses a multi-tiered system of support (MTSS) approach as an evidence-based practice that should be taught to ITE students. MTSS is defined as 'a combination of evidence-based teaching practices, data-based decision making and ongoing progress monitoring to provide targeted support to students who are struggling with general whole class instruction' (p. 11). As its name suggests, the MTSS framework is not a single strategy or practice, but a highly integrated system of academic, behavioural, and social-psychological supports which is grounded in prevention logic and relies on targeted progress monitoring and collaborative decision-making across all levels of a school. Preparing preservice teachers with an understanding of MTSS is important, but graduates can only implement this knowledge in the context of an established whole school approach that incorporates strong collaborative planning practices and the expertise of highly qualified specialist teachers and allied health professionals.

The discussion paper highlights the implications of the novice to expert continuum for supporting student learning. This continuum equally applies to the education of teachers, who will benefit from different learning experiences at different points in their career as they spend more time in the classroom, deepen their content knowledge, engage in deliberate practice of key skills, and develop an increasingly sophisticated and well-organised knowledge base related to the art and science of teaching. Professionals in any domain do not automatically become experts solely through cumulative hours in the field (Kirschner et al., 2021). Rather, expertise is cultivated through well-planned opportunities for development, practice, and feedback. For teachers (and school leaders), these opportunities must be aligned with personal career goals and situated within an enabling system characterised by favourable work conditions and career-long frameworks that support professional growth.

Effective teacher education

Characteristics of effective teacher education are well researched. Recent work by ACER includes international benchmarking of high-performing education systems and highlights essential considerations for teacher recruitment, preparation, retention, development, and career progression. These are reinforced in multiple recent reviews, and some are addressed in the expert panel discussion paper. Key points are briefly summarised below.

- High-performing systems integrate mechanisms to "increase the esteem in which teachers are held in the community and to ensure that teachers feel valued and have high levels of self-efficacy" (Masters, in press, p. 97). These mechanisms include elevated hiring standards and qualification requirements across the system, and rigorous preparation programs with high entry and qualification standards. They also include favourable job conditions such as job security, high salaries, teacher autonomy, and trust in teachers' professionalism; and continued opportunities for relevant professional learning, collaboration with colleagues, and career progression (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice, 2021).

- Highly effective teaching requires a strong foundation of deep disciplinary knowledge, understanding of how learners typically progress within a discipline, pedagogical content

knowledge relevant to teaching the concepts and competencies of specific learning areas, and a repertoire of effective evidence-based pedagogical practices that are responsive to learner diversity and appropriate to the context of the school (Masters, in press). Effective ITE programs focus on these core pillars and include practical experiences that enable students to gradually take on teaching responsibilities under the supervision of experienced mentors (Halász et al., 2018; NCEE, 2020).

- High-performing systems provide structured support for early career teachers by experienced mentors, including through formal induction and mentoring programs (Adams & Woods, 2015; Kutsyuruba et al., 2019). Intensive mentoring for early career teachers is effective when mentors are high-quality experienced teachers coached in effective mentoring practices, and where sufficient time is provided for both parties to engage in meaningful planning, modelling, observation, analysis, reflection, and other activities (NCEE, 2020).

- High-performing systems conceptualise and support diverse career structures that reward effective teaching, recognise teachers who take on additional roles in research or leadership, and enable career progression for excellent teachers who choose to remain in the classroom (Tournier et al., 2019). With careful consideration of salary and other working conditions, structural support for multiple career pathways provides teachers with progressively greater autonomy, responsibility, flexibility, and job satisfaction (NCEE, 2020).

- High-performing systems provide the enabling conditions for effective professional learning across system and school levels. Effective professional learning allows for differentiated opportunities that address teachers' diverse interests and levels of expertise, but these are aligned to common strategic goals and a shared vision for student success (Timperley et al., 2020). Effective professional learning is contextualised, relevant to daily practice, focused on student learning, and supported by leaders learning alongside teachers to model the desired professional learning culture and foster trust (Hollingworth et al., 2018). In high-performing systems, "teachers see teaching as a meaningful, rewarding career that demands ongoing development of knowledge and skills" (NCEE, 2020, p. 12).

It should be acknowledged that ACER's 2014 benchmarking of Australia's ITE programs found strong alignment with international best practice. However, reviews of teacher education have consistently targeted the quality of ITE programs without comprehensively examining the transition into practice and the factors that support the ongoing development of teachers' professional expertise. Past reviews have considered ITE programs as the route to *graduate* level competence in the Australian Professional Standards for Teachers. However, there has been far less attention to teachers' progression to *proficient*, *highly accomplished* and *lead* levels. Consideration of how diverse career pathways could be supported within the standards framework, or how the framework could be reconsidered to enable multiple career structures, has also been overlooked in formal reviews of teacher education.

Conclusion

We acknowledge the limited remit of the Teacher Education Expert Panel and support its efforts to tighten current practices and procedures related to ITE programs. Nevertheless, we strongly recommend that future reviews of teacher education consider the career-long development of teachers in the context of enabling systems. An expanded focus would enable comprehensive mapping of teacher preparation and ongoing professional learning along an integrated progression from novice to expert. It would promote greater

alignment between preservice education and school practice and emphasise the ongoing responsibility of the whole system for effective teacher education and career development. Teacher education is a complex and multi-faceted prospect with momentous consequences. We contend that it should be considered across its full scope and in all its complexity.

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