



CQUniversity response to the Teacher Education Expert Panel Discussion Paper

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Background

CQUniversity has a strong tradition in providing quality initial teacher education to regional Queensland since its early beginnings in 1972 with a Diploma of Teaching offered on the Rockhampton campus of the Capricornia Institute of Advanced Education (CIAE). Present day offerings include a range of undergraduate and postgraduate initial teacher education courses complemented by a variety of vocational education, graduate certificate, masters and doctoral qualifications. All courses at CQUniversity are designed for the diverse student population who service regional, rural and remote communities to provide quality teachers for the teaching workforce.

CQUniversity continues to be a leader in the delivery of distance education with approximately half of the ITE student cohort being made up of students studying online. All CQUniversity ITE courses are offered online using a model of connectivity and engagement through the Moodle platform and live interactive tutorials using Zoom technology.

CQUniversity prides itself as a multi-campus university. In addition to the online offerings, the ITE courses are offered through six regional Queensland campuses including Rockhampton, Bundaberg, Mackay, Cairns, Gladstone and Townsville. Additionally, CQUniversity has partnered with Geraldton Universities Centre, Uni Hub Spencer Gulf, and the Country Universities Centre to deliver undergraduate ITE courses. Students at these University Centres are supported by local tutors using materials developed by CQUniversity staff within a “Distance with Assistance” model.

Compared to other universities, CQUniversity is proud to have the highest ratio of students from mature age, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander, first-in-family and low socio-economic backgrounds. The University defines itself by who it embraces rather than who it excludes, and because of this is widely recognised as Australia's most inclusive university.

CQUniversity prides itself on affording opportunities to people to study ITE courses who are located in rural and remote locations. Students in such locations are able to complete their in-school placements in their local community and then stay and teach within such locations upon graduation. This is a key strategy of CQUniversity to service rural, regional and remote centres and provide opportunities to those in such locations where students will teach upon graduation including those from families who may be low SES and or indigenous. Additionally, some graduates have accepted employment in Indigenous schools in Queensland.

Feedback from stakeholders has identified the need to focus ITE courses on developing teachers who are well prepared and capable of having an impact in their classrooms across a range of regional, rural and remote settings. In response to this, key partnerships have been established with schools, non-school settings (early learning services and Kindergartens) and regional offices across the University's footprint to ensure our courses are developed in partnership with the profession.

As Australia's largest regional university CQUniversity is committed to being Australia's most accessible, supportive and engaged university, recognised globally for innovative teaching and research innovation. These principles shape CQUniversity's responses to the Teacher Education Expert Panel (TEEP) discussion paper.

Response to each proposed Reform Area

The following provides a response from CQUniversity to the questions raised in the Discussion Paper. Integral to the response is that CQUniversity provides initial teacher education courses:

- In regional, rural and remote areas
- To regional, rural and remote students
- That are inclusive of all equity groups
- That are of world class standard

It is acknowledged that the discussion paper offers an opportunity to strengthen our suite of ITE courses and affirm the range of identified reforms that are already embedded in our courses. While recognising that improvements can be made to ITE, it is important for the Expert Panel to acknowledge what universities do well.

- Embedding an approach to deeply understand the learners our pre-service teachers engage.
- Our graduate teachers engage with neuroscientific concepts and as such understand there are differences in learning across the lifespan.
- Approaches to differentiation.
- Our courses are built to align with the requirements in each of the placements through a spiral curriculum based on a progressive curriculum aligned with the developing nature and journey from pre-service to graduate teacher.
- We have carefully designed professional experience handbooks. This information is shared with schools/kindergartens/early learning services. We receive favourable feedback on these documents to support our pre-service teachers on placement.
- Being regional/rural does add to complexity, but we use strategies to build relationships and meaningful partnerships with schools and other learning sites and maintain contact with students while on placement.
- Many of our academic staff have worked in regional and rural schools, so, at a practical level, we have experience with the context that we serve.

It is concerning that the discussion paper, particularly Reform Area 1, is presented from a deficit model and does not acknowledge institutions that already include a range of the identified new "core content" presented. Whilst this proposed set of reforms presents an opportunity to strengthen initial teacher education courses, it does not outline the volume of learning or standard required of the core content and the level of engagement graduate teachers will need to have met in order to be classroom ready graduates. There is concern that a list of core content could become a checklist of 'what to include' in a teacher education course. Additionally,

this reform presents a number of items to be added to an already dense and crowded teacher education curriculum without removal of existing content.

Reform Area 1 identifies the importance of evidence- practices. However, this is a one-dimensional approach to the profession of teaching, reducing it to a simplistic view that if the evidence of what work exists, it must be used to inform practice.

It is concerning that the Discussion Paper does not acknowledge Early Childhood contexts and is not inclusive of age-specific pedagogies (for example, Age-Appropriate Pedagogies) and those that focus on the child as the centre of the educational journey. Also silent within this Discussion Paper is the view of children/students as agentic. Agency means that children are “able to make choices and decisions, to influence events and to have an impact on one’s world” (DEEMC, 2022, p. 64). Recognising children’s agency (not just in early childhood contexts but throughout the lifespan) means that any pedagogical framework that is suggested needs to enable children’s agency.

Early Childhood is a glaring omission. If the commitment to action in the Alice Springs (Mparntwe) Education Declaration is to be taken seriously through “strengthening early childhood education” (Department of Education, Skills and Employment [DESE], 2019, p. 11) early childhood education would be at the forefront of these reforms.

Each of the Reform Areas will be responded to below:

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

- 1. Evidence-based teaching practices**
- 2. Amending Accreditation Standards and Procedures**
- 3. Curriculum specific content**
- 4. Ensuring consistent, robust delivery of evidence-based teaching practices**

Teaching is a profession based upon episteme (science), tēchne (skills) and phronesis (making judgements on the best way forward). The last mentioned is particularly important as the beginning teaching is learning to balance in judgemental fashion, the different demands of different contextual factors continuing coming to the fore or retreating. Thus understood, students in the same lesson are invariably at different levels in their learning and understanding, with multiple needs, motivations and socio-economics backgrounds. The science of what works is therefore only one factor playing into the complex professional judgments that are considered and acted upon in conveyor belt fashion throughout the school day, before, during, between and after lessons.

The emphasis here needs to be on evidence-based practices in ITE courses. This means teaching teachers how to teach – the art and craft of teaching that promotes learning. This set of practices is a vital foundation for beginning teachers from which to choose pedagogical approaches, methods and techniques to meet their students' learning needs. Australian classrooms are increasingly diverse and research has found that Early Career Teachers do not feel equipped to cater for the needs of students from diverse socioeconomic, cultural and linguistic, health-based backgrounds (e.g. Mayer et al, 2018). Hence the need to build beginning teachers' pedagogical capabilities, that is their teaching knowledge and know-how. They need a pedagogical smorgasbord to choose from when they are addressing their students' diverse needs and interests.

Effective ITE course design should incorporate the professional knowledge, professional practice and professional engagement that describe quality teaching of the Graduate Standards. As necessitated through the current ITE Program Standards, the design and development of the ITE courses at CQUniversity take account of research literature surrounding initial teacher education that asserts preparedness to teach that must go beyond the acquisition and demonstration of practical skills. Ewing, Glass, Kervin and Gobby (2019) describe teaching as intellectual, emotional and socially responsible work where the development of a professional identity, capable of responsible and ethical decision-making is of paramount importance to the readiness and retention of graduates in the profession. Subsequently, the rationale for the development of our courses is infused with a view of readiness whereby teaching practice is understood to occur in contexts that require judgement and informed decision-making (Mills & Goos, 2017). This approach to defining readiness is best described as a process of developing graduates' "evaluative thinking" (Hattie, 2021) about their teaching practice and has resulted in the identification of the following design principles for the implementation of our courses:

1. Learning activities and assessment are embedded in units with a focus on the interrelated nature of the three domains of the Standards.
2. Knowledge and understanding of the ways in which the varying needs, characteristics and abilities of children and students affect learning provides a focus for evaluative thinking and identification of sources for ongoing professional learning throughout the course.
3. Research inquiry and critical engagement with educational research is fundamental to the ability to make informed decisions and distinguish practices that have a positive impact on student learning.
4. Pedagogical content knowledge and assessment practice must take account of discipline-specific ways of knowing and learning.
5. Multiple opportunities are provided for learning, practising and reflecting on the impact of teaching practice and decision-making on student learning.
6. Multiple sources of evidence of informed decision-making are collected over time and through a range of assessment tasks throughout the course.

Any reform to amend the Accreditation Standards and Procedures need to be inclusive of a curriculum that is contextual to the needs of the students enrolled in those courses. There appears to be extreme overregulation and a pronounced deficit assumption on current practices in ITE courses. The Discussion Paper also lacks evidence of the research on how more measurement data of ITE students will enhance the outcomes from teacher education courses.

TPAs allow the flexibility to include evidence-based practices that reflect the context the TPA is implemented within. No two TPAs are the same and neither should they be based on practices that acknowledge each learner is an individual and each class within a school has its own intricacies. The focus of TPAs should be on the assessment of the Professional Standards for Teachers and should allow for the pre-service teacher to demonstrate their ability to plan for, implement and assess student learning and reflect and appraise their understanding of this process. Through the very nature and intent of a TPA, student responses should include reference to evidence-based practices as part of their appraisal of their understanding of the teaching, learning and assessment cycle.

TPA process and indeed, any assessment needs to be streamlined and targeted to be beneficial. Currently the quantity of assessment demands is overwhelming for students nearing graduation.

The development of extensive knowledge of pedagogical approaches that support the strengths, interests, needs and developmental stages of children and school aged learners is considered an imperative in the selection of content in ITE courses at CQUniversity. Reflection on the educational backgrounds that students bring to our courses and their mastery of content knowledge in particular disciplines raised awareness of the potential for gaps in their understanding of curriculum learning progressions and concepts that may be difficult for students to learn. Additionally, the findings of a large-scale international study into the retention and attrition of beginning teachers show that extensive pedagogical preparation is the most influential factor in teacher retention (Ingersoll, Merrill & May, 2014). These reflections and research findings have informed the approach taken to the design of learning activities and assessment tasks in units at CQUniversity with a focus on curriculum and pedagogy, and professional experience.

As a deliberate design choice, throughout the CQUniversity ITE courses, students are exposed to multiple evidence-based approaches to teaching and learning that connect content or subject matter knowledge with pedagogical content knowledge. This is demonstrated through students' understanding of discipline specific ways of knowing and learning is developed by embedding a focus on the concepts, substance and structure of the content and teaching strategies of learning areas (APST 2.1) into every curriculum and pedagogy unit. Content knowledge and pedagogical content knowledge is accompanied by a dual focus on assessment strategies for monitoring student learning (APST 5.1) that supports their ability to front-end assessment for the purposeful alignment of curriculum, teaching and learning and assessment (Wyatt-Smith & Adie, 2019).

In relation to core content, if reforms are to be inclusive of young children (prior to school and the early years of school), any changes need to include play based pedagogies. Play needs to be explored by all students enrolled in primary and early childhood ITE courses.

The current Accreditation Standards and Procedures includes the requirement to embed evidence-based teaching practices. The rigorous accreditation process ensures the consistent application of this requirement and the implementation of the core content. This is demonstrated firstly through the Stage 1 accreditation process where proposed courses are scrutinised for their inclusion of evidence-based teaching practices and required core content. Then during the Stage 2 accreditation process, these practices are verified through demonstrated evidence and checked through the consultation process with current students, graduates and key school-based stakeholders.

Queensland includes additional requirements of core content (referred to as Priority Areas) which are updated based on strategic cross-sectoral policy initiatives. The embedding of these requirements ensure QLD ITE courses are inclusive of current practices in schools and early learning contexts.

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

- 5. ITE performance measures**
- 6. Public reporting**
- 7. Public transparency**
- 8. Transition funding to support performance improvement**
- 9. Excellence pool for higher quality programs**

The linking of strengthening, and by implication, improving ITE through the imposition of standardised performance measures and public reporting of performance outcomes is fraught. Past experience of such approaches should be recognised as favouring certain institutions and institutional profiles over others, thereby doing reputational damage. In addition, the linking of standardised performance measures, publication of outcomes and the assumption that this approach leads to improvements in ITE programs is spurious. It is an ascendant discourse but problematic in that standards work to standardise work (Taubman, 2009).

The question is why would TEEP want to standardise work when universities operate in different contexts with different student profiles? CQUniversity is deeply embedded in its regional and rural communities and offers university opportunities for students who would otherwise not have access to a university degree. People are committed to the sustainability of their communities and cognisant of their regionality. Standardised performance measures will likely favour large metropolitan universities as the 'big players' and diminish recognition of the outcomes of regionally oriented ITE courses.

New thinking is needed in this area if the aim is to strengthen ITE programs with their particular priorities and nuances. This is particularly important for regional universities.

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

- 10. System level agreements**
- 11. Centres of excellence**
- 12. National frameworks**
- 13. Student support during placements**
- 14. Integrating theory and practice**
- 15. Role of schools in supporting practical experience**

Of note in this Reform Area is the silencing of learning sites other than schools. Early childhood students are asked to have placements that extend beyond schools (See ACECQA requirements). Therefore, in any requirements that build from this review, consideration needs to be given to:

1. using language that is inclusive of non-school settings.
2. recognising that while the context is different, students engage in planning for the full teaching learning cycle.

Based on what currently occurs in Queensland, a more comprehensive system needs to be developed and implemented for system level agreements. The placement process can be very ad hoc, and we do not have any input into who is supervising and mentoring our pre-service teachers. Where possible, more training needs to occur for supervising teachers.

As a regionally based university we have schools that always take our students for placements at each of our campus footprints. This is more difficult when sourcing placements for interstate students, so localised arrangements would be very helpful. However, we do not want to use a model such as NSW does as this excludes students studying with interstate universities and makes sourcing placements in NSW very difficult.

It is an interesting idea to include Centres of Excellence, but not really practical. Queensland has previously implemented Centres of Excellence, but these were only for selected pre-service teachers. Pre-service teachers who were selected were placed in schools where mentors were specifically chosen based on their experience and training in mentoring. It was a successful model but was expensive and only catered to a limited number of pre-service teachers each year. Regional and rural pre-service teachers and schools were disadvantaged by this model which would have required regionally based pre-service teachers to relocate to participate in the program. If Centres of Excellence were to be introduced, the program would need to encompass all geographical areas, with a focus on those studying within regional and remote contexts. A model of support that includes on-line mentoring could perhaps service those areas with limited access to a metropolitan context.

Assuring the quality of student mentoring when on practical experience is a theme constantly commented upon internationally and not the least across Australia. While the resources developed by AITSL are a step in the right direction, it is questionable if they have actually resulted in quality assurance of mentoring. In other international education ecosystems, moves for many years have been towards developing credentials and more systematic training of school mentors. 'Mentoring the mentors' is a key policy imperative.

It should not be left up to the willingness of the school leaders or ITE providers to ensure that this takes place in a consistent fashion.

The CQUniversity demographic includes students from a diverse range of backgrounds including mature aged entrants, first in family, low socioeconomic and first nations contexts. This needs to be considered when understanding pressures placed on students when managing their own contexts and competing compulsory in-school placements - particularly if they were to be extended as suggested. Most students at CQUniversity work to financially support themselves and their family through completing their university studies. Thought should be given to financial aid for pre-service teachers when they are on placement. Suggestions to support these students include students being paid a nominal amount (maybe at a TA rate for the first few placements) whilst completing placements. For final placements which are often much longer, an internship type arrangement could be an opportunity to provide financial support to students and a wider range of scholarships for those experiencing financial hardship could be introduced.

Lengthening placements would add to the challenges faced by students, particularly the costs incurred by students and also universities for additional payments of supervision. Schools may find this difficult also, particularly later in the course when there are additional requirements such as the need to complete the TPA in situ. More is not always better, rather, at CQUniversity, every effort is made to ensure that experiences are high quality.

Central to the design of the ITE courses at CQUniversity is the recognition that the 37 graduate descriptors of the Australian Professional Standards for Teachers comprise the curriculum and focus for assessment of all accredited initial teacher education courses in Australia. As a result, content selection, opportunities to practise application of the Standards, and demonstration of successful performance against all focus areas prior to graduation provide a major focus for course design and the determination of a graduate's readiness to teach in this course. The report "Action now: Classroom ready teachers" compiled by the Teacher Education Ministerial Advisory Group (2014) emphasised the importance of achieving this type of "classroom readiness" (p. vii) for graduate teachers. According to the report, graduates must be prepared to teach in a way that meets the needs of systems and schools particularly in relation to their ability to collect and analyse data on student learning, communicate student progress to parents, and teach literacy and numeracy.

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

16. Better pathways for mid-career entrants

17. Building the evidence base

18. Increasing flexibility

The Master of Teaching suite of courses at CQUniversity have a proven record of preparing pre-service teachers to demonstrate the Australian Professional Standards for Teachers at Graduate Career Stage with evidence and qualifies our graduates for professional registration with the Queensland College of Teachers.

The design of the Master of Teaching courses utilises CQUniversity's three-term structure, therefore a two-year volume of learning Masters course can be fast-tracked to be completed in one and a half years. A part-time pathway is also available for those who require more flexibility in their study structure based on their personal circumstances.

As one of Australia's largest online learning providers with over 40 years' experience providing quality online learning, CQUniversity's Master of Teaching courses are delivered online, with content available through an online learning management system (Moodle) and live tutorials delivered through Zoom (with recordings made available). Professional Experience units are also delivered online, and students receive support from lecturers both online from their unit coordinator, as well as in person from their University Supervisor while on placement. Where physical distance inhibits a face-to-face supervisory visit to pre-service teachers in schools, CQUniversity has developed a comprehensive distance supervision process.

At CQUniversity, we believe University should be for everyone and are proud to offer a wide range of [scholarships and awards programs](#) including mid-career entrants. Our scholarships could help mid-career entrants pay for some or all of the course fees, or even contribute towards students' living and study expenses.

CQUniversity's Equity Policy states "CQUniversity is dedicated to providing an environment that upholds the principles of social justice, equity, diversity and social inclusion. It strives to build a vibrant community which respects the inherent dignity of the individual and values the unique knowledge, skills, abilities, life skills and competencies that each person can contribute to learning and workplace culture." The spirit of this policy is evident in our diverse academic and administrative staff and acceptance and inclusion of our diverse students including mid-career entrants. These core values are also embedded within the units taught in the Master of Teaching courses, which are also aligned with the Australian Professional Standards for Teachers and aims to support pre-service teachers develop the knowledge and skills to teach responsively to the learning strengths and needs of students from diverse linguistic, cultural, religious, and socioeconomic backgrounds.

CQUniversity offers various support mechanisms for our mid-career entrants that includes welfare, academic, and career support to assist them throughout their learning journey. For those students who live near one of our regional campuses (including 8 across Queensland), we have Campus Life Committees that organise 'student experience' activities, events, services and social opportunities. Welfare

support is offered through Counselling Services, Disability Services, Grievance Resolution, Religious Services, Student Advocacy, Student Equity Service, and Student Mentor and Leadership Programs. CQUni Careers supports students in achieving their career development and professional aspirations through career education, guidance and information. The Academic Learning Centre provides students with workshops, as well as the opportunity to meet with advisors, to learn about study skills, academic writing, and referencing in order to complete assignments.

Paper Contributors:

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