Teacher Education Expert Panel Discussion Paper: CSNSW Submission

Introductory Comments

1. Catholic Schools NSW (CSNSW) responds to the Teacher Education Expert Panel Discussion Paper (the Discussion Paper) on behalf of the almost 600 Catholic schools in New South Wales.

2. While CSNSW has a leadership role as the peak representative body for Catholic schools, day to day operational responsibility lies with each of the eleven diocesan education offices for Catholic systemic schools and with each individual school for Catholic independent schools. This submission is informed by their feedback and provides a 'system-wide' response to the Review's discussion questions and Terms of Reference.

3. CSNSW has previously participated in the *Quality Initial Teacher Education Review* and supports the recommendations for national action to:

   - attract more high-quality candidates into Initial Teacher Education (ITE) and the teaching profession

   - boost the quality of ITE courses to ensure confident and capable graduates

   - ensure timely access to enhanced ITE and early career teacher data

   - recognise the importance of ITE changes on the Early Childhood Education workforce.

4. Indeed, given ITE plays a significant role in preparing pre-service teachers for the classroom and improving learning and wellbeing outcomes for students, CSNSW has consistently argued for the need to situate ITE reform within a broader education reform context.

About Catholic Schools in NSW

5. Catholic schools have been an integral part of Australia's education landscape for 200 years and see themselves as partners with families, government, and the broader community in delivering a high-quality education across NSW. Today, Catholic schools educate more than one in five children in NSW.

6. Catholic schooling in NSW is comprised of 596 schools, which employ 27,000 teachers and enrol 256,000 students, Kindergarten to Year 12. Catholic schools are geographically and socio-economically diverse and include mainstream schools, special schools for students with disability, flexible learning centres and vocational colleges.

7. Catholic education is broader than just its schools and covers the continuum of learning via its prior-to-school early learning centres, out-of-school-hours care facilities and Catholic tertiary institutions, including two universities.

8. Currently, most undergraduate and postgraduate teachers come into Catholic schools from the two Catholic Universities (55–60%).

9. A key differentiator of the Catholic school system is the preference (and, for certain roles, the requirement) for the workforce to be Catholic, thus limiting the potential supply of teachers. Not surprisingly then, a large percentage (82%) of the teaching workforce is Catholic.

10. In late 2020, CSNSW began a strategic review of the Catholic school workforce in NSW. The Workforce Review—which is an ongoing strategic project for CSNSW—is about developing a 'blueprint' of the workforce and identifying the key drivers of supply and demand to assist with local workforce planning and respond to State and Commonwealth policy reform. The simulation model that was developed will allow CSNSW to model the impact of workforce trends and/or changes in policy settings over several years.

11. While the Catholic school sector is experiencing current teacher shortages in some locations and key learning areas, the baseline simulation modelling suggests that the Catholic sector in NSW is facing a significant workforce shortfall in future years. Regional and rural schools will face slightly higher shortfalls compared to metropolitan schools. The shortage is largely driven by insufficient supply of teacher graduates and the retirement of baby-boomer teachers. The gaps are largely proportionate to those predicted for government schools in NSW.

Strengthening ITE Programs

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

12. CSNSW supports embedding evidence-based practices in ITE program development. Equipping pre-service teachers (PSTs) with the necessary skills to be effective teachers is critical and the proposed practices are essential in developing an understanding of the most efficient processes for knowledge acquisition and application. This includes 'knowing your students' and the importance of providing a psychological and physical safe space for them. CSNSW would like to see an explicit focus on inclusive practice, specifically in relation to supporting students with disability, complex behaviours and student mental health (noting that Aboriginal Students and Aboriginal Education, and cultural/linguistic diversity are included as core content). As part of this, there is potential to provide scholarships and learning support to students from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and EALD backgrounds to diversify the cohort entering ITE.

13. ITE programs should also include a focus on quality differentiated learning and teaching (Tier 1) and reference to national legislation for example DSE, DAA, Child Safe Standards. A focus on child protection and privacy are also essential.

14. CSNSW also supports a deeper understanding of the Australian Professional Standards for Teachers, particularly the progression from Graduate to Proficient.

15. CSNSW welcomes the role the Australian Education Research Organisation (AERO) can play in establishing the evidence-base that identifies the essential knowledge, skills and practices that should be foundational for all PSTs, regardless of speciality or setting.

16. Evidence-based practices should be accompanied by measures to support the ability of PSTs to implement these practices. Strengthening ITE programs to better enable PSTs to move from theory to practice and close the implementation gap through real world application is pivotal to any efforts to bolster ITE programs. Moreover, ITE programs should emphasise the importance of teachers knowing and engaging learners as the drivers of their own learning. In recognition of the relational nature of teaching, these skills should be accorded priority alongside the factors articulated in the Discussion Paper.

17. In relation to 1.2 of the Discussion Paper (Core Content: the brain and learning), the impact of poor mental health, including trauma, anxiety and depression, on learning cannot be understated. Children and young people who have experienced trauma struggle to make space for learning. Trauma impacts on the functionality of the brain, reducing the ability of the brain to develop neuron connections and enact long-term memory retention. Children and young people who have experienced trauma may be unable to concentrate, engage, and retain and recall new information. Management practices that can effectively respond to such matters are important.

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?

18. Amendments to the Accreditation Standards and Procedures should specifically reference the proposed evidence-based practices. Assessment, at the right time and with the right frequency, will facilitate PST growth in the specified areas. Assessment of the evidence-based practices via the Accreditation Standards and Procedures should occur not only through the capstone assessment of the Teacher Performance Assessment, but at regular intervals throughout the ITE program. The emphasis of any assessment should be on building teacher capability in the art, craft and science of teaching. Indeed, there should be a balance between the science of learning and the art of teaching.

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

19. Curriculum specific content should be built into ITE programs. Although some scholars often argue that pedagogy eclipses curriculum, the importance of discipline-specific knowledge cannot be dismissed. CSNSW supports a greater emphasis on discipline-based thinking and mapping evidence-based practices to discipline frameworks.

20. The unique characteristics of a Catholic school mean that it is also relevant to consider how religious education accreditation requirements might be better integrated into ITE programs to address barriers to participation in the Catholic education workforce. Catholic dioceses in NSW have developed partnerships with universities to streamline religious education offerings and enhance the willingness of ITE providers to embed such offerings and thereby respond to the unique nature of Catholic schools.

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?

21. There is a need for consistency in the assessment of ITE programs against the Accreditation Standards and Procedures. A national registration authority and nationally consistent standards would provide effective means of ensuring consistent, robust delivery of the core content in ITE programs.

Strengthening the link between performance and funding of ITE

22. CSNSW supports the notion that ITE providers should strive for excellence and continuous improvement in ITE. High-performing ITE programs select diverse, high-quality candidates in areas of workforce need; support and retain their ITE students to graduate as a teacher; prepare ITE students to be ready for the classroom; and support graduate teachers to transition effectively into the teaching profession.

23. However, CSNSW is concerned about the potential for a stronger link between performance and funding of ITE to become a punitive instrument and one that increases the complexity of ITE funding structures. Indeed, the potential for 'league tables' to emerge, based on university 'drop-out' rates, would negatively impact ITE learning and assessment.

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?

24. CSNSW supports an emphasis on the relational domain of teaching. Teaching requires a complex mix of knowledge and personal skills. The degree to which PSTs possess the suitable competencies and characteristics to be effective teachers should be better reflected in the selection category. This could also provide an opportunity to highlight the positive qualities of teaching as a career choice—a highly-skilled profession requiring a unique set of capabilities, competencies and personal characteristics.

25. In relation to the retention category of the performance measures, this could become a blunt instrument. Retention rates may not be capable of adequately reflecting the multitude of reasons why an ITE provider does not retain a PST from program entry to completion. Such measures could create inequity and favour smaller, elite cohorts over other ITE providers.

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?

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

26. CSNSW welcomes meaningful data when data informs policy and serves as an evidence base, but is concerned about the potentially reductive and negative dimensions of public reporting of performance measures. Transparency of the performance measures is not sufficient to drive quality improvement in ITE and therefore CSNSW questions how assurance of the quality of the information supplied for the Australian Teacher Workforce Data collection will be achieved.

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?

27. Transition funding has the potential to facilitate continuous review and improvement and encourage providers to strive for excellence in delivery and output. Indeed, a partnership model would be a more effective means of driving improvement by building the capability of providers to target areas for improvement.

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?

28. A system of reward funding is not without risk and could encourage a climate of elitism. ITE providers who do not achieve the excellence label would probably face a reduced intake for ITE and those who do achieve an excellence label would enjoy increased demand. Unsuccessful applicants may turn towards a different qualification altogether, resulting in the loss of a PST to the education system as a whole. Given the teacher workforce shortages we are experiencing, CSNSW questions this approach.

29. Catholic education in NSW places a strong priority on the development of high quality ITE programs whilst acknowledging the interplay of many different factors that may impact an ITE provider's capacity to meet the criteria for excellence. Indeed, it is possible that some universities may reconsider providing ITE if a system of reward funding is introduced. It is important to ensure that such a measure does not reduce teacher supply.

30. If this proposal was adopted, clear, evidence-based criteria for excellence would need to be developed in tandem with clear parameters for reward funding. If excellence was deemed to be in a particular field of the ITE program, such as science teaching, this could encourage the provider to become an expert in that area and assist in developing more skilled experts to enter schools.

Improving the quality of practical experience in teaching

31. Practical experience is the essential link between theory and practice and CSNSW supports improvement in the quality of this experience. CSNSW agrees in principle with the characteristics of high-quality practical experience placements (section 3.2 of the Discussion Paper). Indeed, the role of the mentor is a critical factor for the success of the placement and CSNSW welcomes how the Discussion Paper highlights this aspect of the placement.

32. Key factors that improve the practical experience placement program include quality partnerships between providers and schools, clear roles and responsibilities of all stakeholders, collaboration in relation to goals and outcomes of the practical experience, clear outline of assessment and feedback roles and responsibilities. Similarly, guidelines for a high-quality practical experience should clearly articulate what high-quality, high-performing collaborative schools look like.

33. The Catholic school as a place of service provides a further imperative to ensure that the practical experience reflects Catholic values of service towards others through the provision of meaningful support to PSTs.

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?

34. CSNSW regards system level agreements and hub arrangements as highly beneficial, enabling enhanced coordination of resources between ITE providers and schools, improved alignment between PSTs and supervisors/mentors and greater insight into potential targeted graduate employment or targeted pre-service employment. Catholic school systems have a dedicated, centralised approach to the placement of PSTs and structured, formalised partnerships with universities. For example, the introduction of Australian Catholic University HUBS has provided schools with a more coordinated and strategic approach to the placement of PSTs in their schools.

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?

35. CSNSW is cautiously supportive of the establishment of centres of excellence to underpin high quality practical experience. Centres of excellence could provide a powerful means of breaking cycles of psychosocial disadvantage and actioning closing the gap measures by supporting a diverse network of schools, including hard-to-staff schools. The establishment of any centre of excellence must be driven by the imperative to reduce disadvantage, to mitigate against the risk that a centre of excellence becomes a proxy for widening the disadvantage gap.

36. CSNSW notes that the proposal put forward in the Discussion Paper is not without difficulty, particularly in terms of the capacity of a school to accommodate a significant number of PSTs undertaking their practical experience. For the proposal to be successful, additional investment in enhancing the practical experience model is needed. This could include funding schools to support quality professional development of supervisory practice.

37. For example, in Catholic Schools Broken Bay (CSBB), the 'hub' school model has been effective in developing reciprocal relationships with partner universities. This has enhanced the placement experience for the ITE student and the supervising teachers. In the CSBB context, the aspiration would be for every school to be a centre of excellence, with highly experienced, expert teachers who are also trained mentors, engaged in modelling best practice for the next generation of young teachers. Nevertheless, centres of excellence may have an important role to play, but there needs to extensive consideration given to how this will work in practice (workforce, teacher time, school/university capacity and resourcing, and other considerations).

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?

38. CSNSW supports a national framework for delivering practical experience ("national guidelines for high-quality practical experience", section 3.4.2 of the Discussion Paper). Rather than specific guidance that is too prescriptive, the framework should foster a greater degree of consistency. A consistent national framework with clearly articulated standards would ensure a baseline for quality practical experience and enable supervisors and systems to better assist PSTs to reach an agreed level of proficiency.

39. Key barriers to a high-quality practical experience include workload and workforce factors, a lack of suitably qualified mentors and limited incentives for teachers to take on the additional duties of supervision and mentoring.

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

40. High levels of ongoing support and development opportunities throughout all stages of a PST's ITE journey are essential. This includes high-quality and effective mentoring programs for PSTs undertaking practical experience, and enhanced induction processes. Further supports include opportunities for PSTs to co-plan and co-teach units of work, co-assess student work, co-report student learning; greater opportunities to observe and, where appropriate, assist in discussions with parents and caregivers; and a graduated levels of supervision so PSTs are better prepared for the impending work environment.

41. Enhancing paraprofessional offerings could also improve preparedness to teach and thereby provide an additional means of support to PSTs. For example, as part of the 'Step into Teaching' program in Catholic Education Diocese of Wollongong (CEDoW), PSTs are employed as student support officers while studying. CEDoW also works in partnership with Australian Catholic University to identify PSTs and provide opportunities for employment as Associate Teachers in Catholic schools within the diocese, allowing the PSTs to build upon prior school-based experiences across school settings. In these two examples, PSTs are provided with a dedicated mentor teacher. Other CEDoW initiatives include actively providing enhanced support to PSTs through access to Early Career Days, which are typically only available to graduates, and the establishment of peer networks for PSTs undertaking practical experience.

42. However, effective support for PSTs during practicum, requires effective support for their supervisor/mentor. Teachers need release time and professional development to ensure PSTs receive appropriate mentoring and support. This process could be enhanced by strengthening links between supervision/mentorship and advancement opportunities, such as higher levels of accreditation for the teacher, and enhancing incentives for supervisors/mentors, including through the provision of allocated, designated time to support the PST. Moreover, supervisor/mentor teachers would benefit—and in some cases already benefit—from opportunities to undertake professional development to support their supervisory practice.

43. Consideration should be given to developing a Highly Accomplished/Lead Teacher (HALT) role description that takes responsibility for the support and development of PSTs in schools. Standard 6 of the Australian Professional Standards for Teachers requires Highly Accomplished Teachers to work with PSTs. There are a number of other ways in which this role would address the higher levels of the standards.

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?

44. Achieving a deeper integration of ITE and classroom teaching is critical to strengthening ITE programs. More extensive immersion in classrooms adds breadth and depth to a PST's experiences. Indeed, further integration of the practical experience within the academic component of ITE is needed, with much value to be derived from PSTs gaining experience in school as early as possible in micro-teaching opportunities to build their capability. CSNSW notes the restrictions in NSW on the start of practical experience and would welcome an authorising environment that enables more opportunities for early practical experiences in schools.

45. A better balance can be struck between the academic component of ITE programs and time in schools so that PSTs are given frequent, meaningful and real-world opportunities to practice what they are learning. A better balance between practical experience and theory does not diminish the complexity of the theoretical component of an ITE program but rather provides more quality opportunities to apply knowledge in a practical way. In addition, there is scope for theoretical assessments to be better aligned with curriculum requirements to enable PSTs to develop a body of work to support them as early career teachers.

46. CSNSW supports flexible internship models as a means of embedding PSTs within schools. Through such models, work-based learning and team-based activities could be facilitated via hub schools which would provide peer support, learning opportunities and improve a PST's preparedness to teach.

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

47. There is merit in considering how funding could enable schools and ITE providers to scale up effective partnership practices to underpin high-quality practical experiences. Funding would enable the Catholic education sector to actively support ITE providers in accommodating PSTs for practical experience placements and commit to their overall development during this period. Reconfiguring the final years of ITE programs and providing opportunities for PSTs to undertake paid internships in schools on a part-time basis whilst completing their studies could better enable schools to support practical experiences. This could be achieved through increased use of incentives and clear articulation of the roles and responsibilities of the school and ITE provider.

Enhancing postgraduate teacher education for mid-career entrants

48. CSNSW supports flexible pathways, including accelerated pathways, for mid-career teachers and enhanced provision for recognition of prior learning and professional experience. There is merit in shorter transition periods into paid employment for career changers with tertiary qualifications. Greater flexibility in ITE offerings for mid-career entrants would also be helpful and could be achieved through virtual learning provision that enables active connection and participation, as opposed to online offerings of a passive nature.

49. As part of the streamlined transition into the classroom for mid-career entrants, the role of mentoring and good supervision will play an important role in the development of teacher quality.

50. CSNSW agrees that a framework for assessing the success of mid-career programs would assist in sharing lessons learned in designing mid-career programs.

51. CSNSW also supports the availability of stronger financial incentives for mid-career entrants to enter the profession. This could occur, for example, through widespread funding for bonded scholarships to incentivise high performing career changers to consider teaching, and apprentice-type offerings that would enable PSTs to work whilst obtaining their qualification.

52. However, CSNSW notes the industrial context and the need to ensure that flexible combinations of work and part-time study do not keep the career changer on a lower conditional salary by delaying the time taken for them to reach proficient teacher status.

Conclusion

53. CSNSW welcomes the opportunity to provide this submission. While the Discussion Paper will arouse passionate debate on important ITE matters, it is important to be mindful of the wider context and how the issues that contribute to the shortfall in teacher graduates are complex and nuanced. These issues require a holistic response with some short and longer-term solutions.

54. If we wish to attract and retain high quality aspirants to the profession, we need greater focus, discussion and research on the big picture issues that form the eco-system in which the training and supply of teachers currently sits.